



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 07 DECEMBER 2021

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Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security

Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
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Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 37 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 07 December 2021

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications
Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Passports (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 291 of 2021)

B. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning

Ministry of Tourism

(a) The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2020.

(b) The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority for the year ended 30 June 2019. (In Original)

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

(a) The Education (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 286 of 2021)

(b) The Private Secondary Education Authority (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 287 of 2021)

D. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

(a) The Finance and Audit (Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups) (Revocation) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 290 of 2021)

(b) The Public Procurement (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 292 of 2021)

E. Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives

(a) The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Mauritius Standards Bureau for the year ended 30 June 2020.

(b) The Annual Report of the Co-Operative Development Fund for the period 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2020.

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Legal Metrology (Assize) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 288 of 2021)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 33) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 289 of 2021)

G. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The COVID-19 (Horse Race Meeting at Champ de Mars) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 285 of 2021)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**PRIVATE SECONDARY EDUCATION AUTHORITY (PSEA) – GRANT
AIDED PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - CORRESPONDENCE**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the correspondence dated 15 October 2021 addressed by the Director of the Private Secondary Education Authority (PSEA) to managers of grant aided private secondary schools, she will state if she has been made aware thereof and if she has taken note of the press communiqué dated 29 October 2021 from the *Service Diocésain de l'Éducation Catholique* and of the press conference of the Federation of Unions of Managers of Private Secondary Schools held on 08 November 2021 in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the actions she has taken to date regarding same, if any.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, on 15 October 2021, the Director of the PSEA sent a Circular Letter entitled “Estimates of Income and Expenditure for Financial Year 2022” to managers of private secondary schools.

This Circular drew the attention of the managers to the PSEA Regulations, Sections 4, 15 (3) and 15 (4) of the PSEA Act 2016, namely –

(i) Section 4 reads as follows –

“Every manager shall, not later than three months before the beginning of each financial year of the school, submit to the Authority in such manner as it may determine, an estimate of the income and expenditure expected to be received or incurred by the school, as the case may be, in the next financial year.”

(ii) Section 15 (3) –

“A grant or a provisional grant payable under subsections (1) and (2) shall be paid at such time and in such instalments as the Authority may determine.”

(iii) Section 15 (4) –

“Before any grant or provisional grant is made, the Authority may require the grantee to furnish such information as the Authority may require.”

And managers were accordingly requested to submit an Estimated Income and Expenditure statement for the period January 2022 to December 2022.

They were informed that disbursement would be made on a quarterly basis in advance and they will have to submit the actual expenses incurred, supported by relevant documents at the end of every quarter. PSEA will then disburse grants for the next quarter.

Furthermore, managers were asked to seek prior endorsement of the Authority before embarking on any major project, in particular for non-recurrent expenses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the circular also stressed that the estimated expenditure should not exceed the amount representing the block grant, less managerial grant, less compensation for use of school premises, and managers should avoid procuring equipment and services from suppliers or companies having a close parental or business relationship in which they hold shares, as this would lead to situations of conflict of interest.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also taken note of the communiqué *de presse* dated 29 October regarding *la décision de la PSEA*. The communiqué mentions that there is *l'ingérence de la PSEA dans la gestion financière des écoles* and that there is allegedly curtailment of grants.

Moreover, the communiqué points out that there are conditions imposed regarding recruitment of personnel, allocation of teaching periods, as well as pedagogy. It also states that State Secondary Schools offer seats to Grades 10 and 12 students and this has had an impact on the post of Deputy Rectors and Educators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted earlier, any new project to be undertaken and implemented by either a State Secondary School or private grant aided secondary school, using public funds should have prior endorsement of the authority responsible for the disbursement of such funds.

The PSEA, by law, has been entrusted the responsibility to ensure that grants disbursed to the Private Secondary Schools are used for the intended purpose and funds disbursed have to be accounted for, in line with the principles of good governance and accountability.

I wish to highlight that in the context of the preparation of the comprehensive grant formula for the period 2022-2023, the National Audit Office asked for the strengthening of the

system of checks and verification as well as monitoring and control on the disbursement of grants to the PSS in view of the substantial amount of funds involved.

In the Corruption Prevention Reviews conducted by the ICAC for the PSEA, it was pointed out that an effective control mechanism based on the principles of checks and balances should be put in place to ensure the proper and ethical use of public funds.

With regard to the recruitment of personnel by the Private Secondary Schools (PSS) who are also remunerated by the State, they have to satisfy conditions regarding teacher entitlement, and this has always been the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the press communiqué from the *SeDEC* alleges that there has been a reduction in the grant payable. However, this is not true, Mr Speaker, Sir. An advance of three months is paid to each Private Secondary School, based on the allocation given to them on the previous comprehensive grant formula. However, if they are not in a position to spend the allocated amount, the remaining amount is carried forward to the next quarter, at their request. The problem noted is that the Private Secondary Schools are not able to spend the funds allocated to them. Contrary to the past, where all funds disbursed, even if unspent, were cashed by the school, the new grant formula provides for a mechanism to carry the remaining balance to the next quarter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect of the food projects for the needy students, this is not part of the mandate of the PSEA. The comprehensive grant formula has specific components and this element of food projects is not covered. While the PSEA is sympathetic to such projects, it is not part of its mandate, as a regulator, to fund such projects.

The new comprehensive grant formula provides for a list of expenses broken down into direct expenses, administrative expenses, and non-recurrent expenses. Unfortunately, Private Secondary Schools were not able to submit justifications for the expenses claimed.

In addition, while scrutinising the claims, it was found that many unreasonable and unjustified claims had been made. It is due to this reason that the PSEA was not able to effect payments of grants for the next quarter for those PSS which were not compliant. However, in order not to penalise them, the PSEA decided to effect payment in advance for the next quarter. During the second quarter, the PSEA decided to pay them forecasted expenditure for two months.

Mr Speaker, Sir, each Private Secondary School has an entitlement in terms of teaching and non-teaching staff. Circulars have regularly been issued to Private Secondary Schools since 2016, requesting them to seek and obtain prior endorsement of the PSEA before finalising any recruitment. It is in no way an interference in the recruitment process.

It has been noted that, on many occasions, if the endorsement of the PSEA is not sought, Private Secondary Schools exceed the teacher entitlement, resulting in difficult situations where the persons recruited may be penalised.

As far as allocation of timetable and subjects offered are concerned, it is not true to say that there is any sort of interference from the PSEA. On the contrary, the PSEA provides for guidelines and includes, in the timetable, the subjects which are offered by the Private Secondary Schools. And this can have a series of subjects, namely Religious Studies, Bible Knowledge, Intercultural Education, Islamiat, and a number of others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a National Curriculum Framework to which all State and Private Secondary Schools in the country must adhere to, as they form part of the national education system. No educational authority or of whatever denomination can operate as an island on its own in this country. As for the timetabling issue, the PSEA provides guidelines to ensure programme coverage. However, schools have the autonomy to retain their specificity.

As regards the point made on the school population at Grades 10 and 12 impacting on entitlement of Deputy Rectors and Educators, PSEA and even the Ministry has informed them that the current entitlement of schools in respect of Educators and Deputy Rectors will not be affected until the retirement of the incumbents.

The House will also appreciate, Mr Speaker, Sir, that with the present demographic trends, schools are bound to experience a reduction in the school intake in the years to come. However, this is true even for State Secondary Schools.

Je voudrais, M. le président, donner l'assurance qu'il n'y a jamais eu, et qu'il n'y aura jamais, aucune atteinte de la part de la PSEA ou du ministère, à porter atteinte aux droits constitutionnels des associations confessionnelles, d'établir des écoles ou aux parents de placer leur enfant dans des collèges de leur choix. Et cela a toujours été le cas. Le partenariat entre l'Etat et les collèges privés est bien vivant.

We have also taken cognizance of the request made by the Federation of Managers regarding dialogues and partnerships, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have always been welcomed in

my office; we have always been having meetings and we have always been discussing. So, the *partenariat est très vivant*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has always adopted a policy of open dialogue with the Federation of Managers and, as I have just said, we have been having regular meetings, and this will always be the case.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for her answer. My question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is motivated by the fact that there are 56,000 young students studying in these private schools. I have been shocked, Mr Speaker, Sir, to see the tone of the Press Conference by the Federation of Managers. This is what they say: *'nous avons besoin de subir l'humiliation de mendier des sous qu'on nous donne à contre cœur.'* And this is what *l'Éducation Catholique* had to say, Mr Speaker, Sir - and, of course, we are talking about children of all communities who are studying in these schools - *'une menace certaine pour la survie des collèges privés et des collèges catholiques.'*

Having obviously read these, and also received a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... dated 08 November.

Mr Speaker: Put the question!

Mr X. L. Duval: But I have to motivate the fact that she got a letter on 08 November...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You are stretching too far. I am helping you!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... addressed to the Prime Minister, copied to her...

Mr Speaker: I am helping you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Did you take any action to meet these people since that time? It is already a month nearly.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, my doors are always open for the Federation of Managers and for the *SeDEC*. I was myself surprised to look at the tone of the

communiqué. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to table this communiqué so that people see what has been written in there, and I will also table the amount of funds being given to schools. I will give you the list and the amounts disbursed to schools from 2011 to 2019, and you will be able to judge because the amount that we are giving to schools today is thrice the amount because we are giving them on a quarterly basis in advance; so there is no curtailment of funds.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, talking about this communiqué, I was extremely surprised because I have had a meeting with them after the comprehensive grant formula had been given and they were telling me that they agreed. However, they had certain problems regarding maintenance of schools, which we are trying to see how to help. But then, when I read the communiqué, Mr Speaker, Sir, where I see that *'depuis un certain temps, nous subissons la tentative de mainmise totale de la PSEA sur la gestion de nos collèges. Par le billet des circulaires, la PSEA nous informe les conditions imposées concernant le recrutement du personnel.'* Mr Speaker, Sir, we just want them to know what is the entitlement of the school; what is the number of teachers they can recruit. And this is our role! We are not saying that we are not giving the funds; we are providing the funds in advance! We are just saying, come and support your...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait!

An hon. Member: *Pankor fini la!*

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Let me finish! Let me finish!

An hon. Member: *Atan! Atan! Pankor fini!*

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: We are just asking them...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not finished...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! You cannot interfere! This is a reply. Let us listen to the reply. Please, go ahead Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Je n'ai pas terminé. Je voulais...

(Interruptions)

No! I am answering the question!

An hon. Member: *Inn poz li en kestion, li pe...*

An hon. Member: *Ekout minis! Ekout minis!*

Mr Speaker: Wait!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I am saying is that we are providing funds, we have not curtailed funds. We are saying that if your school population is dwindling, your teachers who are already recruited remain in the school. But then, at the time of their retirement, you are not supposed to get another teacher for that position because your school population is smaller now. We are being flexible; we are saying that in spite of the fact that the school population has gone down and your teacher entitlement does not allow you to have an additional teacher, we are allowing you to keep the teacher or the Deputy Rector until the retirement of that person, which is only too fair, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: I want to operate a PNQ; when I ask a question about whether she has met them, I get an answer completely different! There is a problem, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have...

Mr X. L. Duval: Let me finish now with my question!

Mr Speaker, Sir, she mentioned the need for strengthening of controls over some unethical expenditure, unjustified claims, and there are two types of schools, as you know. There are the profit-making schools, about 60, and then 25 schools are confessional schools: Catholic

schools, Muslim schools, Hindu schools, etc. Now, which of these confessional schools you are saying are, in fact, lying and submitting...

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I never said that!

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I never said that! I never said so!

Mr Speaker: Withdraw that word! Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: Why?

Mr Speaker: Apologise, then withdraw that word!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain!

Mr Speaker: Apologise!

Mr X. L. Duval: Let me explain what I said!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You do not have the floor!

An hon. Member: Withdraw!

Mr X. L. Duval: She said the reduction was not true! What does that mean?

Mr Speaker: You said 'lying'!

Mr X. L. Duval: When you say something is not true, what does that mean?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You withdraw that word!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I am withdrawing, Mr Speaker, Sir, no problem. You said that what they said were untrue. That is what you said. And now, out of these 25 confessional schools, which you have put in the same *panier* as everyone else, which one – please be honest and tell us the truth – justifies the sort of measures you have taken? Which one?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will be honest. Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr X. L. Duval: Name me one: St. Joseph? Is it Muslim?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please! There is an end to a question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Is it Islamic? Which one is it?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, there is an end to a question! The question is not literature! Go ahead Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am a Minister of Education for all the students in this country and I deal with all the schools; I put them at par. Now, one thing, when I say that there has been unethical, I am saying that ICAC...

(Interruptions)

...has mentioned that we have to ensure that funds are being used in an ethical manner. Now, when a school having 285 boys, has already a football pitch, comes and says 'I want to invest on a second football pitch', do I agree? Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about public funds; taxpayers' money. And that is why I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I have to deal with all of them alike. Now, I am not going to talk about confessionnal schools or private secondary schools; none of these. Look, any profit making school investing in its school can manage its school on its own, but when public funds are concerned, it is my duty to ensure that it is being used properly. If I do not do that, the hon. Leader of the Opposition can come and ask me a question: 'why am I allowing schools to use public funds unethically?'

Now, I am not here to pinpoint on any one school, but I would like to say that certain schools ask funds to put a list in the school; others ask funds to get road markers so that they can mark their school yards; some others came and said that they need to replace all the computers in the school; which are in running conditions. Now, my question is: are you asking me to take public funds, to dish out public funds without having any control?

I am going to table, Mr Speaker, Sir, not only the *communiqué de presse* of SeDEC, but I will also table the Circular Letter of the PSEA, because to me there's nothing wrong in that

Circular Letter. We are just asking them to come forward, we have already given you the funds, come forward and show me your receipts and I can give you funds for the next quarter. Now, if the funds are not used, you are given the opportunity to use it again in the next quarter. So, what is wrong in that? And what action am I supposed to take in such a situation? The officers are just trying to ensure that public funds are being used properly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, certain schools send a paper, saying that they are having excavation works done in the school yard, without saying for which purpose. Do we send the funds and say: okay, use it? I am myself a product of private secondary schools. I have myself worked as an educator...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I am going to get an answer or ...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: ...in private secondary schools...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dir li! Dir li!*

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: So, I do not have to learn anything from anyone, to come and tell me what is the difference between a confessional school or a private secondary school.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have been...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: ... to a confessional school from the age of five till I completed my schooling. I have been working in a confessional school for over 25 years. So, I have got nothing to learn from anyone about how a confessional school is run.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, she has been unable to tell us why 25 confessional schools are being put in the same basket for unethical use and unjustified claims.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have never said so!

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

Mr Speaker: Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have never said so! Mr Speaker, Sir, I have never said so!

Mr Speaker: Minister! Minister, please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have never said so!

Mr X. L. Duval: She does not understand the file! That is the problem, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

I am going to read from the PSEA...

(Interruptions)

She does not understand; this is why this mess. This is a horrible mess, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, this is what is said in the PSEA -

“Any unutilised amount will be offset against the disbursement of the following quarter.”

Meaning what? That if you do not spend today, you get a reduction next time. Otherwise, they do not know how to write English.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that is a small point; I will not go too much into that point. I will now come to some issues relating to profit-making. We understand that you have profit-making schools. There are about 60 of them there.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: They are not profit-making schools!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, you cannot intervene, interfere!

Mr X. L. Duval: Which you said yourself!

Mr Speaker: Let the hon. Leader of the Opposition put his question!

Mr X. L. Duval: You said yourself they are profit-making!

Mr Speaker: Do not take too much time. Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: You said yourself they are profit-making schools. Read the Hansard! You said yourself!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to ask for these schools; you are paying them a small amount of rent which was last valued in 2014. Now, I will take two schools. I will give the names if she wants. Both were valued independently at Rs1.2 m. Your Ministry is giving Rs217,000. That was last valued in 2014. Now, it was supposed to be revalued again. They have not done so; at least four years late.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It has already been done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: No, then, you are engaging in a conversation. You know the result. Please, put your question and no conversation!

Mr X. L. Duval: Did you understand my question? I said: why are you underpaying?

Mr Speaker: You finished with your question.

Mr X. L. Duval: Well, I asked the question!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, the question is over. Please, reply!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to inform the House that the valuation exercise has been completed on 30 November. The valuation exercise for all the schools has been completed.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you understand how this works, how you reimburse the schools. They are given a small amount of rent, much less than they ought to receive and then you reimburse them for expenses. Now, anybody, with half a mind, would understand that if I am just reimbursing you for expenses, there is no way that you can make a return on investment. Do you understand? There is way because you are only reimbursing.

Mr Speaker: And the question?

Mr X. L. Duval: And the question is: how are these schools going to make a return on their investment? Because in this formula – you can ask the Minister of Finance if you are getting stuck – there is no way other than reimbursement of expenses.

Mr Speaker: The question is done, please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I was trying to say is that the schools are run by the managers. The State provides funds for the running of the schools and for ensuring that the students get quality education. What we pay to the managers in terms of rent is known as an Annual Rental Value (ARV) and because it was decided so as far back as in 1976 when we decided to go on free education, they get an amount over a long period of time. So, there is a value that is given and there is a ceiling of Rs217,000 per month that is provided to the managers

of the schools, but all the running of the schools or the expenditure resources required to run the schools is provided by the State, and it is in billions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The teachers, the non-teaching staff are all paid by the State. So, what investment are we talking about? Even if they buy a computer, the State pays for that. So, which return on investment are we talking about? We can just ask the teachers, the teaching and non-teaching staff of all schools, all private secondary schools, they will come and tell you what is happening in the schools. So, there is no return on investment that we are expecting. We have been paying these schools as far back as from 1976. All successive Governments have been doing so. Now, when we have a report from the Audit Office, when we have a report from the ICAC, do you want me to sit back and say: okay, let things go as it has been going on for years? No, we have got to redress, Mr Speaker, Sir. And I am again insisting on one point: that we have not curtailed funds; we have been providing more funds. We are just asking managers to collaborate, to cooperate and to provide us with documents supporting their expenditure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important for me to table both the communiqué from *SeDEC* as well as the Circular Letter from the PSEA so that people can understand what is going on. Using a letter to come and say that everything is going wrong, when in this letter - I have just mentioned - we have just asked them to provide us with receipts, provide us with supporting documents. And I am really shocked to see such a Press communiqué talking about - I have to read it because I was shocked to read that myself.

(Interruptions)

No, I will read it!

(Interruptions)

Your question is based on this Press communiqué; I am going to read it!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To mem inn lev sa papie la!*

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Not at all!*

« Nous estimons que ces agissements sont une atteinte aux droits constitutionnels des associations confessionnelles d'établir des écoles ainsi qu'à la liberté des parents de placer leurs enfants dans des collèges de leur choix. »

On vient plus loin dire que les élèves passent en Grade 10 et en Grade 12 dans les collèges confessionnels. Mais c'est le droit constitutionnel des parents de faire admettre les élèves dans les collèges de leur choix, et en plus nous avons pris des mesures pour empêcher à ce qu'il y ait des *lateral transfers* dans les écoles pour que les collèges privés puissent garder leurs élèves. Mais quand il y a une place dans une académie et qu'un élève a bien travaillé et a fait un choix d'aller dans une académie, je ne suis pas là à les empêcher.

Maintenant, on parle de la démographie, le déclin. C'est vrai pour nos écoles aussi ! Dans nos écoles primaires, nous n'avons qu'une poignée d'élèves. Il y avait une question la semaine dernière d'un membre de l'Opposition. C'est vrai qu'il y a un déclin, mais je n'y peux rien. Là, je dois faire ressortir que ce serait vraiment dommage qu'on puisse venir remettre en question le *Comprehensive Grant Formula* quand j'ai eu des rencontres avec les managers. Ils étaient d'accord initialement, avec la *SeDEC* aussi. Alors, je trouve un peu bizarre que maintenant, se basant sur une lettre circulaire demandant simplement qu'on revienne vers les autorités avec les documents requis, on vient nous dire que nous sommes en train de tout basculer. Non, mais franchement!

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Do you want a question? Because she is not answering at all when I ask her questions!

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Ah bon?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Do you have a question?

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: What is the point?

Mr Speaker: If you have a question.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, I want to ask a question to the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, please, if you have no question, I will allow one question to hon. Dr. Gungapersad.

Mr X. L. Duval: When we have got the time, you can do what you like, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: But put your question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I the hon. Vice-Prime Minister this? I have on record here a meeting that there was at her Ministry with her SCE in October 2020, and they were very unsatisfied because they said no details were provided on the Comprehensive Grant Formula. Which meetings have you had with all these people now that the technical working group has been abolished - I saw that in the paper this morning that it is not true - the Federation of Managers, etc., and when did you have that?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Comprehensive Grant Formula was given to them, they came to me.

Mr X. L. Duval: Two years ago!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Not two years ago; last year!

Mr Speaker: No conversation!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Either I answer the question or I listen to another question.

Mr Speaker: No conversation! Please address the Speaker, hon. Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been having meetings regularly with the Private Secondary Schools, especially with *SeDEC*. After the Comprehensive Grant Formula was given to them, they came to my office, they were saying that they were agreeable, they wanted certain changes. Oh yes, they came up with another document saying that we could change a little bit here and there and they told me that they were very happy with the idea that they had to come and submit their receipts. And that is why I am telling you that I was surprised to see this Press communiqué, because when they left my office they were happy. I had even told them that I am trying to discuss with the Ministry of Finance, whether we can see what can be done for the ARV, and I have been discussing with the Minister of Finance. But then, they have to wait. I have also been telling them that the evaluation process was on and once it is done, things might improve also in terms of their ARV. But we have to be *honnêtes!* They had come to me; we had discussed on all that.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, they are dishonest. Thank you!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last letter I have...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... of 02 December 2020, a year ago, where they met apparently your SCE. And they said in that letter - I can table it - 'no details were discussed.' Now, do I take it, firstly, that the Prime Minister has not deemed fit to reply to the letter of 08 November from your supposed partners in education - you were copied with that letter; you did not do anything either and the last meetings you had with them was last year in 2020?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been having meeting with them even after that. So, it is untrue to say so. I had a meeting with SEDEC, and they were accompanied by the Cardinal as well. So...

(Interruptions)

I am not! You will allow me to answer?

Mr Speaker: Please, hon. Minister, address the Chair. Forget whatever the Leader of the Opposition is saying.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: We had the meeting; we had discussed and ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I will take action, don't you worry!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Ekoute! To pose kestion, to pas ekoute?*

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Don't disrupt the proceeding, please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying that no details were discussed. They have given me a document with their proposals after reading the comprehensive grant formula. So, how come they did not have the details? Mr Speaker, Sir, I have here the list of meetings, which I am going to provide to you.

(Interruptions)

I will give you the list of meetings.

(Interruptions)

Pe rod enn tipe tro!

Mr Speaker: No conversation, please! Both sides!

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Voilà!*

Mr X. L. Duval: And who attended ...

Mr Speaker: Please! Leader of the Opposition! Behave yourself!

(Interruptions)

Behave yourself!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The technical working group met on 24 September, 23 October, 25 February 2020, 28 February 2020, 04 March 2020, 11 March 2020, 18 March 2020, 23 September 2020.

Mr X. L. Duval: I rest my case, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please! Time is over by five minutes.

Mr X. L. Duval: 2020!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Et alors ?*

Mr Speaker: Yes, time is over already! Prime Minister's Question Time!

(Interruptions)

The Table has been advised ...

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/1320 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, and PQ B/1324 has been withdrawn.

Hon. Juman!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker...

Mr Juman: B/1321!

The Prime Minister: You are taking time. I want to answer!

(Interruptions)

POLICE OFFICERS & INFORMERS - REWARD MONEY

(No. B/1321) 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 Reward Money, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to the amount thereof allocated to officers of the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit in financial year ending 30 June 2017, indicating if all required procedures were duly followed in each case.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/1073 at the Sitting of Tuesday 16 November 2021, wherein I stated that Reward Money to informers is instrumental in assisting the Police in the fight against drug trafficking and other crimes, and that it is in line with the Police Standing Order No. 122.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that since December 2001 Reward Money is also paid to Police Officers, including ADSU personnel engaged in the fight against dangerous drugs resulting in the seizure of gandia, heroin, psychotropic and other hard drugs.

I am further informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that the quantum of reward to informers to be disbursed in each case depends on the following factors –

- (a) nature and circumstances;
- (b) persons (and obviously number of persons) arrested;
- (c) quantity and value of drugs and exhibits secured;
- (d) risk involved; and
- (e) reliability and regularity of the informers.

Payment of reward to Police Officers was stopped as from May 2014 in respect of seizures for year 2013 onwards. However, in January 2016 the then Commissioner of Police restored the payment of reward money to Police Officers with regard to uprooting of cannabis plants only. This represented an incentive as well as a motivation for Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) personnel and other Police Officers for the additional risks that are involved in the

search for cannabis plantations. Since September 2021, the payment of reward money to Police Officers has been extended to other drug cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I had also stated in my reply that Reward Money to Informers and Police Officers was granted 34 times for a total amount of Rs5,502,520 for the period July 2016 to June 2017. I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that this amount comprises Reward Money, as follows –

- Rs254,270 to Police Officers posted to the ADSU in respect of 631 cases of uprooting of cannabis plants;
- Rs95,350 to personnel of Police Helicopter Squadron;
- Rs516,000 to those falling in the grade of Inspector of Police/Police Sergeant acting as in charge field teams and above posted to ADSU;
- Rs3,686,900 to informers of ADSU, and
- Rs950,000 to informers of the Central Criminal Investigation Department (CCID).

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that the procedures for the payment of reward to informers for providing information on Drugs or Drug related cases are as follows –

- (i) Divisional Commanders and Branch Officers submit an application to the Commissioner of Police for approval and payment of reward;
- (ii) following the approval by the Commissioner of Police, the application is forwarded to the Manager Financial Operations for payment;
- (iii) a payment voucher Accounts Form 232 is filled by the Manager Financial Operations and a Government cheque in the amount claimed is drawn in favour of the Divisional Commanders and Branch Officers concerned;
- (iv) the cheque is handed over to the Divisional Commanders and Branch Officers concerned for encashment and payment of rewards, and
- (v) after payment is effected by the Divisional Commanders and Branch Officers concerned, the recipients (Police Officers) acknowledge receipt thereof.

The procedures for payment of rewards to Police Officers posted to ADSU who were involved in operations for uprooting cannabis are as follows –

- (a) the Deputy Commissioner of Police, ADSU, submits an application to the Commissioner of Police for consideration for the payment of Reward Money to Police Officers posted to ADSU who have been involved in operations to uproot cannabis;
- (b) following approval by the Commissioner of Police, the application is forwarded to the Manager Financial Operations for necessary payment;
- (c) a payment voucher Accounts Form 232 is filled by the Manager Financial Operations and a Government cheque in the amount claimed is drawn in favour of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, ADSU;
- (d) the cheque is handed over to Deputy Commissioner of Police, ADSU, for encashment and payment of rewards to Police Officers concerned, and
- (e) the Officers concerned are then convened to ADSU Headquarters where cash payment is effected against signature.

Regarding the applications made by Deputy Commissioner of Police, ADSU, for the Financial Year 2016/2017 for payment of Reward Money to Police Officers involved in cannabis uprooting operations, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that the procedures, both at the level of the Police Headquarters and at the level of the Police Finance Section have been duly followed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since Friday 05 November 2021, the Acting Commissioner of Police has issued guidelines regarding calculation of Reward Money based on street value of the dangerous drugs seized. Also, the Standing Order No. 122 has been amended by adding a new part (E) to the Reward to Informer Form whereby the Police Officer liaising with the Informer will certify receipt of the Reward Money applied for. The Acting Commissioner of Police has, on Wednesday 17 November 2021, set up a Special Committee at the level of the Police to revisit and streamline procedures for the payment of Reward Money, including reward to Police Officers with specific terms of reference. The Committee is expected to submit its recommendations by end of December 2021.

Mr Juman: Thank you. Hon. Prime Minister, let me come direct to a particular case, bearing OB 909/17, the famous case of *bonbonne gaz*, where a cheque of Rs950,000 drawn to the order of the DCP on 30 June 2017; Treasury Voucher 201061965, out of which Rs700,000 meant for the above mentioned case. Can you, hon. Prime Minister, confirm whether the Rs700,000 have been remitted to the Informers and if the secret receipt has been duly signed by the Informers to acknowledge receipt of the money?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member himself has mentioned that there is a case which is under investigation, even citing the OB Number. Now, how can I be expected to provide information, evidence, in fact, which the hon. Member is asking me to provide while a case is being enquired into? That is not proper. But, secondly, let me say to the hon. Member that the case to which he is referring is, in fact, an alleged case of money that had to be paid to Informers. In his question, if I can read him properly, he is referring to Reward Money that has to be allocated to Officers of the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit. The case to which he is referring has no relevance to the Parliamentary Question that has been asked today.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The question I am going to ask the hon. Prime Minister - I am not sure whether he has the answer with him and if not, he can circulate it later; to be fair - is the whole concept, the whole mechanism of Reward Money. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether this falls under the purview of the Director of Audit and, if not, can I suggest that in the future, the accounts of Reward Money are audited by the Director of Audit?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, all expenses that are incurred from public funds, and, with regard to the budget of the Police, how the money is budgeted for different items, in fact, are such expenses subjected to inspection by the Director of Audit. Obviously, there must be reports that are regularly made by the Director of Audit. I do not know; I have not seen any with regard to this specific issue. I need to have a look to see whether there have been any comments that have been made with regard to use of funds for Reward Money.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there was an initiative in or around year 2015 for reinstating payment of Reward Money to Police Officers?

The Prime Minister: Yes. As I stated in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Reward Scheme for Police Officers was introduced in December 2001. Now, the payment of the Reward to Police Officers for seizure of cannabis, psychotropic and other illicit substances was, in fact, made at the same rate as that of Customs Officers. However, the scheme for Customs Officers was abolished in 2006 with the coming into effect of the Mauritius Revenue Authority. All the payments of the Reward Money to Police Officers were stopped in 2014. There were representations from the Officers, from that Unit also in 2015, not only to restart but to review this scheme. The Police was advised - because they had written to the Prime Minister's Office - to refer the matter to the Pay Research Bureau. However, the Pay Research Bureau did not address this issue in its Report of 2016, and in January 2016 the then Commissioner of Police had restored the payment of Reward Money to Police Officers in connection with uprooting and seizure of cannabis plants only, and, in September 2021, it has been extended to other drugs.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Hon. Prime Minister, I am not talking about the case of drug trafficking; we are talking about the Reward Money. And for the Reward Money, Rs700,000, you just mentioned that the sum has not been given to the Police Officers. There is no such amount handed over to the Police Officers. So, obviously, it goes to the Informers. Hon. Prime Minister, can you confirm to the House whether there has been an *ex parte* lodged by ICAC to the Supreme Court in relation to the present case I mentioned, where the Judge granted the motion?

The Prime Minister: Hon. Member, maybe I have to repeat, I do not know; if I can say it in French maybe.

La question supplémentaire que pose l'honorable membre est une question concernant une allégation qui a été faite concernant le paiement de *Reward Money* à des informateurs. Sa question, aujourd'hui, parle de, et je dois traduire en français sa question supplémentaire qui est en anglais. Il parle de *Reward Money* qui a été payé aux officiers de l'*Anti Drug Smuggling Unit* pour l'année financière se terminant au 30 juin 2017.

M. le président, cette question supplémentaire n'a rien à voir avec la question principale qui est posée aujourd'hui. J'invite l'honorable membre à venir avec une question spécifique concernant ce cas particulier et, bien sûr, je vais répondre.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has any information from the Acting Commissioner of Police with regard to whether there has been any inter-departmental enquiry with the Central CID whereby, has been said, is believed that procedures have not been fully followed in that particular case that happened in early 2017?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to repeat again. The hon. Member is asking me whether there has been an internal enquiry following the supplementary question that has been put by hon. Juman concerning a case which, I know, is actually under investigation, as he himself mentioned, but which bears no relevance to the Parliamentary Question that has been put today. So, I invite the hon. Member also to come with a substantive question with regard to that issue and, obviously, I shall answer.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, move to your next question!

POLICE FORCE - CAPS - PROCUREMENT

(No. B/1322) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to when Police caps therefor were last procured, indicating –

- (a) the number thereof procured;
- (b) the cost thereof, and
- (c) if all have been delivered and issued to the Police Officers.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to section 7 of the Police Act of 1974, every Police Officer shall wear the prescribed uniform. Accordingly, the Police Department has issued the Police Standing Order No. 110 "*Dress Regulations*", which provides instructions on all

aspects of Police uniforms, including the proper wearing thereof and the use of other items and accessories forming part of the uniform.

There are several items which constitute the Police uniform, namely –

- a) shirt;
- b) trousers;
- c) skirts;
- d) belts;
- e) caps;
- f) shoes;
- g) socks, and
- h) accessories such as shoulder badge, cap badge, name plate, lanyard, amongst others.

I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that the procurement of different items of uniform, including Police caps, is based on the annual requirements and on the frequency of issue of same. There are different types of caps which are issued to Police Officers based on their ranks, gender and size of their head. Police cap is issued at least once every three years or earlier upon request, following wear and tear, loss, or damage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that for the last procurement exercise for Police caps, the contract was awarded for 6,352 caps for male Police Officers for a total cost of Rs4,996,850.40 including VAT, on Wednesday 21 March 2018. All of them have been delivered to the Police Department and are being issued as and when required.

For female Officers, the contract for the procurement of 1,500 units of caps was awarded for a total cost of Rs2,239,050 including VAT, on Monday 04 October 2021. The delivery date is on Sunday 12 December 2021. On Tuesday 09 November 2021, the supplier delivered 92 caps, and a sample was sent for testing. According to the test report, the caps delivered did not meet the required specifications. The supplier was informed of the non-compliance. The 92 caps have thus been returned.

Mr Juman: May we know who designed those caps?

The Prime Minister: Who designed those caps? I need to check. I can recall that Police uniforms had something to do with the University of Mauritius, but I need to get the exact information. But I undertake to provide it to the House.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister provide the names of the bidders for both the Policemen and Policewomen caps?

The Prime Minister: Yes. For male caps, there were four bidders –

- (1) Global & Strategic Procurement Ltd;
- (2) Knight Trading Agency Co. Ltd;
- (3) Master Sport Co. Ltd, and
- (4) Ismael M. Bawamia Co. Ltd.

In fact, for the female caps, 15 suppliers were invited to submit quotation for the procurement of those caps through a restricted bidding exercise. I can circulate those 15 names, but what is important, at the time of closing, only 4 bids were received. They are as follows –

- (1) Ismael M. Bawamia Co. Ltd;
- (2) Global & Strategic Procurement Ltd;
- (3) Worldwide Marketing & Services Ltd, and
- (4) Knight Trading Agency Co. Ltd.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we know from the hon. Prime Minister what is the procurement process for these accessories; caps, badges, socks, trousers?

The Prime Minister: As the estimated cost for the WPC caps was estimated at around Rs2.250 m., which is below the threshold of the Rs5 m., the restricted bidding method was used in accordance with section 19(1) (b) of the Public Procurement Act 2006, whereas for the male caps, it was an open advertised bidding method because it was estimated to be more than Rs5 m.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister stated that the supplier for Policewomen caps was not in compliance with the set specifications. Can the hon. Prime Minister give us more explanation on how?

The Prime Minister: I must find out, Mr Speaker, Sir, because there was a discrepancy in the content with regard to cotton. One of the specifications was that it has to be 100% cotton woven fabric coated with plastic - that is, the crown - waterproof, and so on. I understand there was a report that was provided after testing and that it did not meet that standard. This is the reason why the supplier was informed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

FLIGHT MK852 - SATURDAY 27 NOV 2021 – PASSENGERS - NUMBER

(No. B/1323) 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 flight MK852 which landed in Mauritius on Saturday 27 November 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Airport Holdings Ltd., information as to the number of passengers who travelled thereon, giving the list of –

- (a) those who –
 - (i) exited through the VIP lounge, if any, and
 - (ii) were COVID-19 positive tested, and
- (b) quarantine centres where they were lodged, indicating the cost incurred in relation thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Airport Holdings Ltd is not involved in the processing of flights and passengers at Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport. These are operational matters dealt with by the airport passenger terminal operator, which is the Airport Terminal Operations Ltd, and other border control agencies, namely, Passport and Immigration Office, Airport Health Office, and Customs Department, among others.

I am informed by the Director of Civil Aviation that Air Mauritius flight MK852 arriving from Johannesburg on Saturday 27 November 2021 landed at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport at 19.19 hours without passengers.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Juman: Hon. Prime Minister, we are talking of the flight of MK852 of 27 November?

The Prime Minister: Well,...

Mr Juman: From Johannesburg?

The Prime Minister: This is the flight I am also referring to - to which I replied.

An hon. Member: *Ramgoolam inn piege twa!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Try your next question!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the flight for which there were rumours about the daughter of the Deputy Prime Minister having travelled by it and having been given special treatment, favourable treatment in order not to go for quarantine. These are the kinds of news that have been circulating! And after the Deputy Prime Minister has denied such fake news, they then spread fake news about Minister Jagutpal, and, after Minister Jagutpal, you know what? You should know! After Minister Jagutpal, they referred to my daughter. This is the kind of nonsense that has been going on.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

Hon. Members: *La honte! La honte!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I heard hon. Hurreeram saying ...

(Interruptions)

Apologise and withdraw the word!

Mr Hurreeram: I apologise and I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: You have a supplementary question?

(Interruptions)

Mr Juman: Hon. Prime Minister...

An hon. Member: Own goal!

Mr Juman: No, no! No own goal!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet, please! I am on my feet!

Mr Juman: The flight on Saturday from Johannesburg! There were around 165 passengers on the flight; that's the truth.

(Interruptions)

That's the truth. And I want to have details about how many passengers were positive and where they were lodged in quarantine centres.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I speak the truth in Parliament whenever I answer any question. The flight to which the hon. Member is referring is MK852 and I have stated that it landed on Saturday 27 November at 19.19 hours, and there were no passengers.

Mr Speaker: Time over! No passengers! Time over!

POLICE OFFICERS – SUSPENSION – REMUNERATION

(No. B/1324) **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 Police Officers currently under suspension, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number of cases lodged, and
- (b) aggregate amount of money paid thereto in terms of remuneration since suspension to date.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQ B/1395 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Industry Development, SMEs and Cooperatives.

PQs B/1345, B/1346, B/1347 and B/1368 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: B/1334!

STATE TRADING CORPORATION - FLOUR - SUPPLY

(No. B/1334) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First 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 supply of flour on the local market in the current year, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the –

- (a) country of origin;
- (b) quantity and price per ton;
- (c) specifications, and
- (d) testing agencies thereof, if any.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker Sir, it is important to make a clear distinction between wheat grain, which is a raw agricultural product and wheat flour which is a processed and refined end product. I am informed that *Les Moulins de la Concorde (LMLC)* which is a private company, imports wheat grains from different sources. The wheat grains are then processed by

LMLC in its own local flour mill to produce wheat flour which according to the manufacturer is essentially a Mauritian product.

The State Trading Corporation (STC) procures around 94,000 MT of wheat flour in four distinct types, which are –

- White Wheat Flour, Type A at the price of USD 454 per MT;
- White Wheat Flour, Type B at the price of USD 418 per MT;
- Brown Bread Flour, Type A, and
- Brown Bread Flour, Type B at the price of USD 458 per MT.

The STC has detailed specifications for each type of flour which have been worked out by a consultant and is periodically reviewed. I am tabling a copy of the specifications.

I am informed that the *LMLC* tests the flour produced in its in-house laboratory to ensure compliance with STC's required specifications prior to supplying same to STC. Moreover, the STC appoints an independent testing body to certify the quality of the wheat flour received from supplier against STC's required specifications. The STC has appointed the Mauritius Standards Bureau to carry out quality tests on the flour supplied by the *LMLC* on a monthly basis.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. For a population of 1.3 million people, bread is considered as a staple food and the flour being referred to in the question, which is also used to make *parathas* and *dhollpuris*, and other pastries, benefit subsidy totalling an amount of Rs1 billion per year from Government coffers.

Can I ask the hon. Minister, in regard specifically to bread, whether there has been a change in specification lately? Because *l'Association des propriétaires de boulangeries* has made vehement complaints to the STC since the month of September, regarding the bad quality of flour that is being sold to them by *Les Moulins de la Concorde*, and that this affects to a large extent the quality of bread available to the population. As a consequence of this, people are complaining and bakers are having to throw away thousands of breads every day, since people do not want to buy them.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since the beginning of the contract in 2021, STC has officially not received any major complaint from bakeries. There are around

160 bakeries currently registered with the STC for the purchase of flour. No official complaint has been received. And I also confirm that there has not been any change in the specifications.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is because the STC is not playing its role as it should be and the Minister has refused consistently to meet with the bakers, despite having asked for meeting on several occasions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I say that STC is not playing its role, because I am going to table correspondence between the bakers and *Les Moulins de la Concorde* directly, which should not have been the case. So, can I ask the hon. Minister what does he have to say about this state of affairs?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not true to say that I have not met with the association of bakers...

Mr Osman Mahomed: On this issue?

Mr Callichurn: On this issue, they did not write to me. I am informed that they verbally complained to *Les Moulins de la Concorde* and no official complaint was received by the STC and neither by my Ministry.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I have just tabled the correspondence, not the verbal, but the written complaint to and fro between *Les Moulins de la Concorde* and bakers.

Mr Callichurn: *Les Moulins de la Concorde* and bakers, not to STC! *Les Moulins de la Concorde* is a private company, Mr Speaker, Sir. They are dealing with a private company.

Mr Speaker: Any question?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes. Has there been a change of specification recently because it is known that on international market, prices of wheat have gone up, and could it be that *Le Moulin de la Concorde* is buying cheaper wheat and supply it to the local market?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have earlier in my reply stated that there has not been any change in the specification as per the contract awarded to *Les Moulins de la Concorde*. And I also confirm that, according to the specification, there are tests which are carried out on a monthly basis by the MSB.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he could table, at least, the last test results done by the MSB?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, I undertake to table.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: B/1335!

BASSIN ROAD & CHEBEL – SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS PROJECT

(No. B/1335) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Project for the construction of social housing units at Bassin Road and at Chebel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) total number of units constructed;
- (b) name of contractor;
- (c) contract value;
- (d) variation and accelerated costs, if any, giving details thereof, and
- (e) delays and repercussions thereof, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand this Parliamentary Question to refer to a project involving two sites, namely that of Bassin and that of Résidence Trochetia at Chebel as distinct from Résidence Lotus at Chebel.

As regards part (a) of the question, I'm informed by the NHDC Ltd that the total number of units constructed at Bassin Road and Résidence Trochetia at Chebel are 102 and 92 units, respectively.

With regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am informed that on 24 March 2017, one single contract for the project was awarded by the NHDC Ltd. to Super Construction Company Limited in respect of both sites for a contract value of Rs325,698,888.

In respect of part (d) of the question, I am informed that variations and accelerated costs are the subject of a dispute which has been referred to arbitration. The award is expected by January 2022, and I shall be happy thereafter to provide the information requested to the House.

Finally, with regard to part (e) of the question, according to information provided to me, construction works at Bassin Road and Chebel, that is, Résidence Trochetia at Chebel, started in April 2017 and, as per the contract, were to have been completed by October 2018. In actual fact, the sites were handed over to the NHDC Ltd in November 2020.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether in addition to the case having been referred to arbitration, the NHDC has in parallel made a statement to the Police for allegedly forgery and over claiming from the part of the contractor to the tune of Rs65m. and this statement – I can even give him the OB Number, it is 6817/221 dated 19 October 2021?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Again, the hon. gentleman is always very well informed about the NHDC Ltd. I do not delve in day-to-day running of the NHDC Ltd. but I have been informed by the NHDC Ltd further to the Parliamentary Question put to me that a statement was indeed made by the NHDC to the Police on 19 October 2021 regarding possible fraud committed by the contractor, I quote from the information provided to me: “in his substantiation for its claims for accelerated costs”.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. Since the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has said that I am quite well informed about the NHDC, can I take the liberty of telling him that for this particular contract, very unusually at the level of the NHDC...

Mr Speaker: Put the question, do not inform the Minister!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes. Is he aware or would he enquire as to whether for this particular contract, every Friday at the NHDC, the Finance Department had to put away all the work that it had to do and concentrate only on the payment due to this contractor so that in expressed manner payment is made on that Friday itself and this could have been the cause of the malaise,, the situation that now because there has been a change of CEO at the level of the NHDC, has been referred to the Police? If he does not have the information which I am sure maybe he would have, can he enquire?

Mr Speaker: Please! You asked...

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not have such information Mr Speaker, Sir. There is, I presume, a Police investigation. There is on the other hand an arbitration procedure that is underway. And I will wait for these respective processes to be completed.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I am not a lawyer but Police investigation will not elucidate all the mysteries there could have been, especially if there was connivance at the level of the NHDC. Can I ask the hon, Deputy Prime Minister, being given that his Ministry is going to embark on a huge housing project for the country (12,000 housing units), to refer this case to ICAC so that for bigger contracts, no bigger hanky-panky than this could happen?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot refer a matter to ICAC when the information seems to be in the sole possession of the hon. Gentlemen. But, of course, if he has any such information, he is free to report the matter to the competent authorities.

An hon. Member: He is not a lawyer!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy, last supplementary!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just seeking your guidance whether it is in order to discuss an issue which is at arbitration, whether it is in order to discuss an issue which is supposed to be confidential as it is under arbitration?

Mr Speaker: That was a supplementary question?

Mr Nuckcheddy: I need guidance on that issue.

Mr Speaker: What was the question?

Mr Nuckcheddy: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister mentioned...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr Nuckcheddy: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister mentioned in his reply that there is an issue which is at arbitration. So, arbitration has got confidential clauses. So, is it in order to discuss issues which are under arbitration to be discussed in this House?

Mr Speaker: I will come to the point later on. Next question!

VRINDAVAN ROAD, BON ACCEUIL – ROAD RESURFACING & DRAINS

(No. B/1336) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the resurfacing and construction of drains at Vridanan Road in Bon Accueil, he will give details of the contract and the mode of financing thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that several complaints were received at the level of the CAB Office Lallmatie from the inhabitants in the region of Vrindavan Road, Bon Accueil, regarding the poor state of the said road. Mr Speaker, Sir, the road name is Vrindavan and not Vridanan as written in the question; Vrindavan, as the village of Lord Krishna.

Subsequently, the technical officers of my Ministry carried out a site visit at the locus on 17 December 2020 and observed that the Vrindavan Road required a full-width resurfacing.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no drainage infrastructure thereat and with the existing site topography, surface run-off flows into the Vrindavan Road and accumulates at low-lying points in that area.

Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to addressing this situation, on 04 May 2021, the NDU issued a Works Order for the “Resurfacing and Construction of Drains at Vrindavan Road, Bon Accueil”, for an amount of Rs2,145,033.69, inclusive of VAT, to Gamma Construction Ltd, under its Framework Agreement for the Construction and Upgrading of Roads and Associated Works.

The scope of works of the project includes the following –

- (i) laying of kerbs to the side of the road, where necessary, as a lateral support to the road crust;
- (ii) construction of four absorption drains of 300 millimetres wide by 4.5 metres long and one absorption drain of 500 millimetres wide by 16 metres long with metal gratings. Out of the four absorption drains of 300 millimetres wide and by 4.5 metres long planned at design stage, only three were constructed on site. The fourth absorption drain planned near the junction Vrindavan Road and RDA A2 Road was

omitted due to the presence of an existing buried live CWA pipe which is prone to damage and also which is located just below the road surface.

In addition, the presence of network of traffic light sensors at the location, further ward-off the construction of that absorption drain.

The contractual start and completion dates of the project were 17 May 2021 and 11 September 2021, respectively. However, due to a delay in mobilisation by the contractor, the works were completed on 29 November 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the project is financed under the National Flood Management Programme and funds will be disbursed from the COVID-19 Project Development Fund. Mr Speaker, Sir, I repeat it again, the project is funded under the COVID-19 Project Development Fund which has been earmarked for economic recovery, to sustain the construction industry and to prevent people working in that industry to lose their job and to allow the supply chain in the construction industry to work. I can only thank the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister for that initiative.

I am informed that as at date, no payment has been effected and the claims are being awaited from the Contractor who has still to submit relevant test results from approved testing laboratories for the works carried out on site. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I have two questions. The first one is regarding the quality of the work. Maybe the Minister is not aware; my in-laws are from the Flacq District. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has been made aware that even the District Councillors have made a lot of complaints about the quality of work that is being conducted there?

Mr Hurreeram: This is exactly what I just said, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the end, before payment, we need to have relevant test results and approved testing laboratories, etc. So, we need our Engineers, at the locals of the NDU, to carry out necessary tests and measurements etc. And also, if the District Councillor - as the hon. Member is saying, I guess it is Mr Domah – has got any issue, he can talk to the NDU directly. So, there is no issue. If they have any issue, we will look into it.

Mr Osman Mahomed: As far as I know, there is no District Councillor called Mr Domah. This is accusation anyway. Can I ask the hon. Minister, in terms of process, which

department applies for funds under COVID, is it the local authority or his Ministry, through the NDU?

Mr Hurreeram: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance in the Budget Speech has provided funds under the COVID-19 Project Development Fund for infrastructural projects, drains, amenities and roads etc. When the NDU has got projects to do in a specific region, obviously, it is the NDU who got to apply for the funds. I am not very much concerned about other Ministries of what they want to do.

Mr Osman Mahomed: But the NDU has got its own funds for projects which have already been approved in the calendar year. So, how does it go? Whims and caprices, NDU sees a project and then it just decides to apply for COVID fund. Because COVID fund is – of course, I understand the rationale for economic development – primarily meant to alleviate problems in relation to COVID.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Hurreeram: ...the Minister of Finance has provided funds under different funds; the Consolidated Fund, the COVID-19 Project Development Fund, the National Environment Climate Change Fund. And all the PPS, prior to the financial year, do submit a list of projects that are required in their respective constituencies and the list is approved by the Minister of Finance and it is up to Minister of Finance to disburse the funds and tell us where the funds are available for us to do the project. There is nothing about whims and caprices because those projects are decided well in advance even before the financial year. For instance, now, we are already working on the project that will be implemented in the next financial year.

So, there is nothing about whims and caprices. It is not that anyone can just come and decide to resurface or build a drain wherever he wants. There is a scientific approach behind; it is well thought where what is needed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will suspend here for one and a half hour.

At 12.58 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

PUBLIC & PRIVATE HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS - BLOOD & BLOOD COMPONENTS

(No. B/1337) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to blood and blood components, he will state the –

- (a) quantity thereof required in public and private healthcare institutions since March 2021 to date on a monthly basis;
- (b) present stock thereof at the National Blood Transfusion Service, and
- (c) measures taken, if any, to ensure adequate stock thereof for medical and surgical emergencies and demands thereof that would be required amid the prevailing COVID-19 situation with the Delta and Omicron variants.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since March to November 2021, the total quantity of blood and blood components required in the public and private healthcare institutions is as follows –

Public Health Institutions –

- 104 Cryoprecipitate;
- 15,470 Red Blood Cells;
- 9,304 Platelets;
- 6,405 Fresh Frozen Plasma, and
- 84 Apheresis Platelets

Private Health Institutions –

- 290 Cryoprecipitate;
- 5,825 Red Blood Cells;
- 1,934 Platelets;

- 1,598 Fresh Frozen Plasma, and
- 24 Apheresis Platelets

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to table the monthly list of blood and blood components required in the public and private healthcare institutions since March to November 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the current stock of blood at the National Blood Transfusion Service as at 02 December 2021 is as follows –

- 67 units of blood for Group A+
- 139 units of blood for Group B+
- 160 units of blood for Group O+
- 46 units of blood for Group AB+
- 4 units of blood for Group A Negative
- 2 units of blood for Group B Negative
- 15 units of blood for Group O Negative
- 2 units of blood for Group AB Negative

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the measures taken to ensure an adequate stock of blood, I am informed that there is an ongoing organisation of mobile blood donations in collaboration with various Non-Governmental Associations and sociocultural groups with due respect to sanitary protocols.

From March 2021 to date, a total number of 29,920 units of blood have been collected. Out of this, 21,053 were collected at 728 mobile drives throughout the island. The rest have been collected at the blood banks of Regional Hospitals.

Moreover, the Protocol for donor selection has been temporarily amended by reducing the HB requirement from 12.5 g/dl to 12.0 g/dl and reducing donation interval to 56 days instead of 84 days, with a maximum of 5 donations per year. These measures have been taken to allow more donors to be able to donate blood.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that a mega blood donation campaign has been planned over 4 days from 20 to 23 December 2021, in collaboration with the Blood Donors Association, to allow maximum number of donors to donate blood in a safe environment, prior to

the festive period. I also wish to inform the House that my Ministry and the Blood Donors Association can inform the population about the blood stock status and make an appeal for blood donation through media whenever it is required.

I also wish to reassure the House that, so far, all the medical and surgical requirements for blood transfusion have been catered for.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. With respect to the eligibility to donate blood in the context of wide national campaign for vaccination, which I call post-vaccination, can the hon. Minister confirm whether only those who had Pfizer or J&J vaccines, which have received the emergency use of the Federal Drug Administration, can be considered safe to be blood donors or all those who had any of the five vaccines that have been administered to the population can be eligible to give blood?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, so far, there have been no criteria for donation of blood, whichever vaccines you have done. Having been vaccinated once is not in itself a criterion for blood donation.

Dr. Aumeer: Then, if that can help the population, can your Ministry or will your Ministry issue guidelines with regard to the time frame of how long after having received any vaccine can somebody be a blood donor?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the guidance of the National Blood Transfusion, there has been no such question about the timing after vaccination. We have started the vaccination campaign in January. So far, in regard to blood donation, it has been smooth, despite the confinement period. The confinement has not been an issue. If ever there is an alert from the Blood Donation Organisation about any specific criteria for blood donation in respect of vaccination, the Ministry will definitely go by its recommendations.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In this very same spirit of encouraging blood donation and blood collection, can the Minister inform the House what are the available logistics at the level of his Ministry to facilitate blood collection and blood donations across the island? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the logistics, blood donations being carried out in different setting as per the different requests, the current National Blood Transfusion Service has 5 caravans and that being conducted in the different places. The Ministry of Health and Wellness has also procured 2 brand new blood caravans this year at the cost of some Rs13 m.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary.

Dr. Aumeer: Does the hon. Minister have the information from the Blood Transfusion Service as to whether they have established a Plasma Convalescent Programme? It is one of those means that has been used in many centres with regard to treatment of the severely sick patients of COVID-19?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, last year, we had used the Plasmapheresis as a treatment but this year, with the new medications available, international guidelines have not recommended continued use of Plasmapheresis. Nevertheless, the Ministry has all the different settings if ever the need for Plasmapheresis arises. It means that those who have already been COVID positive, their plasma contains the antibodies that can be used to treat other patients. Well, that set up and the criteria to use it are already an established one also.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/1374, B/1375, B/1376, B/1377 and B/1320.

Next question!

**AIR BOUND & SEA BOUND PASSENGERS - ARRIVALS - VACCINE
CERTIFICATES, PCR TESTS**

(No. B/1338) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to air bound and sea bound passengers, he will state the number of arrivals thereof respectively, since 01 October 2021 to date, indicating –

- (a) the number thereof who are South Africans;
- (b) whether they produced at the immigration counter;
 - (i) *bona fide* vaccine certificates, and

- (ii) negative results of PCR tests done at least 72 hours prior to embarkation for Mauritius, and
- (c) the measures taken to ensure authenticity of vaccine certificates and PCR testing thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that since 01 October 2021 till 06 December 2021, 157,412 air bound and sea bound passengers have embarked in Mauritius, out of which 9,850 passengers were from South Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (b) (i), in accordance with established sanitary requirements, all incoming passengers should produce the following documentary evidence that he or she has been vaccinated at least 14 days before departure with a full course of any of the following vaccines –

- a) AstraZeneca;
- b) Covaxin;
- c) Moderna;
- d) Pfizer BioNTech;
- e) Sinopharm;
- f) Sinovac;
- g) Sputnik V,

or at least 28 days before departure with a Janssen Vaccine or documentary evidence that he or she has recovered from COVID-19 and thereafter has been vaccinated with one dose of one of the above mentioned vaccines at least 14 days before departure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (b) (ii) of the question, it is mandatory for any incoming passenger to take a pre-departure PCR test within 72 hours before departure; the result of which should be negative.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the department of Civil Aviation has issued NOTAM A0153/21 - Conditions For Landing At SSR International Airport which defines the conditions of travel for incoming passengers. In line with NOTAM

A0153/21, the Airline Authorities have the responsibility to ensure that inbound passengers possess the required documents, that is, documentary evidence of vaccination status and negative PCR test results prior to embarking on the plane. The authenticity of these documents provided should also be verified by the Airline Authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, should the Public Health Inspectorate, posted at the airport; suspect that the vaccination certificate or PCR test results produced are doubtful; the matter is referred to the regional Public Health Superintendent. The Embassy is thereafter requested to initiate an enquiry and contact the authorities as well as the concerned laboratory to verify the authenticity of the vaccine certificate and the PCR test results. In light of the findings of the enquiry, the matter is referred to the police for necessary action in the case of counterfeit documents.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can the Minister confirm the number of passengers who had a negative, as he said, 157,412 came through; obviously they all had a negative test at embarkation and how many among them, have been found to be PCR positive on arrival in Mauritius and which countries were they from?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unfortunately I do not have these numbers now but I am going to table it in the Assembly.

Dr. Aumeer: The Minister is surely aware of a lot of bogus vaccination certificates and our borders being opened from all quarters, we should be very weary. Daset and Telegram E-platform have been used by fraudsters to sell bogus vaccination pass. The Israeli-based Cyber security firm has identified 29 countries which have been targeted by fraudsters to issue fake COVID certificates. Has your Ministry taken any measures, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Technology to address this issue? Likewise, the European Council also has its platform gateway being targeted because our tourists come mostly from Europe and South Africa? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already stated in my reply that any doubtful PCR test result or vaccination certificate is being counter-checked by the authorities. We send them to the Embassy to get the information. So far, we have not received any such reply from the Embassy or from the laboratories that they are fake documents. Now, concerning the other part of the question, the Ministry will obviously carry out an investigation because you have to check it by the different authorities before we can ascertain that these documents are fake.

Mr Speaker: MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Thank you. Following a communiqué of the Ministry of Health, dated 26 November 2021, inviting passengers already in Mauritius and who have been physically present, in any of the 6 African Countries from which no passengers are allowed entry to undergo a free PCR test, can the hon. Minister inform the House, how many of those passengers came forward to do a PCR test?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, these figures, I do not have them but I am going to table the figures. This was a measure to see if ever passengers from South Africa, because we are referring to the Omicron variant, to see whether those who have already landed in Mauritius before, can come up to verify and check anew. In any circumstance, that they have done a PCR test at the airport. In fact, with this PCR test done at the airport, already we can, being vaccinated and doing a PCR test, will definitely give us a true picture about whether someone is infected or not.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**MODERNA LABORATORY - PREORDERING REFORMULATED VACCINES -
OMICRON VARIANT**

(No. B/1339) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the reformulated vaccines being developed by Moderna to combat the Omicron Variant, he will state if his Ministry will consider pre-ordering same.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 01 December 2021, a request was made by my Ministry through the Ministry of Foreign affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to the Chief Executive Officer of Moderna to provide us with new vaccines being developed by its laboratory and which will have improved efficacy against emerging variants including Omicron as soon as all regulatory approval is obtained. Further details as to the price of the new Moderna vaccines, the terms and conditions regarding supply and delivery along with the time frame have also been sought.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Chief Executive Officer of Moderna, Stéphane Bancel, has, on 01 December 2021, stated that the efficacy of the available vaccine against the Omicron variant is

not yet known. According to him, the results of the efficacy of the vaccines against the Omicron variant are awaited. It is impossible to make any statement at this stage. It is imperative to analyse all blood samples and in about two weeks' time, more information would be available.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. I am glad to hear that some form of contact with the CEO of Moderna and some approach to pre-ordering are in order now. Can the Minister reassure the population as to which vaccines inoculated so far in Mauritius do confirm some protection against COVID-19, namely Delta and Omicron, as per the Scientific Advisory Committee of his Ministry?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, so far, all the international recommendations, even the WHO recommendation, for all the vaccines that we have been using in Mauritius, are all efficient for the Delta variant as well as for the other variants in regard to COVID-19. We will definitely communicate any further information that we get to the public.

Dr. Aumeer: I think Sinopharm trial results do not go in line of what you have just said. Anyway, I will take the answer as it is. Has your Ministry earmarked any specific budget should a more specific vaccine against Omicron be made available on the market?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I will come back to the PNQ I replied last time about Sinopharm and its efficacy, I will not repeat what I have said but what the international organisation said about Sinopharm vaccines. I maintain that this is an efficient vaccine. Now, about the budget that we have earmarked for the future, the Vaccination Committee which falls under the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will provide the funds in case we will need a special budget for the purchase of vaccines.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

CÔTE D'OR NATIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/1340) **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 proposed renovation of the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sports Infrastructure Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) scope of work;
- (b) name of contractor, and

(c) project value thereof.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd. (MMIL) that there are currently no renovation works being carried out at the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex nor there are any renovation works scheduled at a later date.

Mr Juman: M. le président, il y a un *tender document* qui est en public en ce moment pour la rénovation du *Côte d'Or National Sports Complex*. Peut-on savoir quels sont les travaux qui sont supposés de faire là-bas, que vous demandez de faire à la *Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd* ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, comme je viens de le dire dans ma réponse initiale, l'information que la *MMIL* m'a donné c'est qu'il n'y a actuellement *no renovation works*. Par rapport au tender document que l'honorable membre est en train de faire référence, je ne suis pas au courant.

Mr Juman: M. le président, je dépose un *tender document* qui est en circulation en public en ce moment depuis juin 2021 concernant la rénovation du *Côte d'Or National Sports Complex* avec plus d'une centaine de travaux de rénovations qui sont demandés à être cotés. Je dépose le *tender document*.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL REPORT - 11,000
DIGITAL TABLETS – PROCUREMENT**

(No. B/1341) **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 Report of the Independent Review Panel on the launch of the bid on 29 April 2019 for the procurement of 11,000 digital tablets by the Open University of Mauritius, she will state if she has taken cognizance thereof and, if so, will she –

- (a) table copy thereof, and
- (b) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to how the delay in the supply of the digital tablets has impacted the students and staff of the University, especially, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Open University of Mauritius that in April 2019, the institution did not launch a procurement exercise for the acquisition of 11,000 tablets.

However, I am informed that the Open University proceeded with the procurement exercise through open advertised bidding for the acquisition of 11,000, tablets on 28 May 2021, the closing date being 30 June 2021. Following this exercise, the lowest bidder was allocated the contract to the sum of Rs21,483,440. The third lowest bidder challenged the decision at the level of the IRP.

As regards part (a) of the question, my Ministry has taken cognizance of the Report of the IRP dated 12 November 2021 in the matter of JV Kalis Technologies Ltd and Keep Clean Ltd v/s Open University of Mauritius. After consideration of the challenge, the IRP recommended the enrolment of the decision. I am tabling a copy of the report.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that students can access to their learning materials remotely and at any time using their computers, laptops and even smartphones. Apart from providing the e-Learning platform, the Open University also organises face-to-face tutorials and provide notes to its students.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the evaluators were appointed by the Departmental Bid Committee of the Open University of Mauritius or by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary education, Science and Technology and if the evaluators appointed for the Bid Evaluation Committee were qualified and experienced in evaluation of IT equipment and are conversant with the bidding exercise because it is the third time that the procurement exercise has been cancelled?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Open University and their officers were involved in the Departmental Bid Committee.

Dr. Gungapersad: Hon. Minister, as you may be aware that one of the items which is advertised as a marketing strategy at the Open University is a free tablet for students which they are supposed to get upon successful registration and at the beginning of the semester. May we be informed when the last distribution of tablets took place and how many students are waiting to

receive their tablets? Is the hon. Minister aware that when students are enquiring when they would get their tablets, they are being told that the process of purchase of tablets is still going on and circumstances are beyond their control?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just informed the House that the IRP had required the Open University to start again the bidding exercise.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/1373 has been withdrawn.

Move to your next question!

**OVERSEAS TREATMENT SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES - JUNE 2021 TO
DECEMBER 2021**

(No. B/1342) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Overseas Treatment Scheme, he will –

- (a) table the number of patients having benefitted therefrom since June 2021 to date, indicating the country where treatment was sought;
- (b) give details of the type of surgery or treatment required and the financial help granted by the State, and
- (c) state the financial support, if any, provided to patients requiring a second or subsequent treatment or surgery.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that from June 2021 till date, there are 94 persons who have benefited from the Overseas Treatment Scheme, mainly for treatment in India, Reunion Island and Switzerland.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will table the details of patients having benefited therefrom since June 2021 to date and the list of financial support provided to patients requiring a second or subsequent treatment or surgery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to patients requiring a second or subsequent treatment or surgery, I wish to inform the House that from June 2021 to date, there are 11 patients who have benefited from the remaining balance of the amount following their first application of the Overseas Treatment Scheme.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request the hon. Minister, like me, he must be aware that the sum of money earmarked for Overseas Treatment Scheme in many cases is insufficient. It becomes a serious financial burden on families who have to ensure a surgery or treatment abroad. Will his Ministry along with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development consider, if possible, increasing the financial ceiling so that these families can easily afford the surgeries or treatment abroad? There are many families who cannot...

Mr Speaker: No, you are making too long statement!

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes, I am asking the Minister.

Mr Speaker: You have already put the question.

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the Minister consider this proposal?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the last Budget, already the sum allocated for families who have to seek treatment abroad has increased from Rs500,000 to Rs800,000 and to Rs1 m. Subsequent increase will obviously depend on the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. And also, we are planning for those surgeries that cannot be done in Mauritius. As per the previous budget, we are working with the private sector so that these surgeries can be done in Mauritius itself. That will curtail cost as well as the disturbance in the family. So, we are working more on those surgeries that could not be performed in Mauritius so that the experts coming to Mauritius can operate in private clinics. Expenses involved will be met by Government and surgeries will be done in in Mauritius itself.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister; that is very interesting. May I request you to ensure that we have more and more visits of these experts in surgeries from abroad so that our patients can get the treatment locally?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is working in collaboration with the private clinics to enable them carry out certain operations that can be done in Mauritius. They will provide logistic support. And then, they will be doing all the logistics support, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness will support them in that aspect.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Gungapersad: B/1343!

COVID-19 SOLIDARITY FUND – FUNDS COLLECTED

(No. B/1343) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the quantum of funds collected therein since March 2021 to date, indicating the –

- (a) number of beneficiaries thereunder;
- (b) purpose thereof, and
- (c) quantum of funds disbursed.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avec votre permission, je répondrai conjointement aux questions B/1343 et B/1383, car elles portent sur le même sujet.

En ce qui concerne les fonds reçus par le *COVID-19 Solidarity Fund*, j’ai été informé que depuis mars 2021 au 03 décembre 2021, le total des contributions reçues s’élève à 733,970 505 roupies.

Pour la même période, le Fonds a fourni une assistance financière s’élevant à 699,415,870 roupies.

Les Fonds ont été déboursés comme suit –

- i. 500 millions de roupies pour le paiement de la subvention sur les denrées et biens essentiels ;
- ii. 15,7 millions de roupies à 40 organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) pour mettre en œuvre 42 programmes liés à la COVID-19, tels que l’aide aux ménages vulnérables en termes de fourniture de nourriture de base et d’articles sanitaires, la fourniture d’un soutien logistique et d’approvisionnement alimentaire aux étudiants nécessiteux et aux enfants handicapés qui suivent des cours de rattrapage, ou encore la fourniture d’un abri aux mal logés ;
- iii. 790,500 roupies pour soutenir 155 personnes affectées par la COVID-19. Chaque personne a reçu 5,100 roupies ;
- iv. 8,45 millions de roupies pour le paiement d’une allocation unique de 10,000 roupies à quelque 845 opérateurs de taxi autorisés à opérer à l’aéroport et dans les hôtels, afin de les aider à se préparer pleinement à l’ouverture des frontières ;

- v. 44,5 millions de roupies comme financement partiel du ministère du Tourisme pour couvrir les dépenses dans les hôtels utilisés à des fins de quarantaine pour les passagers de retour qui avaient été bloqués à l'étranger en raison de la pandémie de la COVID-19 , et
- vi. 130 millions de roupies comme contribution au *National COVID-19 Programme Fund* pour financer la mise en œuvre du National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

Merci.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request the hon. Minister to consider the setting up, because he has a list of donations that he is doing, to kindly consider a special fund for those frontliners and other people who have lost their lives recently, for their families, so that we can alleviate their financial burden?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette suggestion. Je vais travailler dessus et je reviendrai bientôt à l'Assemblée sur une proposition. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Gungapersad: B/1344!

FRUITS (FRESH) - IMPORTATION - PRICES

(No. B/1344) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to imported fresh fruits, he will state if the prices thereof are controlled and, if so, table information as to the number of checks carried out, if any, by the Consumer Affairs Unit since January 2021 to date and the number of contraventions booked in relation thereto, if any.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that imported fresh fruits products are classified as controlled goods and their prices are fixed under the Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-up) Regulations 1998 which falls under my Ministry.

Under the maximum mark-up price system, the maximum allowable mark- up on imported fresh fruits is 45% as well as a special allowance of 5% to cater for expenses such as

chilled warehousing and transportation. Imported fresh fruits have the highest mark-up due to the short lifespan of the product.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Consumer Affairs Unit of my Ministry regularly effects visits, inspections in different types of trade premises all over the island to ensure compliance with the existing consumer protection laws.

From 01 January 2021 to 02 December 2021, some 17,235 inspections have been carried out and these include sellers of imported fresh fruits as well. As such, a total of 19 contraventions counts have been established against sellers of imported fresh fruits for either failing to affix price label or failing to submit a return of cost within the prescribed time delay.

Furthermore, 14 complaints have been received and registered on the Citizen Support Portal as at 02 December 2021 regarding exorbitant prices and non-affixing of price labels in respect of imported fresh fruits. Out of these complaints, 3 contraventions counts have been established against fruit sellers for failing to affix price label. It has also been observed that, in practice, those traders who may be selling at higher price simply do not affix their prices.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister, whether normally the Consumer Affairs Unit of his Ministry, carries out visits following complaints received, or is there an established system or mechanism where the price of fruits across the island, as it is a controlled commodity, is checked on a regular basis?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the officers of the Consumer Affairs Unit, they act on complaints and also effect random visits at trade premises.

Dr. Gungapersad: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what is the approved prices for oranges and what is the current market price being practiced? In view of the great disparity between the fixed price and the actual market price, why no action has been taken by the Consumer Affairs Unit?

Mr Callichurn: Sorry, I did not get you. For which product you mentioned?

Dr. Gungapersad: Oranges!

Mr Callichurn: Well, there are different importers of oranges. There is a list of 17 importers and they import from different sources, be it South Africa, Egypt, France, Netherlands and the prices vary country to country. For example, I take oranges, in January 2021, the CIF

price per kg was Rs30.35 and, in November 2021, the CIF price for oranges was Rs30.59. And also it is apposite to point out that, in June 2021, there was an increase of 37.23% as compared to March 2021. There was an average increase of 30% in the FOB and insurance.

Mr Ramful: Will the Minister agree that with the depreciation of the rupee, this is having an impact on the consumers locally? Will he consider reviewing the mark-up price for those fruits that are being imported?

Mr Callichurn: Any proposal is welcome. So, I have to look at it at the level of my Ministry, with my technicians, whether it will be to the advantage of the consumers to have a look at the maximum mark-up, because what happens is whenever you consider decreasing the maximum mark-up, there is a risk that importers do not import. So, we will have to look at it carefully.

COVID-19 VACCINES ADMINISTRATION – SERIOUS ILLNESSES & DEATH

(No. B/1345) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to COVID-19 vaccines, he will state the number of persons having either developed serious illnesses or died after having being administered therewith, indicating, in each case, the –

- (a) nature of the illness developed, and
- (b) vaccine administered.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - FOREIGN DOCTORS & NURSES – NATIONALITY & PAY PACKAGES

(No. B/1346) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether in regard to the foreign doctors and nurses recruited to assist during the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state the number thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) nationality;
- (b) specialty field, and
- (c) remuneration package thereof.

(Withdrawn)

INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY ACT 2019 – NON-PROCLAMATION

(No. B/1347) **Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Industrial Property Act 2019, he will state the reasons for the non-proclamation thereof as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

ABANDONED & UNDECLARED CHILDREN – PERIOD 2020-2021

(No. B/1348) **Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to abandoned and undeclared children, respectively, she will state the number thereof over the period 2020-2021, indicating the actions taken by her Ministry in relation thereto.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that for the year 2020 and January 2021 till date, 76 children, that is, 43 male and 33 female alleged to be abandoned have been reported to my Ministry. Concerning undeclared children for the year 2020 and January 2021 to date, 125 children: 63 male and 62 female allegedly with no birth certificates have been referred to my Ministry for facilitation in respect of tardy declaration of their birth at this Civil Status Office upon favourable conclusion from the *ministère public*. My Ministry has also set up specific guidelines to deal with abandoned and undeclared children.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the procedures in place for the tardy declarations? Also, if there is a sensitisation campaign ongoing for such cases?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes, indeed. Mr Speaker, Sir, like I just mentioned in my first reply, there is a specific set of guidelines that have been set up to deal with the tardy declaration and undeclared children, and with your permission, I would like to table these guidelines for the information of the House.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, la santé préventive de ces bébés et enfants non-déclarés et abandonnés est une priorité. La ministre pourrait-elle indiquer à la Chambre si des arrangements pourraient être entrepris pour assurer des vaccins obligatoires de ces nourrissons et enfants en attendant les démarches administratives pour la déclaration de naissance ? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, just for the information of the House, tardy declaration of birth by the Ministry of Gender Equality, my Ministry, it depends on the guidance and the green light from the *ministère public*. And it is a process that involves different Ministries. Therefore, when it comes to the medical care of those *nourrissons*, of those infants, at the level of my Ministry as soon as we can get the clearance, they are taken care of in that sense.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, la ministre pourrait-elle informer la Chambre sur les dispositions prises pour s'assurer que les enfants non-déclarés et en âge d'être scolarisés ne puissent pas rater leur scolarité ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, one has to appreciate that the process to have - there are many problems that we encounter when we talk about tardy declaration and these are the issues that cause delay when it comes to *scolarisation* – putting them into school, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are required documents to be able to register a child into an educational institution. There is a fixed address that needs to be provided so that a child can be put into a school and without these documents, Mr Speaker, Sir, hence, the terminology of tardy declaration. Without those requisite documents it becomes a bit tricky and difficult to go ahead with admitting the said child into a school. We also have to remember that sometimes the parents of those children who we spend a lot of amount of energy to track down, some of them are unreliable; some of them are uncooperative; some of them are even in prison. Therefore, the House must take note of the process that is called tardy declaration and the guidelines that we follow to be able to help identify, first of all, and consequentially, help those children.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**COMPUTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM – COMPOSITION & DUTIES –
COLLABORATION WITH META**

(No. B/1349) **Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Computer Emergency Response Team, he will state –

- (a) the composition thereof;
- (b) the duties assigned thereto, and
- (c) how the team proposes to collaborate with Meta.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius (CERT-MU) is operational since May 2008 as a department of the National Computer Board. The CERT-MU was set up based on the recommendations of the National ICT Strategic Plan to serve as an agency for coordinating cyber security, response activities, and promoting cyber security at National level.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that CERT-MU operates with a team comprising 6 staff of whom, one Officer-in-Charge and five Information Security Consultants.

As for part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the duties of the staff include –

- formulation, planning and coordination of strategic and operational plans and the preparation, presentation and management of the operational and project budget;
- managing information security incidents;
- development and implementation of Information Security Management System based on ISO 27001;
- providing training and implementation of Information Security Management System;
- providing leadership and strategic guidance in creation of innovative partnership and organisation of workshop and training;
- engagement with relevant regional and international organisations such a Council of Europe, Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, Commonwealth Foreign Office, Anti-Phishing Working Group, Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams, Facebook International Search and promote the division of work output;

- representing CERT-MU during conferences and International forum;
- liaising with stakeholders to promote activities of child online protection;
- organising capacity building programs in cyber security and cybercrimes amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (c) of the question the CERT-MU has established collaboration with Meta for the resolution of incident reported on the online platform, MAUCORS (Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System) which is a centralised Cyber Incident Reporting System, managed by the CERT-MU. The system allows citizens to report incidents, including those occurring on social media, and Facebook platform. There is a dedicated channel on which such incidents are reported to Meta by CERT-MU, and request made to the latter for removal of any such post containing undesirable contents.

I also wish to inform the House that a correspondence was sent to the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, now Meta, on the 14 July 2021 requesting for a meeting with him on issues faced by Mauritius in relation to objectionable posts on its social media platform. Subsequently, on 20 July 2021 an online meeting was held with high officials of Facebook from the UK, Mr Boakhe and from South Africa, the Head of Public Policy and the Public Policy Manager because they handle the African region. The discussion focused on great collaboration in dealing with issues related to that social media platform. During the meeting, various points were raised which are of concern to the Government of Mauritius and the public in general, namely –

- harmful contents especially those having communal tones posted on Facebook in the context of our multiracial society;
- fake profiles being used to post objectionable and/or immoral content by Mauritian social and cultural standards;
- fake news being posted, especially in relation to were sensitive matters such as infections caused by COVID-19 pandemic, and
- especially the relatively long time that Facebook takes to response to request for information and/or to remove certain objectionable posts that have been complained at the Police or the CERT.

Finally, the following was agreed –

1. Facebook will enhance the review process of local contents including timely response to requests from local authorities and CERT-MU which operates under the aegis of the Ministry will be the only reporting agency to Facebook to ensure consistency and efficiency and coordination similar to various CERT in other countries that they are the authority dealing with Facebook.

A second follow-up meeting was held on 16 August 2021 with high officials of Facebook regarding various issues Mauritius was still having with its social media platform. Following discussions, Facebook proposed a programme of activities and workshop to be conducted in Mauritius from November 2021 up to July 2022 to build awareness on responsible online behaviour, critical thinking and understanding social issues shared via digital technology with the ultimate objective to enabling safe, responsible and productive use of social media platform.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry in collaboration with Meta has hosted two events already, namely, –

- (i) Misinformation Deep Dive Session for High-Level Government Stakeholders on 24 November 2021 which focused on how to tackle various misinformation campaigns and to propose a comprehensive approach to help address information crisis and fake news on the social network platform. The session involved participation of various sectors, namely, Government Officials, representatives of the industry, associations, Business Mauritius, ICTA, Police Department NGOs and representatives of the cyber society.
- (ii) Launch of the Africa Small Medium Business Report that was done on 25 November 2021. This report emanates from a survey of small and medium-sized businesses in eight African countries including Mauritius conducted by Meta, which would encourage Government and private companies to combine efforts to develop a digital environment that will give SMEs more opportunities in Africa.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. In your reply, you mentioned about Facebook, that is, Meta will be responding in a timely manner. Does this take into consideration

the *kreol* contents which we face very often on Meta? Also, if the hon. Minister could inform the House if there could be some recruitment of Mauritians so that we are able to better look after the contents.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, during our various meetings and when the delegation of Meta was in Mauritius recently, this question was raised and they have informed us that indeed Facebook have recruited Mauritian including diaspora to be able to review content especially when they deal with *Kreol Morisien*. However, I do not have more details because they keep this information as an internal information for themselves but they have confirmed to us that they have indeed recruited Mauritian including diaspora to be able to help in the process, in reviewing any complaints that is put at the Police or at the CERT to fasten the process of their Community Standards Regulations.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. We tend to focus more on what Meta and Facebook are doing. I would request the hon. Minister to take into consideration that we have also another social media platform which is taking *l'ampleur* as we say, it is TikTok. If he could just maybe look after that as well because we have some contents which are quite disturbing on TikTok as well.

Mr Balgobin: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, TikTok has become one of the most widely used social media platform by everybody including Parliamentarians, Members of this House, at every moment at night, in the morning, during Parliament sessions. And it is, of course, very popular among youngsters, but the dark side of it, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there have been lots of complaints, incidents reported at MAUCORS where TikTokers have gone outside the Community Standards that is to be able to use the platform socially and there have been lots of complaints.

I wish to also inform the hon. Member that in order to strengthen the collaboration with TikTok...

(Interruptions)

So, I say it again. Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to strengthen collaboration with TikTok CERT-MU have written to the TikTok Public Policy Director of Africa, Mr Fortune Sibanda to discuss the possible areas of collaboration and those areas would include public facing online campaigns,

workshop with the LEAs and also first level contact in order to report incidents and handling those incidents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that during the meeting a request was made via the African office for a meeting with the CEO of TikTok, Mr Shou Zi Chew and a response is awaited to be able to have more collaboration with the Head Office in order to help all those victims that have complaints, to resolve their complaints in a correct manner.

Mr David: May I know from the hon. Minister whether the CERT-MU has up to now detected any use of spywares in Mauritius, for instance Pegasus?

Mr Balgobin: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy to respond to this question but as at now I do not have this information because the question pertains specifically to the composition of the team and the collaboration with Meta. But I am happy to answer to the hon. Member if he comes with a specific question on that matter.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TEN-YEAR SME MASTER PLAN – RECOMMENDATIONS – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1350) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the ten-year SME Master Plan, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from SME Mauritius Ltd., information as to where matters stand as to the implementation of the recommendations contained therein.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the ten-year Master Plan for the SME sector was launched by my Ministry in March 2017 with the objective of reshaping the entrepreneurship landscape as well as accelerating SME innovation and growth. The first of this kind report has a total of 265 main activities, nine proposed high impact initiatives with 46 key actions including six quick wins, nine sectors with 27 sectorial actions and seven themes with thirteen thematic actions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of those 265 main activities were set high on the agenda of my Ministry since its launching. In fact, a Steering Committee comprising relevant stakeholders was set up in May 2017 to look into the effective execution of those recommendations. Technical Committees were also set up to oversee the implementation of all the activities mentioned in the Master Plan. My Ministry has since launching of the SME 10-year

Master Plan been liaising with different Ministries and public institutions falling under their purview to achieve the desired outcomes and embrace change for a flourishing SME sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has been closely monitoring the implementation of the Master Plan through a Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting mechanism. As at January 2021, that is, within four years, 59% of the 265 activities have been initiated and are ongoing and 11% has been completed. Some of the main activities that are ongoing are as follows –

- (i) networking events promoting topical policies, issues and matters relating to entrepreneurship promotion and development through SME Mauritius;
- (ii) entrepreneurship training workshops through SME Mauritius;
- (iii) registration of potential businesses through the SME Registration Unit of my Ministry;
- (iv) profile matching exercise of SMEs with qualification and skills offered by students under the SME Employment Scheme;
- (v) SMEs are being encouraged to be part of the e-Commerce ecosystem with the aim to increase the domestic spending and revenue through an MoU signed with the Mauritius Post Ltd;
- (vi) identification of foods that can be integrated in the food value chain of the agri-business sector, and
- (vii) identification of SMEs interested in secondary processing items through the setting up of mini food processing plants.

Some of the activities that have been completed are as follows –

- I. setting up of SME Mauritius for a greater coherence, more efficiency and effectiveness, and rationalising and improving SME supports;
- II. setting up online chat to support SME through Mauritius;
- III. showcasing successful entrepreneurs, and promoting national recognition through organisation of SME Innovation, and SME Excellence Award in 2017 and 2019, respectively, at the level of my Ministry;

- IV. strengthening start-ups by providing management, technical and other supports through SME Mauritius support schemes;
- V. prospecting young adults living in poverty-stricken areas interested in starting small businesses through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme of SME Mauritius.

However, there are unprecedented circumstances created by COVID-19 pandemic have seriously affected the very survival and business operation of SMEs as a whole.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. With the changing economic landscape due to COVID-19, is the 10-Year SME Master Plan still relevant?

Mr Bholah: Well, when we launched the 10-Year Master Plan back in March 2017, we knew that moving forward many of the environmental factors, economic factors and social factors would be changing. However, nobody had predicted that the world would be hit, and hit badly by a pandemic that we are presently experiencing. Having said that, early next year, my Ministry and SME Mauritius will assess the situation and adapt the remaining recommendation of the Master Plan so that we can face the future with confidence.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD PROGRAMME - COVID-19 PANDEMIC – CURRENT STATUS

(No. B/1351) 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 Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, he will state if same is ongoing amid the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question, which gives me an opportunity to give an overview of this prestigious programme.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award was founded by his Royal Highness, late Prince Philip in 1956. It operates in more than 130 countries with the goal of challenging, empowering and recognising young people between the age of 14 and 24 years.

The Award Programme was launched in Mauritius in 1966 in the then Youth Section of the Ministry of Education and was moved to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, when the latter was set up in 1969. Mauritius is one of the rare countries where the programme is delivered totally free of charge. Hence, the Award Programme has been implemented for the benefit of our youth for 55 years now, enabling young people to acquire self-confidence, be disciplined and to become well-balanced citizens. The Patron of the Award is His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Mauritius.

The Award is delivered via licensed National Award Operators. My Ministry is licensed as the National Award Operator of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award by the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation. In 2019, the full license has been granted up to 30 December 2025.

The Award comprises three levels and four sections. The Bronze level is for those over 14 years with 6 months minimum participation. The Silver level is for those over 15 years with 12 months minimum participation and the Gold level for those over 16 years with 18 months minimum participation. Participants have to complete the four sections, namely: voluntary service; physical recreation; skills; adventurous journey at each level in order to achieve their Award. In addition to these three sections, at Gold level participants have also to complete a Gold Residential Project.

The Award has always been successfully delivered in Mauritius and has been ongoing in spite of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a global change in the mode of the delivery of the Award Programme and it had to be adapted to the new situation. Mauritius, as well as other countries, had to adhere to the COVID-19 Guidelines set by the International Award Foundation.

Consequently, in view of the pandemic, the Award Programme which is usually delivered in educational institutions, universities and youth organisations, is instead being presently delivered through the "Award from Home" programme.

Since May 2020 to date, and especially during the lockdown periods, the "Award from Home" programme is being actively implemented locally and an element of flexibility has been introduced therein. In the "Award from Home" Programme, participants are exceptionally allowed to change their selected activity in the three different sections.

In order to ensure the proper monitoring and progress of participants who are doing their award from home, videos and photos of the activity practised at home is being sent to Award Leaders. Also, all records are uploaded on the Online Record Book (ORB).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a dynamic situation whereby social platforms are being intensively used as means of communication to reach young people as part of the programme. As such, the Facebook page of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Mauritius, has been used to share communication with Award Leaders, Award Participants and parents. Coordinating meetings have been held through Zoom with Award Staff to evaluate overall progress of the programme and to motivate and launch new Award groups online.

Mr Speaker: Thank you!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. The Minister would agree that with the pandemic and adapting to the new situation, the Award From Home does not have the same motivation like when you are *en présence*, as we say it. So, can the hon. Minister inform the House of the number of participants for, maybe, the year 2020-2021, also if you could state the number of boys and girls participating in the programme? Thank you.

Mr Toussaint: En fait, M. le président, nos jeunes s'adaptent très, très vite à la situation et malgré le fait que les activités ont changé et qu'ils ne peuvent plus faire leurs différents niveaux en présence. Nous avons eu une grande demande, et pour l'année 2021 nous avons au total pour les 3 niveaux, *Bronze, Silver and Gold*, 6,609 jeunes ; et donc nous avons 3,079 garçons et 3,530 filles pour l'année 2021 qui participent au *Duke of Edinburgh's International Award*.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 VACCINE - POSITIVE-TESTED PERSONS – VACCINE ADMINISTRATION TIME LAPSE

(No. B/1352) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 vaccine, he will state the reasons for the decision of his Ministry to administer same to persons having contracted COVID-19, not less than four months from the date they have been positive-tested therefor,

indicating if same is based on the recommendation of the World Health Organisation or any other health organisation.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the protection that someone gains after having contracted the COVID-19 infection, varies greatly from person to person. In fact, it depends on the immune status of the person.

We are aware that the antibodies developed after a natural infection, are higher and effective over a longer period of time than having been administered a COVID-19 vaccine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the WHO recommends that the person having suffered from COVID-19 infection be administered a vaccine after a lapse of 6 months. However, elderly persons suffering from comorbidities as well as immunocompromised persons do not produce as much antibodies. In view that in Mauritius, the prevalence of chronic and other diseases that lowers the immune response is relatedly high, the COVID-19 Vaccination Committee recommended that persons having contracted the COVID-19 infection, be provided the possibility of being administered a COVID-19 vaccine about 4 months later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in some countries persons with compromised immune systems, such as cancer patients, patients having organ transplant, amongst others, are provided the possibility of being inoculated about 1-month post-infection. There is no risk of getting vaccinated earlier but a minimum of 1-month is required for the vaccine to be effective.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le 20 août dernier, le Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Scientifique en chef de l’OMS, avait affirmé et je cite -

“We still recommend that even if you have COVID infection, you should go ahead and take the vaccination when it is available to you.”

Et cela, sans mentionner de délai. De ce fait, l’honorable ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi cette contradiction entre la position de son ministère qui impose, comme il l’a dit lui-même, un délai de 4 mois et celui de la Scientifique en chef de l’OMS qui, dans sa déclaration n’impose aucun délai alors que les *guidelines* de la *National Health Service* de la Grande Bretagne font état de *4 weeks after recovery*.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius, the first and second doses have already been administered to a very large population. The policy of the Ministry is to give the vaccine in

priority to the frontliners, elderly persons and to patients with comorbidities. This has been the practice since the beginning of our Vaccination Campaign. We are now following the same pattern; first we vaccinate vulnerable groups before giving those who have been infected with COVID-19. They have a natural immunity, having produced antibodies and with a natural immunity that lasts longer. We have to make a choice. We give priority to those who really need the vaccines, in the first instance, and gradually extend the vaccination to others. This is our strategy. The Vaccination Campaign is carried out according to priority groups.

Mr Quirin: J'ai bien compris la réponse, l'honorable ministre mais ne pense-t-il pas qu'avec ce délai, n'est-il pas risquant pour une personne qui a déjà été infectée et rétablie, n'y a-t-il pas un risque que cette personne soit de nouveau contaminée si elle doit attendre 4 mois avant de pouvoir, je ne sais pas ; ça peut-être sa première dose, deuxième dose ou même la *booster* dose?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact as I said, having the natural immunity of being exposed to the virus, is better; the immunity is better than you have a vaccine. So, we have to see whether somebody who has already been exposed to the virus develops a certain immunity and then proceed with those who might be immunocompromised and as I have just stated it, that he may not have antibodies. We have to give priority to those who fall into such categories. I believe that this is the right way of going forward. We give priority to vulnerable groups and to those who cannot develop immunity even after being exposed to the virus.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**COVID-19 - ESTABLISHMENTS/HOTELS - POSITIVE TOURISTS & STAFF -
REGULAR TESTING**

(No. B/1353) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state, since 01 October 2021 to date, the number of tourists having been COVID-19 positive-tested, indicating the hotels or other establishments where they have been staying and the number of staff members of the said hotels or other establishments having been COVID-19 positive-tested and, if all of them are being tested on a regular basis and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with the prevailing sanitary requirements, all incoming passengers, including tourists flying to Mauritius are required to take a PCR test within 72 hours before embarkation; the result of which should be negative, to take health insurance covering COVID-19 and to complete the Mauritius All-In-One Travel Digital Form which contains information about their intended place of stay in Mauritius.

Upon disembarkation, unvaccinated passengers are subjected to mandatory quarantine of 14-days duration involving PCR tests on day 0; day 7, and day 14 whereas vaccinated passengers are free to proceed to their intended place of residence.

However, after disembarking in Mauritius, fully vaccinated passengers proceeding to establishments registered with the Tourism Authority, have to undergo a Rapid Antigen test on day 0 and day 5 of their stay at the hotel.

Vaccinated passengers who would not be proceeding to hotels after disembarking in Mauritius are, on the other hand, required to undergo a PCR test at the airport on day 0 and a self-administered test on day 5.

Now, since the reopening of our borders on 01 October 2021 up to 30 November 2021, Mauritius has welcomed 152,689 passengers, including 120,186 tourists. All were duly COVID-19 tested before arrival in Mauritius and after arrival, either at the airport or at their tourist accommodation.

I am informed that out of the 152,689 passengers who arrived in Mauritius in October and November 2021, 167 had tested positive to COVID-19, representing 0.1% of all arrivals for that period. I am informed that while it is known that 120,186 tourists arrived over the same period, the data for COVID-19 positive tests does not relate specifically to tourists but to foreigners including tourists. Of the total foreign nationals having arrived during October and November 2021, 114 were found COVID-19 positive, that is, less than 0.1%. All those tested positive went into self-isolation and none have required hospitalization due to COVID-19 so far.

Among the 114 foreigners tested positive, 80 booked their stays in establishments holding a Tourism Accommodation Certificate which includes hotels, guesthouses and other tourist residences. Of the remaining 34 foreigners, 33 resided or are residing at a family or

friends and I is in a quarantine center. With your permission Mr Speaker, Sir, the list of relevant tourism accommodation will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards staff members of the relevant tourism accommodations tested positive to COVID-19, the information required is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly as soon as it is available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that according to the regulations made under the Quarantine Act 2020, only staff of hotels and guesthouses who are either fully vaccinated or have had a negative PCR test within the last 7 days or who are medically ineligible to be vaccinated are allowed to work and that is the case since 01 October 2021. According to the Sanitary Protocol prepared by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, all hotel staff are required to undertake an antigen test 2 days prior to their first shift. Hotel staffs, including management, are required to ensure compliance with all sanitary measures in place. Moreover, hotels where positive cases have been reported are required, in line with the prevailing protocol, to carry out antigen tests on day 0 and day 7 on members of their staff who have been in contact with clients tested COVID-19 positive. In case of a negative result, they may continue to work whereas in case of a positive result, they do have to self-isolate at home until the test result is negative again. A PCR test is also undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Wellness to confirm the negative result.

The honourable gentleman, will, I hope, recognize that Government has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the relaunch of tourism took place in conditions as safe as possible for the local population and for visitors alike.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, j'ai bien écouté la réponse de l'honorable ministre et je vois que le pourcentage de touristes testés positifs, dans leurs établissements hôteliers est relativement faible. Mais malgré tout, je voudrai savoir de l'honorable ministre ce qu'il en pense parce que moi, d'après les informations qui me sont parvenues, bien sûr pas au niveau de tous les hôtels mais au niveau de certains hôtels, le *Rapid Antigen Test* n'est pas effectué malgré ce qu'il vient d'affirmer - quand il y a des touristes qui sont testés positifs, aussitôt les instructions sont données à ce que les *Rapid Antigen Tests* soient effectués sur tout le personnel, ce n'est pas le cas dans pas mal des hôtels. J'aurais peut-être l'occasion d'en parler à l'honorable ministre en

aparté et je voudrais savoir ce qu'il en pense. Est-ce qu'on peut vraiment s'assurer que cette condition soit respectée dans tous les hôtels ? Parce qu'il y a beaucoup des hôtels, je le redis...

Mr Speaker: You made your point!

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, nous sommes dans une phase très délicate où malgré l'arrivée du variant Delta chez nous et malgré une augmentation sensible des cas de la Covid et des décès dus à la Covid, nous nous efforçons de relancer le secteur du tourisme.

Maintenant, je ne doute pas de la parole de M. le député mais je le prierai de ne pas jeter la boue sur tous les hôteliers. Il faut bien comprendre qu'il est de l'intérêt des hôteliers de s'assurer que tous leurs clients soient testés et que chaque cas qui s'avère positif soit immédiatement traité pour la sécurité sanitaire des autres clients, des membres du personnel et pour la bonne réputation de l'hôtel.

À ce stade, nous n'avons eu au ministère du Tourisme, à la *Tourism Authority*, à la *MTPA*, aucun retour qui indiquerait qu'il y aurait un nombre conséquent d'établissements hôteliers qui ne respectent pas ces normes. Et il ne m'est parvenu aucun rapport du ministère de la Santé à cet effet non plus.

Donc si M. le député a des renseignements précis, je le prierai de nous transmettre ces renseignements afin que nous puissions agir en conséquence.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CHEBEL - TROCHETIA & LOTUS HOUSING ESTATES

(No. B/1354) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Trochetia and Lotus Housing Estates at Chebel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the number of housing units comprising same, indicating the –

- (a) number and date of allocation thereof ;
- (b) legal delay to occupy same, and
- (c) number of allocated houses still unoccupied.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the NHDC Ltd. that *Résidence Trochetia* and *Résidence Lotus* at Chebel comprise 92 and 99 housing units respectively. In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the NHDC Ltd and the National Empowerment Foundation, 10% of housing units constructed by the NHDC Ltd are reserved for the NEF.

Consequently, 9 housing units at *Résidence Trochetia* and 10 housing units at *Résidence Lotus* have been sold to the NEF in August and July 2021 respectively to be allocated to the NEF's eligible beneficiaries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a), I am also informed that all the 83 remaining housing units at *Résidence Trochetia* and 89 remaining housing units at *Résidence Lotus* were allocated to eligible beneficiaries on 25 November 2020 and 14 July 2021 respectively. However, prospective beneficiaries of 2 housing units at *Résidence Lotus* did not turn up to confirm their agreement to purchase their housing units and these units were subsequently reallocated on 26 November 2021.

Regarding part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the NHDC Ltd that the purchaser becomes owner *de plein droit* of his housing unit once the deed of sale is signed before the Notary. Consequently, unless the beneficiary breaches a condition of the sale agreement, the NHDC Ltd is not empowered to intervene irrespective of whether a beneficiary occupies or not the house. Hence, the issue of legal delay to occupy the housing unit does not arise.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the NHDC Ltd that as a date, 3 of the 83 housing units allocated at *Résidence Trochetia* and 10 out of the 89 housing units allocated at *Résidence Lotus* are unoccupied.

Mr Quirin : M. le président, j'aimerais que l'honorable ministre nous dise, vu que j'ai fait un constat qu'il y a 7 unités qui sont toujours inoccupées dans le complexe de Trochetia, est-ce que ce sont ces unités qui ont été réservées pour la NEF car cela fait quand même plus d'une année que ces appartements ont été alloués. Je suis totalement d'accord que 10% soient réservés pour la NEF mais cela fait quand même une année que ces maisons dans le complexe de Trochetia ont été allouées. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre pense que c'est normal qu'après autant de temps, autant de mois, ces maisons soient toujours inoccupées ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: C'est tout à fait anormal, M. le président, et je dois dire que je ne sais combien de fois mes collègues ministres et députés ont soulevé des cas semblables à travers le pays sur différents sites de la *NHDC*.

Mais M. le député devrait savoir que selon la loi du pays, une fois l'acquisition d'une maison faite, cette maison est la propriété de l'acquéreur et il est protégé dans son droit à en user selon son bon vouloir aussi longtemps évidemment qu'il respecte la loi du pays. Donc, nous avons là un problème très épineux. À travers le pays, il existe bon nombre d'appartements ou de maisons de la *NHDC* acquis par des personnes qui étaient demandeurs d'un logement social ; donc des personnes que l'on peut supposer étaient en situation de difficultés et qui pourtant, une fois l'acquisition complétée, ne viennent pas habiter.

Cela pose problème, non seulement un problème moral vis-à-vis de ceux qui attendent depuis des années pour obtenir un logement de la *NHDC* mais souvent, ces demeures sont laissées à l'abandon et peuvent être utilisées par des gens, des malfrats et cela pose problème.

Donc, il m'est rapporté que la *NHDC* intervient régulièrement. Par exemple, dans le cas de Chebel, il y a eu une correspondance adressée aux bénéficiaires qui n'ont pas encore occupé leurs logements pour leur demander ce qui se passe ; pourquoi les logements ne sont pas occupés. À travers le pays, nous avons un bon nombre de maisons de la *NHDC* qui ne sont pas occupées et la *NHDC* fait le suivi en essayant de retracer les acquéreurs et leur mettre devant leur responsabilité pour assurer que ces maisons soient tout au moins entretenues correctement.

Voilà ce que je peux dire à ce stade, M. le président.

Mr Quirin : Doit-on déduire que la *NHDC* n'a aucun moyen légal ? J'ai bien compris ce que vient affirmer l'honorable ministre, mais est-ce que la *NHDC* n'a aucun moyen légal pour récupérer ces maisons qui ont été allouées et qui sont restées inoccupées pendant des mois et des mois et pour les redistribuer, réallouer à d'autres personnes qui sont vraiment dans le besoin ? Si nous prenons le cas de Chebel, l'honorable ministre le sait parfaitement bien, la demande est...

Mr Speaker: You made your point! Let us wait for the reply!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Non seulement à Chebel mais à travers le pays. À priori, la *NHDC* n'a pas de moyen légal d'intervenir pour récupérer une maison qui a été dûment vendue et acquise par le nouveau propriétaire. Néanmoins, nous avons recherché à nouveau un avis du

parquet quant aux possibilités d'insérer une clause quelconque dans le contrat de vente qui permettrait d'assurer l'occupation dans un délai raisonnable. Mais en droit, cela est loin d'être évident, M. le président.

Mr Bhagwan: Thank you. Can I ask the Minister whether he has had the opportunity following the commissioning of these houses to have a look at the topography of the sites where these houses have been built? Because the planning was done before and now, we are reaching the heavy rainy season. According to us, there would be definitely a problem of land drainage, *des inondations dans ces deux régions spécifiques*. Can I, at least, make a request to the Minister to have his technicians have a look at these sites and see whether something can be done prior to the heavy rains, which would be coming during the end of the year?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, that has nothing to do with the present question, but I will answer. The honourable gentleman knows full well that each and every time in the past that he has contacted me concerning the very same concern, lack of drains at Chebel, I have made the request to the NHDC. And I would appreciate any further information on his part, if there are specific issues to be addressed.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Quirin: B/1355!

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - FOREIGN DOCTORS & NURSING OFFICERS -
RECRUITMENT**

(No. B/1355) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the decision of his Ministry to proceed with the recruitment of, he will give details thereof, including the –

- (a) number thereof who will be recruited and country of origin;
- (b) salaries and conditions attached thereto, and
- (c) expected date of arrival thereof in Mauritius.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to reinforce Medical and Paramedical staff in all Regional Hospitals as well as ENT

Hospital. In this vein, my Ministry is looking into the possibility of recruiting healthcare professionals from abroad through our diplomatic channels.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has to date made the following...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Too much conversation!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...arrangements –

- (i) The Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training was requested to make arrangement to assist my Ministry in the recruitment of the following Nursing Staff from India –
- 25 Male Nursing Officers;
 - 25 Female Nursing Officers, and
 - 25 Specialised Nursing Officers in the field of ICU.
- (ii) The Indian Government has been approached, through the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to depute six medical teams to Mauritius. One team to be attached to each of the five Regional Hospitals and the ENT Hospital and will comprise of –
- 2 Anaesthetists;
 - 2 ICU Nurses;
 - 2 Male General Nurses, and
 - 2 Female General Nurses.
- (iii) The Indian Government and other countries, with which we have diplomatic channels, are being approached for recruitment of 20 doctors in the field of Anaesthesia and 15 doctors in the field of Emergency Medicine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to remuneration package, I am informed that nurses will be remunerated with a monthly salary of Rs30,000 and specialised nurses with a monthly salary of Rs40,000.

As for doctors, those reckoning up to 15 years of experience will be remunerated an all-inclusive package of 5,200 USD and those with greater than 15 years of experience, an all-inclusive package of 5,700 USD. Other benefits such as accommodation and passages would also be provided.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is expediting matters in respect of the recruitment of health care professionals.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je n'ai pas bien saisi effectivement ce que le ministre a affirmé dans sa réponse par rapport aux spécialistes qui seront recrutés. Est-ce que parmi ces spécialistes figurent des *Pulmonologists*, des Intensivistes-Réanimateurs, parce que nous savons très bien que c'est un secteur qui fait défaut au niveau du service hospitalier local ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will just repeat. For the nurses, the monthly salary is Rs30,000; for specialised nurses the monthly salary is Rs40,000, for doctors, that is, an inclusive package of 5,200 USD. Those who have 15 years of experience and above, including anaesthetists and intensivists, the package would be 5,700 USD.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last warning!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, en ce qui concerne le personnel soignant qui sera recruté, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si son ministère a pensé à recruter des personnes qui sont formées à la réanimation intensive au niveau du personnel soignant ? Je ne parle pas de médecins, de spécialistes ou autres, mais par rapport au *nursing staff* qui sera recruté.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated, the team that will be recruited - we have approached the Government of India - will comprise of different specialities as well as specialised nurses so that they can work together in the service in different hospitals. At the same time, they will work with the Mauritian team. So, it has to be a balanced approach.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Has your Ministry organised an interview panel to recruit these doctors? Because they are very sub-specialised and they will be doing a very, very sub-specialised job with regard to reanimations and patients who are severely sick in the ICU.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes. In fact, for the nurses, the interview is going on. Once we will be having the names of the doctors, then, an online interview will be conducted.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: B/1356!

MAURITIUS INSTITUTE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY LTD – STAFF & ASSIGNED DUTIES

(No. B/1356) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Mauritius Institute of Biotechnology Ltd., he will state if the company is fully operational, indicating the –

- (a) number of staff members posted thereat, and
- (b) duties assigned thereto in each case.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé que le *Mauritius Institute of Biotechnology Ltd* a été constitué le 28 octobre 2021 en tant que société anonyme.

Le conseil d'administration du MIB Ltd a tenu sa première réunion le 18 novembre 2021.

Le conseil d'administration est composé de professionnels dans divers domaines pertinents.

De plus, des sous-comités techniques ont été mis en place pour soutenir l'administration et, plus important encore, les questions techniques sont traitées par le sous-comité biopharmaceutique et Recherche & Développement (R&D).

Les membres de ces sous-comités sont des experts hautement qualifiés dans les domaines du biomédical, de la virologie, de la technologie alimentaire et des services de laboratoire.

M. le président, j'ai d'ailleurs informé que ces sous-comités travaillent actuellement sur les objectifs stratégiques et la mise en place de l'organisation ainsi que sur les dispositions administratives pour atteindre ces objectifs.

En tant qu'entreprise récemment créée, les sous-comités du MIB Ltd ont déjà été chargés de travailler, entre autres, sur les sujets suivants –

- (i) le modèle et la structure organisationnels appropriés pour un tel institut ;
- (ii) l'élaboration d'une feuille de route pour identifier le cadre de partenariat et les collaborateurs appropriés, tant au niveau national qu'institutionnel ;
- (iii) les dispositions administratives qui comprennent l'identification d'un lieu approprié pour accueillir le siège du MIB avec les commodités pertinentes, et
- (iv) la structuration de son identité visuelle.

En parallèle, plusieurs actions ont déjà été entreprises par le *MIB Ltd*.

Tout d'abord, un contact a été établi avec le PNUD pour que l'organisation internationale fournisse des conseils techniques afin de développer une stratégie et un plan d'action visant à établir des capacités de fabrication biopharmaceutique au niveau local et à faire de Maurice un centre régional.

Cela comprend –

- i. Une évaluation du marché de l'écosystème biopharmaceutique régional et mondial ;
- ii. Un examen de la législation mauricienne et une analyse des lacunes en matière de compétences locales, et
- iii. Des options stratégiques sur les produits à développer et l'ordre de priorité ainsi que des propositions de valeur pour chaque option.

En outre, des discussions sont en cours avec plusieurs autres pays et institutions pour une assistance dans les secteurs biotechnologique et pharmaceutique.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé qu'à ce jour, deux agents de l'*Economic Development Board* et de mon ministère, ont été respectivement affectés au *MIB Ltd*.

Mon ministère détachera du personnel supplémentaire auprès du *MIB Ltd* si nécessaire, en attendant le recrutement de son personnel permanent suite à la finalisation de son plan directeur stratégique.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, j'ai été informé qu'un agent a été affecté aux fonctions d'agent responsable et que l'autre agent assiste le MIB Ltd dans ses fonctions administratives et comptables. Merci.

Mr Armance: Thank you, hon. Minister. So, now we understand that the MIB Ltd is fully operational. Can we know if there has been any expression of interest to use the platform to produce vaccines in Mauritius? Has there been any international firm that has expressed their concern regarding the platform that Mauritius is putting in place?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question. Je pense – je ne veux pas dire des bêtises ici au Parlement – avoir déjà dit dans le passé que des intérêts ont été exprimés concernant la fabrication des vaccins ou des produits pharmaceutiques, mais je n'ai pas ces informations à ma disposition. Je vais faire le nécessaire avec l'institution et je déposerai à l'Assemblée les informations.

Mr Armance: Can we have an idea about how much fund has been injected in the MIB?

Dr. Padayachy: Vous savez, M. le président, dans le dernier budget 2021-2022 j'avais indiqué qu'on allait mettre à la disposition de cette institution 1 milliard de roupies pour faire de ce projet un succès. Je n'ai pas ces informations à ma disposition, je vais demander à mes techniciens d'avoir plus de renseignements concernant les fonds déjà déboursés pour cette institution, je ne pense pas qu'on a déboursé beaucoup de fonds parce que comme je vous ai dit cette institution vient d'être mise en service.

Mr Armance: One last and very simple question, hon. Minister. Since we are *dans l'œil du cyclone*, when are we expecting the first Mauritian vaccine?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre de cette question ; cela prouve que c'est une question de patriotisme, le fait d'établir ce genre de projet à Maurice. On a été touché par la COVID, on a tous été touchés par la COVID et nous pensons que l'établissement d'une institution de cette envergure est primordial pour Maurice, donc on travaille dessus. Le plus tôt possible, M. le président, je dis bien le plus tôt possible, on travaille pour qu'on puisse avoir une entreprise de renom, une entreprise internationale qui puisse s'installer à Maurice. On travaille vraiment dessus pour que d'ici juin 2022 qu'on puisse réellement établir cette institution et par la suite commencer à produire des vaccins. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - PUBLIC BUSES - SANITARY MEASURES

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a statement as regards enhanced sanitary measures on board public buses in the context of the prevailing COVID-19 situation.

On 26 November 2021, Government agreed on several measures with a view to reducing the number of bus commuters during peak hours while also enhancing sanitary measures on board public buses until 13 December 2021 or for such additional period as may be required.

A circular dated 29 November 2021 has been issued to all Ministries and Departments including Parastatals and Local Authorities by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, for the implementation of flexitime and a roster system. In addition to the Work from Home Scheme, flexitime and the roster system have been introduced in the Public Sector as follows –

- a. 08 30 hours to 14 30 hours (1st Batch); and
- b. 10 30 hours to 16 30 hours (2nd Batch)

As regards the implementation of the Work from Home Scheme and introduction of flexitime in the Private Sector, a correspondence has been addressed to Business Mauritius on 01 December 2021 to this effect. The CEO of Business Mauritius has informed that a correspondence has consequently been sent to all affiliated members to introduce staggered

hours at the workplace to the extent possible. Furthermore, a clip has been prepared to this effect and Business Mauritius has shared same with all its stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to travel restrictions in respect of Senior Citizens, persons with disabilities and those under 18 years, the National Land Transport Authority has, through a Communiqué dated 18 November 2021, made an appeal to these commuters to limit their travel in public buses during peak hours, that is from 06 00 hours to 10 30 hours and from 14 30 hours to 17 30 hours, except for the purpose of availing of medical treatment or procuring medicines.

In the same context, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been requested to review the appointment system in the Health Services so that outpatients above 65 years are requested to proceed to hospitals or health centres outside peak hours as far as possible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards sanitization of buses, Government agreed that the sanitization and spraying of buses would be undertaken by Maurifacilities. However, a meeting was held at my Ministry with the General Manager of Maurifacilities who pointed out that it would not be possible to deploy the required personnel at the different bus stations and bus stands within such a short delay. It was further highlighted that since the organisation has never undertaken such exercise in the past, it would have to undertake some research to be able to decide on the best method and most effective chemical substance to be used for the sanitization and spraying of buses.

In view of the reply of Maurifacilities, my Ministry has, as a matter of urgency, engaged in an emergency procurement exercise for the sanitization and spraying of buses in-between trips at some 40 bus stations or bus stands across the island. The bus stations or bus stands have been categorised under 8 zones for the purpose of this exercise.

Additionally, the National Land Transport Authority, in its capacity as Regulator, has already addressed a correspondence to make an appeal to the bus operators and remind them that they have to comply to sanitary obligations such as cleaning of their buses, provision of protective equipment to their personnel along with temperature checks, making available hand sanitizers on board every bus, keeping windows open as reasonably practical.

It has been reiterated to the bus operators that no standing accommodation is allowed in buses in accordance with the Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021.

The bus operators have been advised to strictly adhere to the Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021.

In addition, the Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021 also provide for any person who is travelling by public transport, including public buses, to mandatorily wear a protective face mask over his mouth and nose and comply with other sanitary protocols. Any passenger failing to comply with these provisions shall commit an offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to reiterate my appeal to travelling passengers to fully collaborate with the bus crew as regards the mandatory wearing of protective face masks as prescribed and adhere to other sanitary protocols while on board of public transport. I further make an appeal for the support of each and every Mauritian to assist Government in eradicating this pandemic.

(4.02 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE OFFSHORE PETROLEUM BILL

(NO. XIV of 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Offshore Petroleum Bill (No. XIV of 2021).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Callichurn!

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr S. Callichurn): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First of all, thank you for allowing me to intervene on this Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was high time that the existing Petroleum Act, which dates back to 1970, be revamped to provide for a more modern and appropriate regulatory framework for the conduct of petroleum activities which includes prospecting, exploration, retention and production of petroleum within the Mauritian territory and its Exclusive Economic Zone. This Bill will also

give the State of Mauritius all sovereign rights to petroleum contained in the seabed and subsoil areas of its maritime zones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are introducing this breakthrough legislation in our strive to accelerate the development of our blue economy. I must say that there have been unsuccessful attempts by previous Governments to give a boost to this emerging sector and here I would like to thank the mover of this Bill, the hon. Prime Minister, for his vision and determination to transform Mauritius further.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Small Island Developing State, Mauritius is disadvantaged due to its remoteness from major markets. Yet Mauritius has been able to be resilient and witness continuous economic progress over the years due to our high quality and rich human capital. So far, Mauritius has built its economy without much mineral and non-living resources.

So far, Mauritius has built its economy without much minerals and non-living resources. It is therefore high time for a metamorphosis allowing the Mauritian economy to reach unprecedented heights. The exploration of the offshore petroleum resources is thus an inevitable pathway if we want to reduce our ever increasing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

It is apposite here to point out that significant reserves of offshore natural gas have recently been found off the coasts of Mozambique and Tanzania. Furthermore, there are indications that the existing oil fields in Uganda and South Sudan extend into the Turkana and Marsabit regions of Kenya and Southern Ethiopia.

Moreover, commercially viable offshore oil prospects have improved with some recent oil exploration results. So far, most of our natural gas discoveries are off Northern Mozambique and Southern Tanzania in the blocks roughly due East of Rovuma-Rufiji region, but further exploration for both oil and gas is also underway off the coasts of Kenya and Madagascar.

These recent findings of oil and natural gas in the South Western Indian Ocean region are resulting in a new and unexpected economic dynamic in this part of the African continent. If approached in an environmentally responsible manner, the recent oil and gas discoveries represent a significant opportunity to escalate development and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal and Agenda 2063 as well as a bridge to more sustainable energy sources in the longer term.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the intention of this Government in presenting this Offshore Petroleum Bill may in this sense be viewed as only a prolongation of work that has already been started with a view to promote the development of a viable oil exploration and production industry in our region. This Bill proposes to put in place the necessary legal framework which would give considerable substance and credibility to our ambitions to become a regional petroleum hub. It is of high importance for any country with maritime boundaries to exploit its sea and have a knowledge of what are the hidden treasures that the sea can provide while discovering our untapped reservoir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when one looks at how these exploration programs are unfolding internationally and in the region, Mauritius is clearly not an isolated island trying to tap into its non-living marine resources. It is extremely intriguing to hear senior Members on the other side of the House making statements and casting doubts as to why Mauritius needs to explore its ocean bed at this juncture or even when listening to the Leader of the Opposition last time questioning the very existence of fossil fuel in our EEZ.

I cannot reconcile the inconsistencies of these Members who a few years back, advocated that our maritime region potentially contained 80% of the world's proven oil reserves and 17% of the natural gas and today they are questioning the presence of oil in our water and putting all sorts of ecological reasons forward to dissuade the Government from exploring our EEZ and they are the very same people recently asking what is the Government doing to develop the ocean economy.

Let me remind the Leader of the Opposition that in 2013 when he was in the Labour Government, his colleague, hon. Dr. Boolell, in an interview when talking about the presence of petrol in our maritime zone stated –

“nous ferons un pas de géant en tant qu’une économie de services en devenant un fournisseur majeur de produits pétroliers dans la région.”

For me, Mr Speaker, Sir, the statement was correct but the willpower to develop the industry was lacking on their part then. Now, the only possible explanation in their sudden *virage à 360°* against this Bill is that they are jealous, jealous because it is us who are going to do it, implying that we will remain in history as a Government who dared and succeeded in developing the petroleum sector in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the population voted us to power because of our vision to transform Mauritius into a solid, vibrant and sustainable economy. We are more than ever motivated to realise projects which will improve the future lives of our children. One has only to see the number of developments we have managed to do since 2014. But instead of supporting projects which will benefit the nation, the Opposition systematically keeps on criticising our achievements

But we need to take two minutes to understand their predicament. They simply do not want this Government to succeed because if we do, they might run the risk of disappearing from the political arena. It is therefore natural that they should bite and chew at this Bill lest they starve and disappear.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius imports over one million metric ton of petroleum products annually, costing us around Rs20 billion annually. The STC is statutorily responsible for the importation of almost all the country's requirements of petroleum products. These include the demands for the running of public transport, industrial and commercial activities, motor vehicles for personal and commercial use, the need of the Central Electricity Board in fuel oils for production of electricity, the needs of jet fuel for aircraft refuelling and the need for bunker fuels for the shipping industry.

The price of crude oil has been extremely volatile throughout the years and this has caused a lot of uncertainty for all market players, most particularly local producers. For instance, crude oil has had more than 50% year on year increases in 2002, 2007, 2016 and for 2021 the increase is more than 64%. Financial crunch abroad also causes unprecedented hikes, for instance, following the financial crisis of 2008, the price of crude oil increased by around 117.5%.

Mauritius is therefore a net petroleum import country and heavily depends on petroleum products as a raw material for the production of local commodities and is a major cost component for the distribution industry. Let me remind the House that the price of Mogas here faced almost 100% increase rising from Rs20.40 to Rs50.70 from 2002 to date while that of gasoline doubled from Rs11.90 to Rs37.30 for the same period. These forms of external shocks negatively hamper our production and distribution process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, like most commodities, the fundamental driver of oil price is supply and demand in the market. However, oil supply is controlled somewhat by a cartel of oil producing nations called Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the single biggest influencer of oil prices, made up of 13 countries, in addition, the United States being among the top oil producing countries accounts for 20% of the world production.

From a global perspective, any reason but mostly political one including instability in the Middle East causes all prices to fluctuate as the region accounts for the majority of the worldwide oil supply. Hence, geopolitical events and severe weather that disrupt the supply of crude oil and petroleum products create uncertainty about the future supply or demand, which can lead to higher volatility in prices. In February 2021, non-OPEC Countries cuts, combined with supply disruptions in the United States, contributed to monthly global petroleum inventory withdrawal that US Energy Information Administration estimated at 3.7 million barrels per day which was the largest monthly withdrawal since 2002.

An increase in the cost of production and distribution invariably leads to an increase in the price of the final product a consumer pays. As such, increasing prices of petroleum product worldwide, over time, generally contribute to inflationary pressures, exactly what is happening in different countries at the moment, including here in Mauritius. We, therefore, need to explore all possible avenues to reduce our dependency on imported petroleum product, which, put as a direct result, greatly reduced the cost of living in our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the main objectives of this Government is also to transform Mauritius as a new pillar of the economy by positioning itself as an international bunkering supplier and hub in the region. The importation of petroleum products for bunkering purposes has been liberalised since January 2014. It is also worth noting that around 30,000 vessels pass near Mauritius each year, but only around 3,000 vessels call at Port Louis for bunkering purposes annually. For the year 2020, around 641,000 metric tons of bunker fuels were sold. Given its strategic location, Mauritius has the potential to increase this quantity, but one of the major constraints is the unavailability of bunker fuel to the scale that we would require being given supply is an issue.

In the event exploitation of our seabed leads to the discovery of oil, Mauritius will no longer have to depend on other countries for our local consumption, as well as for bunkering.

The Offshore Petroleum Bill will, thus, further enhance the development of our ocean economy by having the appropriate regulatory regime to conduct petroleum activities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a question of energy, even first-world countries such as France, England and Russia are facing serious issues of demand and supply in energy and gas, thus, causing a sharp rise in prices. Government facing soaring energy price, energy and gas prices are finding ways and means to mitigate the impact. For instance, the French Government has announced a one-off payment of 100 euros for each citizen whose monthly net income is 2,000 euros or less to help counter the surge in fuel and energy prices. On the other hand, the UK Government is considering to offer financial assistance worth hundreds of millions to companies facing increase energy prices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of the House will agree with me that when I say, at some point in time, Mauritius being dependent on importation will not be spared and we will face the direct consequences of what is happening elsewhere. Bearing that in mind, as a caring Government, we cannot remain at a standstill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been accused of being “hypocrites” and even “schizophrenic” in the words of the Leader of the Opposition if we were to believe Press reports. Why? Because we state that we are fully committed to maximizing our effort to fight CO2 emission and, at the same time, are coming up with the presentation of this Bill to set the legal framework for exploration and search of oil in our EEZ. May I ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and other Members, where in its policy intentions this Government has declared that we are engaged in an energy transition aiming at 100% green or renewable sources for our country in the foreseeable future? If in the best cases, we were to reach 60% of our energy needs provided by renewable energy sources, then, where would the other 40% consists of? Thin air? This is why we always talk about a transition towards a new energy mix which will, probably, for at least one more generation, consist of a consistently important fraction of fossil energy. To move from where we are now to the desired destination of an engaging country which will develop its own hydrocarbon industry, we need to step up our state of preparedness.

In view of the potentially socio-economic impacts of oil exploration on the economy on the hand, and probable environmental impact on the other hand, it is prudent that adequate governance mechanisms are put in place. This Bill lays heavy emphasis on the environmental

protection while exploring and sustainably exploiting non-living resources from the ocean. Tapping into the economic potential of the ocean while at the same time protecting its resources, requires thoughtful policies, planning and management. The Offshore Petroleum Bill indisputably takes into consideration the direct effect of petroleum activities on the marine ecosystem and ensures that environment sustainability is the priority of this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members on the other side of the House may rest assured that this Government will leave no stone unturned in the protection of the environment and to mitigate the negative impacts of global warming and climate change in our country. Here, I refer to sections 23 and 29 of the Bill, which cater for this, and it also provides for an Offshore Petroleum Environmental Code of Practice which will have to be followed strictly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like to say that as a responsible Government, we cannot ignore or underestimate the nefarious effect of climate change and must remain committed to vigorously pursue our efforts to develop renewable energy sources. Having said that, however, we cannot also ignore the fact that we are living in an increasingly hostile environment, and that energy security remains at the heart of the sovereignty of any nation. If status quo is observed, as canvassed by the Opposition, we will not be able to modernise neither the legal framework nor the approach to exploration of our ocean. Our vast Exclusive Economic Zones would remain largely unexplored, resulting in suboptimal use of our resources.

As a Small Island Developing State, we feel that we owe it to our people and, indeed, to the less privileged sections of our nation that we shall do everything within our means to increase the responsible and sustainable exploitation of all our available resources to achieve and improve the living standard for the people of Mauritius.

I am done.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.42 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened very passionately to the speech of the hon. Minister and the treaties that he is voicing out, what certain people are advocating. And this is a school of thought; this is democracy, and he has his own point of view with regard to exploration of oil

and the feasibility of those activities that may be happening or will be happening if this Bill is enacted.

I have got some 20 minutes to convince the hon. Prime Minister that this Bill is in stark contradiction with the vision of his Government to establish a green energy industry as a new pillar of our economy, that the timing, Mr Speaker, Sir, of introducing and debating such a Bill is quite puzzling. And, I would have thought that, after views from several quarters, scientists, experts, that they have expressed at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow - the Prime Minister, himself, was there - that the Prime Minister rightly decided to put on hold this Bill instead to pursue the avenues and make our country a model in terms of setting the global trend of sustainability, preserving our environment, our ecosystem, our ocean. And make our country a model in terms of setting the global trend of sustainability, preserving our environment, our ecosystem, our ocean, and embracing the new normal of having to survive in a world, Mr Speaker, Sir, under a Climate Change Emergency which is an irreversible process. The hon. Minister did not address that issue at all, that is, we are living in a world where we are under a Climate Change Emergency, an irreversible process and, Mr Speaker, Sir, resumption of debates on this Bill is thus, in my humble opinion, unbecoming and grossly out of context.

It is not just the population which is taken aback but also international experts and recently Mr Speaker, Sir, in an End-of-visit Statement, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, Dr. Marcos Orellana, on his visit to Mauritius from 25 to 29 October of this year stated the following, and I quote Mr Speaker, Sir -

“All this action on climate mitigation and adaptation, however, is directly contradicted by the new Offshore Petroleum Bill introduced to the National Assembly of Mauritius earlier this week.”

He stated that end of October 2021. He further stated -

“Oil exploration would only aggravate what is already an existential climate emergency that threatens to undermine the ability of humans to live on our planet Earth.”

He went on to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, -

“Mauritius as a small island state is already in the first line of climate vulnerability. Allowing for oil exploration in the knowledge of the climate emergency is akin to self-injury, and it is incompatible with the human rights obligations to respect and protect the rights to life, health, and a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the statement of the Leader of the Opposition or any Member from this side of the House. This is the statement from an international expert of the United Nations and despite that statement made by the end of October of this year, we are still continuing to debate on this Bill today in this august Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir. Previous orators from this side of the House have very vividly pointed out why there should be wide consensus, wide consultation. Public opinion should be asked. Our people should be called upon to understand the implication of this Bill and the debates, with regard to the exploration or discovery of oil within our territorial waters, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been on the table since late 1960s and culminated in the enactment of the 1970 Petroleum Act.

If I go by the reasoning of hon. Minister Callicurn, true it is, in those years, in the 1960s, if we would have discovered oil, then most certainly we could have been like Brunei, Qatar or Dubai. We are in this House assuming that if we are to discover oil now, then imagine how wealthy our country will become? Why do we embark ourselves on such simplistic calculations, Mr Speaker, Sir? What is our responsibility in a world where we are under Climate Change Emergency regime? What about the views and opinion of our people, Mr Speaker, Sir? What about the views and opinion of experts? What about public consultation, Mr Speaker, Sir?

These are questions that should be canvassed and without public consultation Mr Speaker, Sir, such a piece of legislation being debated at such an untimely manner is to my humble view, inappropriate and premature. Such a Bill should undergo genuine and inclusive consultations with every potentially affected group and other stakeholders before it gets adopted. Such consultations should take place at all key stages in the legislative process and not only when there is an already fully drafted legislative text, Mr Speaker, Sir. Initial consultations should happen when different policy options are still being considered, that is, before a decision is made on whether to go ahead with developing a new law on this subject matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, why is it so urgent to have this Bill debated when our people, the owners of this country, the owners of our territorial waters, the owners of our natural resources do not even have a clue as to the implications when this Bill will be enacted? Without having undergone public scrutiny, without all stakeholders having the chance to provide their views and opinion, it stands to reason that Government is proceeding through the backdoor to introduce this new piece of legislation which should not be the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government should disseminate its policy to the people; explain the veracity as to why we are coming with this Bill. Let our people voice out and decide whether they want to preserve what the hon. Minister is saying, the status-quo with regard to the society in which they are living, that is maintaining the preservation of our marine life and ecosystem, keeping our territorial waters as it is or whether they wish to embark in the exploration of our territorial waters and have a novel economic model to be tuned around future discovery of oil or gas in our waters.

Unfortunately Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not have in our jurisdiction the possibility of going for a referendum on such an issue and this ought to have been the case in a vivid democracy. Let our people decide. Let us get their consent but for the sake of debate, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would respectfully elaborate on the following facts and information. Why is this Bill still being debated before this august Assembly now?

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Minister pointed out, in light of recent discoveries that have been made Offshore East Africa, the Archipelagos of the Indian Ocean have received more attention from the International Oil And Gas Industry while those interests are still somewhat nascent. There is a long road ahead before the hydrocarbon potential thereof can be wholly assessed. While the presence of commercial quantities of hydrocarbons could dramatically reduce our country's dependency on foreign resources now and strengthen our economy now, no exploration has occurred and this is the case and we do not also have much scientific facts and figures to back at this very moment, this urge of Government to repeal the Petroleum Act of 1970 and Mr Speaker, Sir, this reasoning of Government is not also in line with the current trend as I said earlier on.

It would have been an attractive statement way back in late 1960s following an exploration program conducted by Texaco in the 1970s, the results of which were inconclusive.

It appears that only India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation has shown an interest in conducting limited exploration within Mauritian waters. As such Mr Speaker, Sir, the hydrocarbon potential in Mauritius, remains an unanswered question and considering the country has one of the largest exclusive economic zones in the world, it is a question that may take a while to answer. However Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth pointing out that Seychelles and Mauritius jointly have taken steps that may help to shed light on the hydrocarbon potential of the latter.

In 2011, following a jointly submitted claim to the United Nations Commission on the limits of the continental shelf for 396,000 KM² of the continental shelf beyond the 200 nautical miles, EEZ of the two countries, Mauritius and Seychelles were granted joint rights to manage the relevant area. Maybe hon. Dr. Boolell will be able to elaborate more on that. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time.

(Interruptions)

And the two countries were to establish a Joint Commission to manage, among other things, the exploitation of resources of the sea bed within the Joint Management Area.

Also in August 2013, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was established to manage oil and gas activities, in this joint management area. Although the relevant announcement went so far as to state that all revenues would be shared on a 50-50 basis, the two countries were to work and prepare the requisite legal and administrative frameworks. No indication has been given as to when the joint management area will be open for oil and gas-related exploration. Though this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, will not apply to the joint management area, I expect the hon. Prime Minister to enlighten this House as to where matters stand with regard to the establishment of that joint commission when he will sum up the debates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the oil and gas industry in Mauritian waters is truly embryonic. Is it now the time to gamble on such exploration activities, Mr Speaker, Sir? Do we have the mandate to do so? Can we, hon. Members of this House, engage ourselves to go down in history of having enacted a legislation that may have far-reaching consequences on the lives of our future generations; be it human beings, marine life and our ecosystem without having broad public debates and consensus on this subject matter?

Although with the enactment of this Bill, those international oil companies that will be amenable to be given as per clause 14 of the Bill, various types of titles, may have an admirable appetite for exploration in what are still considered to be frontier waters, Mauritian dreams of hydrocarbon-based wealth must remain tempered by the possibility that the impending exploration may reveal a lack of commercially viable reserves.

Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, Greenland is a very good example, Greenland being the largest island on earth. Greenland dropped all plans for future oil exploration on environmental grounds saying the price of extraction was too high. The island's socialist-led Government has made climate concerns central to its legislative programme and in a recent statement, the PM of Greenland stated the following, I quote –

“The government has decided to cease issuing new licenses for oil and gas exploration. This step has been taken for the sake of our nature, for the sake of our fisheries, for the sake of our tourism industry.”

In a number of cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, many European countries also have scrapped plans for oil exploration, France, Denmark, Ireland and Scotland.

At this point in time, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to reflect on what type of an economy, what type of a country do we need to have? Going to what we have in this House with a clear majority that will vote most definitely for this Bill, it is worth noting that through the enactment of clauses 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill, providing additional powers to the department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration, which is a mere department of the PMO, these clauses, Mr Speaker, Sir, are not warranted. We do not need to have those clauses, giving such powers to a department of the Prime Minister's Office. Instead, I propose that there should be an Offshore Petroleum Commission set up if this Bill is going to be enacted.

Also, this Bill should include the establishment of a Parliamentary Committee to oversee all operations of this Commission and participate in the decision-making process when it comes to the approval of a model petroleum agreement.

I shall also invite the hon. Prime Minister to study the Norway model in terms of decommissioning obligations as per clause 9(g) of the Bill and the Ghana model in terms of requirements concerning compliance with Environmental Impact Assessment amongst others

and revisit clause 76, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to disclosure of information so that Parliament remains sovereign in its responsibilities to be provided with all information with regard to the applicability of this Bill when it will be enacted.

What I want to convey to the hon. Prime Minister and this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that we have reached the end of a cycle. Oil is no longer the king. I plead that this Bill be put in abeyance and instead a Select Committee of this House be set up and wide public consultations be held.

I plead that instead let us, as a nation, go along the road maps set up to establish and develop the green energy industry as a pillar of our economy. Already the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency launched an Expression of Interest for consultancy services for a feasibility study of ocean renewable energy technologies, which will cover offshore wind with energy converters and tidal energy technology.

In the Budget Speech 2021/2022, it was proposed that Government will implement the establishment of offshore wind farms. I shall thus invite the hon. Prime Minister and the Government to come to this House, if he so wishes, with a Certificate of Urgency, with a Bill that will provide a regulatory framework to kick-start and embrace the vision of a net zero economy.

We can well study the Australian Government recent steps, Mr Speaker, Sir, taken towards the development of a leading offshore wind energy industry with the introduction in its Parliament of the Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Bill.

I shall thus plead that let our country become a model of what we can propose to the world and walk the talk with regard to creating an economic model cemented on the preservation of our ecology. Let us thus embrace this new normal. It is realistic, it is achievable, it is clean and most importantly, sustainable. Let us walk the talk, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let us live to our reputation of being the star and key of the Indian Ocean.

We are the *Stella Clavisque Maris Indici*. Do not go ahead with this Bill. Come with a Bill with regard to offshore wind energy or tidal energy and we, on this side of the House, will support such Bill with regard to clean and green energy.

I will not take further the time of this House, Mr Speaker, Sir, because I am done with my 20 minutes. I do think that I could have convinced the Prime Minister. I will listen to him later on if I have been able to convince him in those 20 minutes allocated to me.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(5.01 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to intervene and share my views on the Offshore Petroleum Bill, an important piece of legislation brought to this House by the hon. Prime Minister.

After listening to my speech, contrary to what the hon. Member was thinking, I hope that I will be able to convince him and other Members of the Opposition who intervened on this Bill and hopefully they will have some of the answers to some of their arguments.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhaliah, will you take a long time?

Mr Dhaliah: 15 minutes.

Mr Speaker: 15 minutes?

Mr Dhaliah: 15 minutes, maximum 20. I will not go beyond that.

Mr Speaker: If you are taking 20 minutes, I will break here for tea.

At 5.02 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.44 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated! Hon. Dhaliah!

Mr Dhaliah: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to join my colleagues, on this side of the House, in acknowledging that the Petroleum Act which dates back to 1970 needs to be replaced by a new legislation. This new legislation will set the foundations for a greater scope of development and exploitation of petroleum and other related resources in our territorial waters. It will propel the Republic of Mauritius to new heights of its development.

The existing legal framework which is more than five decades old has served its purpose. Members in this august Assembly will concur with me that, today, in 2021, we cannot continue

to operate within an old and limited legislative framework which does not take into account all the evolution that, not only Mauritius, but the whole world, has witnessed over half a century.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since it has been announced that the Offshore Petroleum Bill would be introduced into the National Assembly, many criticisms have been levelled against the Government.

I can understand that the Opposition may have some fears and feel the need to voice out their qualms. It is quite legitimate. But let me point out that there is a huge difference between fears and demagoguery.

Mauritius is not the first country of the region to engage in such activities as prescribed by the Offshore Petroleum Bill. We are indeed planning to explore the seabed and subsoil areas of our maritime zones.

Does anyone know what can be found in our waters? Some Members of the Opposition, in their various public statements, question the presence of petroleum in our waters. Have they actually done any exploration before jumping to any conclusion? The answer is obviously no, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, de rappeler aux membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre, qu'en 2012, le Gouvernement d'alors ambitionnait de faire de l'économie océanique un des piliers les plus importants. L'année suivante, il y avait même un national dialogue regroupant les différents partenaires et cela avait débouché sur l'élaboration d'une *roadmap*. Est-ce que cela concernait uniquement les poissons et autres ressources marines ?

Hearing the arguments being put forward by some people, we are tempted to ask ourselves if it is not mere frustration. Frustration from the part of those who were in power for years and who have not had the political courage and will to come forward with bold actions and decisions regarding the exploitation of our territorial waters. While others were scared, we, on this side of the House, we have dared.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, when this Government is walking the talk, some are putting forward environmental issues. Are they trying to demonstrate that this Government does not care about environment protection? *La population n'est pas dupe.*

Nous voulons explorer nos eaux pour voir s'il y a du pétrole. Et de ce côté de la Chambre, M. le président, nous sommes conscients qu'il est impératif de tenir en ligne de compte l'aspect environnemental, la configuration sismique et qu'il faut des experts qualifiés dans le domaine. Comme je l'ai déjà souligné, les experts devront évaluer l'écosystème marin, voir si le sol mauricien peut contenir du pétrole et si ceci peut être exploité.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I always say that *gouverner, c'est prévoir* and this Government does not depart from this philosophy.

Since we are in power, all our actions have been geared towards the wellbeing of our population and we go much further by ensuring a brighter future for the Republic.

Let us not forget that Mauritius is highly dependent on importation and hon. Minister Callichurn mentioned that in his speech, be it for food items, among others, but also for fuel. Just imagine the numerous economic advantages that could be derived, not only from living resources, but also from non-living resources in our maritime zones.

For sure, the whole process, namely the prospection, the exploitation and the production may take some time, but ultimately the country would have made a big leap forward.

M. le président, certains de nos amis de l'Opposition avancent qu'en introduisant l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill*, le Gouvernement va à l'encontre des objectifs visant à accroître le recours à l'énergie renouvelable. Ils font fausse route. Nous nous sommes fixés des objectifs et nous entendons bien les respecter.

M. le président, l'Opposition, fidèle à ses habitudes, pose un faux débat et fait un faux procès au gouvernement. Elle vient opposer l'ambition déclarée du gouvernement d'encourager les énergies vertes à la vocation de ce projet de loi.

Cet argumentaire est complètement à côté de la plaque. Le gouvernement ne remet nullement en cause ses engagements en matière de réduction des émissions de gaz à effet de serre. Bien au contraire, le gouvernement est pleinement conscient de ses responsabilités face à la crise du climat, que ce soit au chapitre de l'atténuation du changement climatique ou en terme d'adaptation aux conséquences du dérèglement climatique.

La nouvelle législation ne compromet en aucune manière notre vision du développement durable. Bien au contraire, elle y apporte de la substance.

La République de Maurice aspire à être reconnue comme un Etat océan qui a l'ambition d'exploiter le potentiel économique du vaste territoire marin qu'elle contrôle. Elle entend développer de nouvelles filières de croissance liées à l'économie bleue pour rehausser son développement socioéconomique vers un nouveau palier.

Dans cette optique, elle se dote d'une gouvernance océanique moderne et avant-gardiste qui garantira le développement durable des ressources océaniques. C'est dans cette optique que s'inscrit l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill*. Le Programme Gouvernemental 2020-2024, prévoit, du reste, l'avènement d'un *Petroleum Bill*, d'un *Seabed Mineral Bill* et d'un *Marine Biotechnology hub* en vue d'accroître le développement de l'économie bleue.

M. le président, nous ne faisons qu'honorer notre engagement avec l'introduction à l'Assemblée nationale de ce texte de loi révolutionnaire.

Certains dans l'Opposition parlaient de mauvais timing concernant la présentation de l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill*, cela en faisant allusion à la Conférence de la COP26 qui s'est tenue à Glasgow. Encore une fois, ils sont en train de mélanger torchons et serviettes et nous imputent des motifs malveillants.

L'avènement de cette loi est dans l'ordre des choses. La question de timing n'a, ici, aucune pertinence. Il n'y a aucune précipitation. Nous avons un calendrier législatif et nous travaillons selon les échéances établies au préalable. Notre arsenal législatif et institutionnel se doit d'être adapté aux grands enjeux de développement de notre pays.

L'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* est une loi-cadre qui va régler les diverses sphères. Notre arsenal législatif et institutionnel se doit d'être adapté aux grands enjeux de développement de notre pays. L'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* est une loi-cadre qui va régler les diverses sphères de l'activité pétrolière. Il est regrettable que certains n'y voient que du noir.

Le Leader de l'Opposition parle d'opacité. Or, c'est justement ce que veut combattre ce texte de loi. Il y a tout un dispositif de gouvernance sous-jacent. D'abord, l'État mauricien va exercer ses droits souverains sur les ressources pétrolières dans les fonds marins et dans le sous-sol des zones maritimes.

Le '*Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration*', qui est une instance au sein du Bureau du Premier ministre, sera l'autorité chargée de réglementer et de contrôler les activités pétrolières. Elle a aussi pour mission de négocier et éventuellement de signer au nom du gouvernement des accords portant sur des activités de prospection et d'exploration du pétrole. Il doit s'assurer que l'État puisse se prévaloir des conditions les plus favorables dans tous les cas de figure.

Le département va s'inspirer des meilleures pratiques mondiales pour proposer un contrat type. De manière générale, les contrats vont déterminer les termes et conditions suivants –

- le paiement des royalties et des impôts et autres paiements à l'État que le département jugera nécessaire ;
- les couvertures d'assurance en cas de dégâts à l'environnement marin ;
- les mesures qui devront être prises par les prestataires dans l'éventualité des torts causés à l'environnement ;
- le financement des activités ;
- les normes et les lignes directrices des activités pétrolières, dont un *Environmental Code of Practice* et un *Safety Code of Practice* ;
- les exigences en matière des opérations d'exploration et de production et
- l'arrêt des opérations et le démantèlement des installations.

Il incombera aussi à l'autorité régulatrice de désigner des espaces, des *subblocks*, comme on les appelle dans le projet de loi, à des fins d'activité pétrolière. D'emblée, les zones marines protégées y sont exclues.

En sus des zones marines protégées, le département aura le pouvoir de déclarer des *Reserved Areas* au sein de nos zones maritimes où aucune activité pétrolière ne sera autorisée pour des raisons écologiques notamment.

M. le président, rien n'est laissé au hasard. Néanmoins, Maurice est sur un *learning curve* dans un secteur qui lui est tout nouveau et qui demande à la fois une réglementation rigoureuse et un cadre de facilités pour attirer les meilleurs opérateurs mondiaux dans nos eaux. La nouvelle loi-cadre est appelée à évoluer et à s'adapter avec les réalités économiques, écologiques,

sociales, politiques et techniques. Mais c'est déjà un excellent outil pour avancer dans cette nouvelle avenue d'exploitation de ressources océaniques.

Je remercie le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth d'avoir présenté ce projet de loi et d'avoir démontré une fois de plus son *leadership* pour faire évoluer les frontières de notre développement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like to stress that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of global economies including Mauritius. Small Island States like Mauritius are particularly vulnerable given that we heavily rely on the services sector, notably, the tourism and hospitality sector. The weaknesses unveiled by the pandemic compel us to identify and tap on new opportunities to further diversify our economy, contribute to our Gross domestic product and materially reduce our import bill.

This pandemic has shown that in difficult times, each country has the tendency to cater for its own interests in the first instance. Hence the reason to be self-sufficient as much as possible, for example in the field of energy. Therefore, we should encourage neighbouring countries to follow the example already set by many countries of the region and now being implemented by Mauritius to adopt an integrated approach towards the discovery of hydrocarbon. To this end, the ocean economy is an area that provides Mauritius with an array of opportunities and the exploitation and exploration of any oil resources is one of them.

Our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.3 million square kilometres and the continental shelf of 396,000 square kilometres co-managed with the Republic of Seychelles are the main resources that Mauritius owns and it is imperative that we optimise the potential of such resources and leave a sustainable legacy to our future generations.

This Bill is an important and positive step towards the exploration and exploitation of any existing hydrocarbon resources. This piece of legislation is a step in the right direction to tap new resources within the boundaries of international laws and conventions to which Mauritius is a signatory.

On this note I fully support the provisions in this Bill.

Long live the Republic of Mauritius.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(6.00 p.m)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the Offshore Petroleum Bill that seeks to replace the Petroleum Act with a new and more appropriate regulatory regime for the conduct of petroleum activities in the seabed and sub soil areas of the maritime zones of Mauritius.

The first question that I put is: what is the current global background against which the petroleum industry must be seen today? Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister of Finance, his name is on the list of orators, later, let us talk about the finance and the state of the exploration industry globally. With each carbon well having only 10 to 15% chance of finding hydrocarbons, and an offshore well costing between 30 to 50 million dollars, exploration is a highly uncertain activity. According to industry experts, Wood Mackenzie, the top 39 companies have destroyed 133 billion dollars of value from 2010 to 2019. Furthermore the extreme volatility in commodity prices is putting pressure for companies to reduce exploration budget which dropped from 60 billion dollars per year between 2012 to 2014 to a mere 22 billion dollars in 2017.

Due to increasing investor pressure on ESG (Environmental Social Governance) Requirements and the need to decarbonise their portfolio, most of the large international players like British Petroleum, Shell, Equinor are moving away from exploration. They are retrenching exploration staff, cutting down on exploration budget, focusing on only known exploration basins, focusing on exploration close to existing production infrastructure and also focusing on only gas prone basins. New country entries for frontier exploration like Mauritius appear to be off the agenda. Countries like New Zealand who has an existing oil and gas industry has even banned offshore licensing. A question at this point in time: against this backdrop, one would certainly wonder why was there not any consultations in and outside the House done before such an important decision on the future of the Mauritian seabed has been taken? Because decision has been taken, and I here refer to the remarks in the introduction to the Bill, the hon. Prime Minister did mention that in February 2020 an agreement for the conduct of Geo scientific survey was signed between his office and CGG Services S.A.S., an agreement that seeks to provide for CGG Services S.A.S. to undertake multi-client seismic data acquisition, processing, reprocessing, interpretation, data brokering, sales and marketing of seismic and offshore Geo

scientific surveys over an exploration area covering a total of around 45,009 kilometres in four selected areas of the Economy Exclusive Zone of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a few questions on this and the very first one is: was there an upfront cost to this arrangement between CGG Services SAS and the PMO, and if so how much given that such exercises are very expensive and run into millions of dollars? There is no doubt that CGG Services SAS is a reputed company but it is only one among the four main players in the field and I thus have another four questions here -

- (i) Was there an international bidding exercise done?
- (ii) Who did the bid evaluation and did he or she or they have the necessary expertise to do so?
- (iii) What is the *modus operandi* going forward?
- (iv) Will Government open up a data room and will players have to pay to assist the data room because data are very expensive and not all attendees do participate at the end of the day?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second issue I would like to touch upon is certainly that of governance which hon. Dhaliah touched as well himself. Well, contrary to him, in Section 5 of the Bill, on the regulatory body of petroleum activities including functions of the department and if you look at Section 7 on Powers of the Department and if you take Sections 5 and 7 therefore together, you will find that there is a real governance question inasmuch as the department, that is, the Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration is being called to do and carry out duties like regulating, negotiating, facilitating, developing policies, standard and strategies, inviting applications and writing of titles, maintaining records, assessing reporting documents, enlisting the services of experts, causing investigations to be carried out, collecting of fees and petroleum agreement negotiations, if you add Clause 8 together with this.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about licensing our Maritime zones, which is way beyond our Economic Exclusive Zone because it includes the continental shelf. We are not talking about licensing an onshore IRS project for example, where we can see visually what is happening but we are talking about licensing our seabed and subsoil for hydrocarbon exploration which is high risk and can take more than a decade to mature with investment running into hundreds of

millions of US Dollars. This 4/2 approach is an unusual setup where the department will, on several counts, be Judge and party at the same time and this is very different from industry best practice. The role the Mauritian State will play is not mentioned. Indeed, the Government can either participate upfront as a participant in the joint venture exploring a block where the Government's share is borne by the foreign investors or Government can retain the right to back-in in case of successful exploration. Which option will Government opt for is not specified.

Furthermore, under the governance point comes the issue of transparency in block allocation. Industry best practice is to have a licensing ground to encourage competition and transparency. This is used even in the most corrupt hydrocarbon producing countries such as Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and others. The moot point here is direct negotiations between one company and Government encourages corruption.

Since we are on the subject of data, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would now like to zoom in on Section 6 (m) of the Bill which mentions about the enlistment of the services of experts. In 2018, the then Joint Management Coordinator of the Mauritius-Seychelles Extended Continental Shelf for Oil and Gas Exploration had stated, and I quote -

“(...) our two Governments had agreed to open up the joint venture for commercial exploration and we expect the multi-client seismic survey to provide high level details on this area.”

I have two questions here for the hon. Prime Minister –

- I. What has become of this survey?
- II. What it completed and what was the outcome?

I feel compelled to ask these questions, Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the hon. Minister of Energy, the hon. Lesjongard has said the following in his speech, and I quote –

“(...) certes jusqu’à présent il n’y a eu aucune découverte dans nos eaux maritimes.”

This is a very interesting remark. I am no geotechnical expert but the basic knowledge that I have about geotechnical engineering as a civil engineer tells me that Mauritius being a volcanic island, it could have happened that during its formation by magmatic activities, the heat flows would have degraded hydrocarbon deposits. Any oil and gas discovery would thus be very far from our shores in very deep waters, maybe in the range of 5 km depth zone and it would

thus beg the question of drilling cost and accessibility bearing in mind that we are a cyclone prone region.

As a matter of fact, I was reading Mr Prem Saddul, Associate Professor in Geology and former Chairman of the Mauritius Oceanographic Institute in l'Express of Tuesday 26 October 2021. In that article - I think this one will reply to the hon. Dhaliah - Mr Saddul has listed eight multifaceted deep sea geophysical investigation by overseas companies which have been carried out in our maritime zones since the 1990s and which constitute a rich bank of data already and which can be retrieved and made use of. But what is more interesting in that article is the following, and I quote Mr Saddle, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“The initiative of tabling an Offshore Petroleum Bill in the National Assembly may have other objectives such as prospecting for deposits of polymetallic nodules which according to me - therefore, meaning Mr Prem Saddul - makes more sense than prospecting for oil in basaltic limestone carbonate and granite environment and deep down in ocean beds.”

Maybe he has a point on the real intention of the Government but this Bill specifically applies and exclusively to petroleum and cannot be extended to polymetallic nodules. Polymetallic nodule is another debate and the hon. Prime Minister will have to come to Parliament for another Bill on this because the concerns there will be totally different.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my next point has to do with Section 2 (c) in the Bill wherein it is stated that -

“by using proven technology readily available within the petroleum industry, could be developed so that the commercial rates of return from the recovery of the petroleum meet or exceed the minimum return considered acceptable for the type of project under consideration by a reasonable petroleum developer and by an investor or lender to the industry;”

The interesting word here is ‘reasonable developer’. What is a reasonable developer? Let us take the example of our neighbour, like hon. Dhaliah has said, the Seychelles. He did not mention about the Seychelles but he has mentioned about neighbour only.

In 2010, the first entrant in Seychelles exploration was WHL, a very small Australian company with no prior offshore experience which subsequently had to join forces with Ophir

Energy which acquired a large 3D seismic survey. In 2016, Ophir relinquished its blocks, Ophir no longer exists and WHL has since left the oil sector. Another actor in Seychelles has little experience as an exploration operator and has not published any news update on its Seychelles activity since 2016. Based on this, Mr Speaker, Sir, you will surely agree that Seychelles experience over the last decade is not very encouraging, all the more so, WHL and Ophir themselves have stated that the Seychelles basin is oil-prone and not gas-prone.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I deplore the fact and I even question: why is it that the Bill before us does not even once mention that the department will have as onus the conduct of a due diligence exercise and capability assessment of participants in the licensing process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mozambique is currently holding its sixth licensing round, and do you know what the financial criteria are? Well, an applicant is eligible for such pre-qualification as operator if it is able to demonstrate to the reasonable satisfaction of the National Petroleum Institute there that the applicant had, as at the end of its most recent financial year, a minimum total assets equivalent of US\$ 1 Billion or equivalent Market Capitalisation if the applicant will undertake operations in water depths of less than 500 meters, and more than US\$ 2 Billion in water depths more than 500 meters. And if you go to the website, you will see a lot of very strict conditions that are applicable to these operators. Now, why is that so? The reason is very simple. A country needs to know whether it is dealing with a company that is experienced and have the required financial means because of the inherent risks associated with offshore drilling. And, we, as law makers are duty-bound to be watchful on this because it really begs the question of the real potential of our basin at a time when the industry is moving from wildcat drilling. Mr Speaker, Sir, wildcat drilling is a form of high risk with a 10-15% chance of success, exploratory drilling in frontier, unproven basins with little geotechnical understanding, and no prior exploration activity like the case is in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in embarking on this venture, it is imperative to talk about the fiscal terms or the share the State will take out of every dollar of revenue. Now, will it be a concession or will it be a production sharing basis? This is important, as the type of contract and fiscal take are the main criteria for investors to determine the economic returns. Clear indications must be given; if not, investors will be discouraged and all investments made upfront will become sub cost.

On a different note, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is very technical and maybe one of the most technical Bills that I had to intervene on. I, thus, had to do some consultations and some reading, and in so doing, it is evident that the terminologies used in the Bill are quite poor in the sense that it is very different if you compare it with those of other countries. Key industry terminology to the sector, like exploration period, minimum work programme, 2 or 3D seismic acquisition, exploration well, well test, appraisal test, declaration of commerciality, development period, development wells and facilities are not used at all in the Bill, and I fear this may lead to further confusion, especially on phases and work commitments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, much has been said about the presentation of the Bill just prior to the Prime Minister leading the Mauritian delegation to COP26 Summit. Well, I will not go too much into this. I had a PQ on this this morning, PQ B/1320, but the PQ was transferred to the Minister of Environment. I will have to come back to this again, but I will finish on this note. And that is firstly, Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2018, countries like Belize have banned offshore oil activity to protect its barrier reefs, and this decision was hailed as a huge step forward that will safeguard the marine environment and the country's lucrative dive tourism industry. Secondly, big oil companies like British Petroleum have reinvented their business model, and its main purpose today is reimagining energy for people and the planet. British Petroleum wants to help the world reach net zero and improve people's life in line with the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty which comprises of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees, preferably to 1 degree Celsius. British Petroleum is now advocating that there is no space for exploration, and many other oil companies are scrapping offshore oil projects. The International Energy Agency says that ending oil and gas exploration today is the only viable climate path, and not only has Mauritius not abided by its promised renewable energy targets, but it is embarking on fossil fuel oil exploration, which is the exact opposite trend.

Mr Speaker, Sir on this food of note thought, I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Maudhoo!

(6.18 p.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the world was adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were all pleased to see that our economy started recovering positively, especially the tourism and export-

oriented sectors. Unfortunately, COVID-19 mutations are a real threat and we are already facing some headwinds with a new variant which, once again, creates more uncertainties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to thank our Prime Minister for bringing up this Bill. There have been several previous speculations on whether or not Mauritius could develop an oil and gas industry, but it is this Government under the Prime Ministership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth that made it possible for such an important Bill to be debated in this august Assembly.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened to hon. Khushal Lobine who insists that a public consultation should be held for the process of developing a framework for an offshore petroleum industry. However, I would like to remind hon. Lobine that such a development was part of the *Alliance Morisien* manifesto in 2019 and that the *Alliance Morisien* won the 2019 General Elections. There is no better democratic way of receiving the approval of the citizens of Mauritius other than the polls.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Chile was blessed with copper; Norway and OPEC countries with oil and gas; Australia has iron ores; Africa with gold and diamond, and there are so many more examples of countries blessed with an abundant supply of natural resources. While looking at the economic structure of these countries, you will realise that their God's gift was put to good use in an efficient manner so as to benefit their population and their society as a whole, to the exception of a few countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Mauritius has been bestowed with the natural resources of 2.3 million kilometres square of blue gold - *l'or bleu* - in the form of our EEZ, notwithstanding the potential of *l'or noir* located maybe in our subsoil somewhere.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the current pandemic has triggered a reckoning that we are far too reliant on the tourism industry. We need to make sure no stone is left unturned in our quest to make the economy more diversified and thus more resilient. We, therefore, have to give ourselves the maximum chances to develop new economic pillars, and the Offshore Petroleum Bill does just that by setting the framework for a new regulatory regime that is investor friendly given the technological challenges that are expected for such a development. Whether or not we should cross the bridge is a question to be answered once we know for sure that we have economically viable petroleum reserves that are environmentally safe to extract, with the latest

technologies available. The first step is to open our EEZ for the exploration of the subsoil. Let us not forget that an entire offshore industry will be developed in the event the offshore oil industry is viable as many spin off industries like services to the oil sector, shipping, renewable energy can be developed and help Mauritius develop its technological capabilities.

M. le président, je suis tout à fait conscient des questions suscitées par le développement potentiel d'une industrie pétrolière à Maurice. Les enjeux sont aussi bien environnementaux qu'économiques. Je parle d'un équilibre à trouver pour concilier ces deux dimensions cruciales au développement de notre propre industrie pétrolière et énergétique en s'appuyant sur une technologie offshore qui a fait ses preuves dans de nombreux pays. Il en va de la souveraineté énergétique de notre pays dans l'hypothèse de la découverte des réserves exploitables, comme décrit dans l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, the present regulatory framework governing the upstream petroleum sector in Mauritius dates back to the 1970s and needs to be actualised in order to not only meet but also address the challenges of the 21st century. To this endeavour, this Government agreed in 2015 to the formulation of a regulatory framework for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, including petroleum in the EEZ and the continental shelf of Mauritius. The long-awaited Offshore Petroleum Bill is thus coming at an opportune time as we are being called to adapt to a 'New Normal'.

The intent of this Bill is to cover the main aspect of petroleum exploration and production. The long-awaited Offshore Petroleum Bill is thus coming at an opportune time as we are being called to adapt to a 'New Normal'.

The intent of this Bill is to cover the main aspects of Petroleum exploration and production, and, in this context, would enact a new and more appropriate regulatory framework for the prospecting, exploration and exploitation of petroleum in the seabed and the subsoil areas of the maritime zones of Mauritius.

While Petroleum exploration is considered as the new frontier of economic development for Mauritius, through this Bill, the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones, Administration and Exploration, as the regulatory body, will be responsible for regulating, monitoring and overseeing petroleum activities, and will ensure, *inter alia*, that strategies and

policies are developed to minimise the impacts of petroleum activities in the marine environment.

It is noted that the provisions in the Offshore Petroleum Bill 2021 caters for a number of issues which are of direct relevance to my Ministry. These sections are -

- a) Section 12 - release of sub-blocks for petroleum activities;
- b) Section 13 - declarations of reserved areas;
- c) Section 17 - application for title;
- d) Section 21 - security Bank guarantee, and
- e) Section 23 - general responsibilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in Section 12 of the Bill, a provision has been made to ensure that a Marine Protected Area will not be released for petroleum activities. Marine Protected Areas are used as an important tool to conserve ocean resources. Worldwide marine protected areas have been based on the protection of marine habitats and maintaining biodiversity. To show its commitment to the protection and management of its marine protected areas, Government has, on 22 October 2021, agreed to Mauritius joining the Commonwealth Blue Charter Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Action Group. The Commonwealth Blue Charter which was launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018 in London is an Agreement whereby Commonwealth countries seek to actively cooperate for addressing ocean-related issues and meet commitments for suitable ocean development.

To achieve this purpose, the Action Group will collaborate with partners at national, regional and international levels to address identified priority ocean issues, specifically related to marine protected areas of its member countries. Its stated objectives are, *inter alia*, to promote the need for establishment of new MPAs and expansion of existing MPAs.

Under Section 13 of the Bill, the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones, Administration and Exploration may declare an area in the maritime zones to be a reserved area for Marine Spatial Planning purposes. This provision is important given Marine Spatial Planning is a practical way to create and establish a more rational use of marine space and the interactions among its uses, by balancing demands for development with the need to protect the environment, and to deliver social and economic outcomes in a transparent and well planned manner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, marine mammals hold a special place in the minds of most people because of their intelligence, visibility and frequent interactions with humans. It is noted that under Section 17(p), provision has been made for the appointment of a -

“qualified marine mammal observer who shall be responsible for conducting visual watches for marine mammal during the conduct of petroleum activities.”

This is indeed an important safeguard to ensure that the marine mammals in our territorial waters are not disrupted by petroleum activities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, environmental pollution caused by petroleum has always been a matter of great concern. Petroleum hydrocarbons are toxic to all forms of life and harm both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. The pollution of marine habitats has caught the attention of the international community in view of the serious impacts of oil spills on marine life as well as on people whose livelihoods depend on the exploitation of the ocean’s resources.

Mr Speaker, Sir, nobody can forget that our country had been confronted to the worst oil spill ever in the South Eastern region following the wreck of MV Wakashio. The concerned authorities took all appropriate actions within our existing resources and with assistance from international organizations and friendly countries, to contain and mitigate the adverse effect of this casualty. I seize this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to these organisations and countries, as well as to all the volunteers, citizens, NGOs, private sector organizations who spontaneously came forward to support the lagoon and shoreline clean-up operations.

The Bill makes adequate provisions for appropriate measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution and other potential hazards to the marine environment, including waste material arising from petroleum activities. For instance, under Section 21 of the Bill, the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration may use the security bank guarantee for clean-up operation or compensation costs in respect of any damage caused by pollution or other incidents occurring as a result of the petroleum activities carried by the title holder.

Furthermore, under Section 23, again, consideration has been given to take necessary precautions in order to avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of petroleum activities on the marine environment, as well as, on human health in Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry

has been consulted on the Bill and we have submitted our views on many issues which were considered necessary to further consolidate the provisions under the Bill. While the Bill appears to cover the main aspects of petroleum exploration, it is considered that in the proposed contract with a potential company earmarked for exploration, the issue of marine pollution and fouling, such as oil spill, fire, deleterious changes in the marine environment at the sites of exploration, as well as, the responsibility for the rehabilitation of any affected sites should be clearly spelt out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the event that petroleum is found within our territorial waters, this would definitely be highly beneficial on the economic, as well as the social level, and it will go a long way to enhance the standard of living of Mauritians. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, hon. Duval has asked for the availability of Deep Offshore Technology in the specific case of Mauritius. I can say that the Deep Offshore Production of petroleum has been a success for numerous years in countries like the United States, Angola, Brazil and Norway.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne le volet environnemental de la prospection, l'exploration, la rétention et la production de pétrole à Maurice, communément appelé *Upstream Petroleum Industry*, je souhaiterai prendre le modèle norvégien en exemple. En effet, nos deux pays sont dépendants de nos industries de la mer et de la pêche. De plus, nos zones économiques exclusives sont de tailles similaires autour de 2 millions de km². L'exemple de la Norvège est très intéressant puisque la totalité de la production norvégienne provient des puits Offshore, donc de fonds marins et les conditions climatiques de la mer du nord et de la mer de Norvège sont très extrêmes. Et pourtant, M. le président, la Norvège s'est imposée comme un leader mondial de la production de pétrole et de gaz depuis les années 80.

Je note ici que la Norvège, à ce jour, demeure un exportateur majeur des produits de la pêche. La Norvège est même le deuxième plus grand exportateur de *fish and fish products* en termes de valeur au monde et la flotte des navires et de pêche est de 6025 bateaux de pêche d'après le rapport de janvier 2021 de l'OCDE sur le *fisheries and aquaculture in Norway*.

M. le président, l'exemple norvégien est la preuve que si l'on respecte les contraintes environnementales lors de l'évaluation et de l'implémentation des projets *upstream* comme décrit dans *l'Offshore Petroleum Bill*, nous pouvons réduire drastiquement les risques liés à la protection et à la préservation de l'environnement marin et gérer les potentiels conflits sociaux en différentes parties prenantes grâce aux technologies de l'offshore pétrolier mais encore faut-il

avoir un cadre réglementaire approprié qui permette d'attirer les entreprises qui possèdent l'expertise dans l'offshore pétrolier. Encore une fois, *l'Offshore Petroleum Bill* vient en réponse à ces besoins.

M. le président, je souhaite également m'exprimer sur le volet économique et les implications pour les générations futures d'une potentielle industrie pétrolière nationale. Le monde est en train de vivre une transition énergétique qui ne pourra pas se faire sans les énergies fossiles et la récente hausse de prix du pétrole est due en partie à un manque d'investissement dans le nouveau champ de pétrole avec une crainte que l'offre ne soit pas suffisante pour répondre à la demande à moyen et long terme aussi. Les potentiels économiques d'une industrie pétrolière pour l'île Maurice est donc un enjeu capital et notre *timing* est idéal et M. le président, les députés de l'Opposition aiment citer de nombreux livres, études et rapports sur le futur de l'énergie fossile.

La vérité est qu'il y a une infinité de livres et de rapports sur le sujet mais qu'il n'y a pas de consensus définitif dans l'industrie du pétrole sur l'avenir de la demande de cette ressource et encore moins sur le timing de la transition énergétique. C'est une question politique et notre gouvernement a fait le choix d'aller de l'avant avec ce projet de loi comme annoncé dans notre manifeste électoral de 2019. On ne fait qu'exécuter notre stratégie de développement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all saw how the COP-26 ended up creating more divide than consensus on the future of energy. India and China worked to water down the final agreement so that coal use could be phased down, but not phased out. This marks the beginning of a strategy by these two global economic engines in which they openly assert their rights to use fossil fuels for their economic agendas and poverty eradication, just as western countries did during the last centuries.

According to the Environment Minister of India, Shree Bhupender Yadav, I quote –

“Developing countries are entitled to the responsible use of fossil fuels.”

He even went on to say that nations with little historical responsibility for climate change should not be held to the same standards as the world's biggest per capita carbon emitters.

In such a potential geo-political divide between western and eastern economic powers, Mauritius has to remain neutral and act wisely when choosing to develop its own potential offshore petroleum assets.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the energy transition is way too uncertain for Mauritius to take a definitive stance on its petroleum development strategy or even discard a potentially game-changing industry.

Again, in the absence of consensus, it is better that we remain conservative in our approach to the development of a potential petroleum industry so that we can benefit from a potential disconnect between wishful thinking and reality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Government, we have the duty to maximise the value of our offshore assets while they are still valuable. The question is not whether or not we should explore petroleum in the context of the COP-26 and my colleagues have already explained why there is no contradiction between producing petroleum and still striving to achieve a greener Mauritius. The question is rather, can we make it in time to extract value for our citizens before it is all over?

M. le président, l'Opposition joue son rôle de garde-fou en participant aux débats sur *l'Offshore Petroleum Bill*, mais elle doit également se montrer constructive dans son approche, en ayant l'intérêt économique du pays à cœur. Il est vrai que Maurice est un nouveau venu dans le domaine de l'exploration pétrolière, mais c'est tout simplement parce que l'Océan Indien est un territoire sous-exploré et sous-exploité, qui devait clairement attendre le bon moment pour prendre sa place dans ce domaine. Je suis convaincu que *l'Offshore Petroleum Bill* nous permettra de devenir une grande nation pétrolière si nous découvrons des réserves exploitables.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to conclude by saying that even though the Opposition seems to be reading the future using their usual crystal ball, nobody knows for sure how the energy transition will unfold, and what energy mix will support the future generations globally.

In the absence of certainty, it is the duty of our Government to make sure we do not miss this potential opportunity provided it is economically viable and ecologically sound by using offshore technologies which would have minimal impact on the blue economy sector.

It is clear that while the world rightly embraces the energy transition, we will still need oil and gas for many decades to come for all the sectors that have yet to adapt to clean renewable energy. The generations to come will thank us for having had the courage to venture in this potential game-changing industry for our country. Of course, under the visionary leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, all our efforts are geared towards leaving no stone unturned to make our country prosperous.

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

(6.38 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad that my legitimate right to intervene has been restored.

(Interruptions)

I was also very glad...

Mr Speaker: Do not react; make your speech!

Dr. Boolell: I am not reacting! Let it be! Hold your horse!

I am also very happy that the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping has ended on a prophetic and cautious note; it has to be ecologically sound.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is as controversial as the regime. What did it promise? I made it a point to read the speech made by the hon. Prime Minister. It promises a unified regulatory framework. We are landed with a loose cannon called Offshore Petroleum Bill.

This Bill is untimely and it conveys conflicting signals and goes against the very letter and spirit of the nationally designated contribution. This Bill should have been the subject of debate at the bar of public opinion. It is an affront to the nation, especially to our young. The regime rushes the Bill like fools where angels fear to tread. What signals are we sending to the financing agencies on mitigation and adaptation? It is tantamount to the rip up of the nationally designated contribution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the NGOs have been critical of this Bill and I do not know of anybody who has not been; *un crime contre la planète*, according to certain. To ward off pertinent

criticisms on the domestic and international front, the Prime Minister has deliberately tried to put the best spin on things to sell this Bill as a narrative of success, but he has failed, and failed abysmally. And why? For a fistful of dirty dollars! Beware of the boomerang effect, and we are on the constant gains of the low-lying countries and Small Island Developing States.

May I remind the House that the Secretary of the low-lying countries group, the former President of Maldives and Speaker of the Maldives Parliament felt that Mauritius has departed from its commitments as a Small Island Developing State. This Bill is likely to be a passport for massive corruption, for ecological disaster and geopolitical conflict. What is good for one power in the China Sea is equally good for another in the Indian Ocean.

I am the first to acknowledge that India has relevant data following seismic studies of the potential, not of oil, but of liquid natural gas in our EEZ and not far from the same maritime zone as Madagascar and Mozambique. In fact, if my memory serves me right, I think a delegation led by the former Deputy Prime Minister went to Seychelles, amongst other things, to raise this matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on geopolitical matters, I will not elaborate because of time constraint. But why an abrupt change? Why have we set aside what information the Indians have and which has been relayed to this Government? At one time, much emphasis was laid on liquefied natural gas. Poten & Partners was one of the companies which have shown interest. Suddenly, a sudden rush for black gold, Mr Speaker, Sir! Black gold!

I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will tell us, and I hope our sovereignty may not be undermined as the Bill has the hallmarks of an oil curse and a trapped economy. This is what the Bill has! The hallmarks of an oil curse and a trapped economy! We have to draw lessons both from oil trapped economy but also from success stories like Norway. This regime, unfortunately, does not have the moral scruple of Nordic Leaders. Transparency and accountability are not the norms, Mr Speaker, Sir! And what are the provisions of clause 83? The provision of clause 83 of the Bill empowers the Prime Minister to have unfettered powers. He is the judge, the jury and the executioner, Mr Speaker, Sir! The Department is the powerhouse, the trifecta bureaucracy and a hotbed of potential shady deals. Since the Prime Minister rules the waves, the allocation of licences will, indeed, make big waves.

There is no comparison to the Petroleum Act of 1970. Those were the days of check and balances, of safeguard. Mr Speaker, Sir, let us not fool ourselves. In the late 60s, Texaco was given a license to prospect in our EEZ before the hike and the price of petroleum products and the looming oil crisis. And the prospection was not carried out too far from Diego Garcia. There was no outcome from oil prospecting; the data collected are still relevant. I am sure the State has a copy of the relevant information.

Today, with constant breakthrough in technology and satellite mapping of our EEZ, oil prospecting companies will hedge their bets. Oil companies will go for low risks and high reward. Besides, what are the prospects of having companies which are prepared to spend millions on prospecting petroleum on the high seas at a time when there is so much opposition to fossil fuel, and even the future of the petroleum industry is uncertain?

In Glasgow, there was almost an endless debate over the process of phasing out or phasing down. But one thing is certain. The process to phase out or phase down is irreversible, and the death knell of coal power has been sounded. In other words, even oil prospection, exploration should also be weed off. The countdown has started though the counting for a phase down may be slow, arduous and long.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the wreck of Wakashio is a forewarning. And I hope we all take stock of the consequences and the fallout of the Wakashio wreck, Mr Speaker, Sir. And where in the world have title holders complied with the responsibilities, as spelt out in section 23 of the Bill, be it Shell in Nigeria, or Texaco in Mexico or US?

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are pressing matters which should be given top priority. A responsible Government should have wasted no time to impress upon UNCLOS to revisit the definition of “innocent passage”, which is not innocent at all. If anything, it is a boulevard for illicit activities and potential ecological disaster.

I'm glad that a seminar was organised jointly by the UNCLOS and the Office of the DPP at Le Meridien last Thursday, on maritime safety and security. High seas are relevant to flag state for prospecting and exploration of oil and sovereignty. And I am sure these pertinent issues were raised; the definition of “flag state” remains a major issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill is a testimony that Prime Minister went to Glasgow with a low level of ambition to the Summit. Otherwise, he would never miss an opportunity, not in Glasgow, to highlight the relevance and importance of our ocean economy, following the ruling given by ICG on territorial integrity and our willingness to declare part of our maritime zone over Chagos as the biggest marine protected area. It would have been a golden opportunity to obtain funding from international community on mitigation and adaptation for climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope, unlike the regrettable absence of some faces, the Prime Minister was in the Conference when the Prime Minister of Barbados, stunned world leaders, especially those from Developed World and those who chose to stay away from Glasgow with the language of naked truth.

Don't choose the path of greed to destroy our pristine environment. Environment impact and food security from land and sea should be high on our agenda. The blue and green economy should be our footprint, should be our blueprint, Mr Speaker, Sir. The choice is straightforward, Prime Minister: oil curse, trapped economy or sustainable development and food security. What can we expect from a Prime Minister who has turned carpetbagger with a view to auctioning our maritime zone for black gold at the expense of white gold pelagic fish and maritime ecosystem?

I can accept, and most of us can accept extraction of real element from the seabed and subsoil, but under no circumstances oil, which can be a curse and our economy would walk into a trap.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why the Prime Minister did not wait for the Summit to be over to sell his Offshore Petroleum Bill to potential investors. The Glasgow Summit was a mere excuse to peddle oil curse. Has Government become a lobbyist for oil cartel when the international community has reversed gear on fossil fuel to contain global warming to 1.5 degree centigrade, Mr Speaker, Sir, pre-industrial level?

Mr Speaker, Sir, New Delhi faces threat of a lockdown, not because of Coronavirus, but because of pollution from fossil fuel. And I hear our friends talking of prior to 2012. The then Government acted responsibly, proceeded as a pace which was reasonable to deliver on the ocean economy. We did not like fools rush in where others fear to tread, Mr Speaker, Sir. What was our objective to set up the Mauritian Oceanography Institute? And that was set up under our Government in 1999, to negotiate a Joint Management Agreement with Seychelles over part of

our continental shelf, and we obtained the agreement of the UN Continental Shelf Commission for our claim over part of our continental and followed by further submission to the Commission.

Seychelles and Mauritius made a joint submission before UNCLOS in New York. My good friend Patrick Pillay and I, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, delivered on undertaking before the committee. And I resolutely salute the commitment of two former Heads of State: Navin Ramgoolam and President Michel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are other pressing matters that need to be resolved. Do you know that the joint management area between Seychelles and Mauritius is yet to be resolved? I grant you, and at least if there is one thing the Bill shall not apply to prospection, exploration, recovery of seabed minerals or recovery of petroleum in that area between the two countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the regime has agreed that the Bill is a necessary component of a legal framework regarding our maritime zone, we want to guard against any unrealistic hope. We need an independent authority which has depth, scale and scope, and not a Department which will bend backwards to the whims and caprices of the regime. Where is the model agreement between the State and the oil prospecting company? It exists in countries which put premium on democratic values and act in the interest of the nation. If we need technical assistance, go to Norad. Norway is a showcase on management of Government Petroleum Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no shortage of gold diggers in this country. According to a famous jurist, and I quote –

“The Bill was the identification of four potential sites for petroleum exploration by a French company tasked with conducting geo-scientific studies on the possibility of oil reserves in the economic zone of Mauritius.”

As we say, it is in the bag and a recipe for shady deals. Who has heard of this French company? No one! What is its credibility? We do not know! I have it from reliable quarters, it has grease in its palms, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is it because it is all the machinery of corruption? Money politics of the regime overrides all legitimate concern. The management of Petroleum Fund under clause 74 stands doubtful. If loopholes are not plugged, it is a bonanza for looters. Parcelisation of our EEZ on its way with allocation of blocks and subblocks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I started highlighting that this legislation is anachronistic to our nationally designated contribution and a total departure from commitments as a SIDS. It is a betrayal to undertaking given to thriving for future, dashing the hope of present and future generations on the potential of the blue and the green economy. And as former Minister of Foreign Affairs together with colleagues from Seychelles, we turned both countries into a showcase of the ocean economy. Today, the regime of Pravind Jugnauth is one-track mind on the oil curse; this is the outcome of this Bill. This regime deserves more than a cursory look. I am done, thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Padayachy!

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy):

M. le président, de prime abord, je souhaiterais féliciter et remercier l'honorable Premier ministre de porter ce projet de loi devant la Chambre.

Ce texte s'inscrit en effet dans le cadre de l'engagement du gouvernement, tel qu'énoncé dans le Programme 2020-2024, de mettre en place un cadre moderne et bien réglementé pour le développement efficient et durable de nos ressources marines. Permettez-moi de rappeler à cette auguste Assemblée que le régime réglementaire actuel régissant le secteur pétrolier date de 1970. Et nous sommes, M. le président, en 2021. Quelques 50 années ont donc passé. Il était grand temps de procéder à la refonte de cette législation.

Conformément à la stratégie du gouvernement en faveur du développement du pays, nous avons toujours travaillé pour allier croissance économique et protection de notre environnement. L'introduction de l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* est bel et bien conforme à la vision portée par notre Premier ministre. Il reflète en effet le potentiel du progrès technologique couplé à la nécessité d'engagements plus élevés en matière de protection de notre environnement.

Au travers du Budget 2021-22, nous avons clairement énoncé nos ambitions en matière de lutte contre le dérèglement climatique. Il y a quelques mois à peine, notre gouvernement a présenté en plus le *Climate Change Bill*.

M. le président, le dernier trimestre de l'année 2021 marque la réouverture de nos frontières et en même temps de notre économie. C'est un nouveau départ. La confiance est là. L'optimisme prévaut.

La sortie de Maurice de la liste grise du GAFI témoigne de la détermination du gouvernement à ne négliger aucune piste pour remettre rapidement et durablement le pays sur la voie de la reprise économique. Le projet de loi présenté en ce jour est un autre exemple de nos efforts pour promouvoir un développement économique robuste.

M. le président, le projet de loi abrogera donc le *Petroleum Act* de 1970. Il fournira le cadre législatif approprié pour la conduite d'activités pétrolières dans les fonds marins et les bas-fonds des zones maritimes de Maurice, telles que la prospection, l'exploration et la production de pétrole.

A ce titre, l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* couvre, entre autres, les points suivants :

- le paiement de redevances, taxes, charges et autres droits exigibles en vertu des accords pétroliers ;
- les conditions attachées aux permis de prospection, aux licences d'exploration, aux licences de rétention et aux licences de production ;
- le rôle et les pouvoirs du *Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration (CSMZAE)* sous le *Prime Minister's Office* qui agira en tant qu'organe de régulation des activités pétrolières ; et
- la création d'un fonds spécial conformément à la section 74, à savoir le *Petroleum Fund*, où seront déposées toutes les sommes devant être versées en vertu de la loi, y compris pour les permis et les licences.

L'administration et la gestion du Fonds relèveront du ministère des Finances, de la Planification économique et du Développement.

M. le président, l'exploration pétrolière dans la zone économique exclusive de Maurice fait partie de la stratégie de l'économie bleue du pays. Pas plus tard qu'il y a quelques jours, Maurice a été reconnue pour ses initiatives innovantes visant à faciliter et à promouvoir l'investissement dans le secteur de l'économie bleue. Cette reconnaissance nous a été attribuée, excusez du peu, lors du Forum mondial de la Conférence des Nations unies sur le commerce et le développement qui s'est déroulé du 18 au 22 octobre 2021. `

Le développement de l'économie bleue a un impact direct sur l'économie en contribuant annuellement au secteur de l'export à hauteur de 700 millions de dollars. Et cela, principalement

dans les secteurs de la pêche et du *bunkering*. Le segment de l'approvisionnement lui-même a connu une croissance significative de l'ordre de 146% en volume entre 2015 et 2020.

Au regard de ces indications, il est évident que la diversification de l'économie bleue est indispensable pour dynamiser ce secteur émergent de notre économie.

M. le président, en effet, plusieurs initiatives ont été entreprises pour y parvenir. Avec une zone économique exclusive de 2,3 millions de km², les opportunités sont immenses. Nous nous devons de mettre en place les structures appropriées au profit des entreprises qui souhaitent prospecter, explorer et exploiter les ressources non vivantes telles que le pétrole.

Ce projet de loi témoigne de la ferme intention du gouvernement de poursuivre son projet d'économie bleue tout en veillant à ce que tous les garde-fous soient mis en place pour protéger les intérêts de l'État et de l'environnement.

M. le président, il est prématuré, à ce stade, de présager des retombées économiques du secteur. Nous n'en sommes qu'au début de la mise en place d'un cadre de prospection.

Néanmoins, nous pouvons estimer son potentiel en basant notre analyse sur les prévisions formulées par les États-Unis pour des initiatives similaires. Il a ainsi été estimé qu'un projet de 1,3 million de barils de pétrole par jour peut :

- générer près de 280 000 emplois ;
- contribuer jusqu'à 23,5 milliards de dollars par an.

M. le président, je vais maintenant aborder un aspect essentiel de ce texte de loi: le dégagement de revenus additionnels pour l'État et la taxation.

Si les activités de prospection et le modèle commercial d'exploitation sont concluants, les retombées économiques pour Maurice en termes de développement, d'investissement et de bien-être social seront conséquentes. A cet effet, il est nécessaire d'avoir un régime fiscal qui soit efficace pour assurer des bénéfices et des revenus à l'État.

A l'instar d'autres pays dans le monde et conformément aux meilleures pratiques, l'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* prévoit un régime fiscal à trois niveaux pour le pétrole, à savoir -

- l'impôt sur les revenus pétroliers,
- les redevances pétrolières, et

- l'impôt supplémentaires sur les bénéfices pétrolières.

De ce fait, conformément à l'*Income Tax Act*, une société pétrolière est, au cours d'une année financière, sujette à -

- l'impôt sur le revenu au taux de 15% de son revenu imposable ;
- une redevance pétrolière calculée au taux spécifié dans l'accord pétrolier, et
- l'impôt sur les bénéfices supplémentaires tirés du pétrole et calculé conformément aux dispositions de l'accord pétrolier.

M. le président, je passerai brièvement en revue ces trois sources de revenus fiscaux. Conformément à notre régime fiscal, le taux standard de l'impôt sur le revenu de 15% est applicable sur les bénéfices de toute entreprise qui prospecte et explore notre zone économique exclusive, en plus d'une contribution au CSR de 2%. Cette disposition reste inchangée dans le projet de loi.

La prospection et l'exploration étant une activité coûteuse et risquée, le taux d'imposition devrait en effet être attrayant pour attirer les entreprises dans ce secteur. Dans l'éventualité où du pétrole ou du gaz serait découvert et commercialisé, un régime fiscal adapté pour les industries extractives nécessite un mix de "*pay-as-you-produce*" et d'impôt sur le revenu. C'est pourquoi, dans le présent projet de loi, une redevance et un impôt sur le revenu supplémentaire seront prélevés en sus de l'impôt sur le revenu normal.

Une redevance sera ainsi imposée sur la valeur marchande du volume de pétrole extrait par les compagnies pétrolières. Le *modus operandi*, le taux et la méthodologie de calcul de la valeur marchande seront fixés par un accord pétrolier.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne l'impôt sur le revenu, comme je l'ai mentionné, une société pétrolière sera soumise à -

- l'impôt sur le revenu au taux normal de 15% et au CSR au taux de 2% , et
- un impôt supplémentaire sur les bénéfices pétroliers. Cette taxe sera payable si les bénéfices d'un opérateur dépassent un certain seuil.

L'objectif est de capter une partie des bénéfices qui leur reviendraient. Ce sera par exemple applicable en cas de hausse inattendue des prix du pétrole ou d'augmentation du niveau de production.

Toutefois, les volumes, les coûts de pompage, les prix de ventes, entre autres, varient selon le champ pétrolifère. Il est donc, plus qu'important, à ce que les seuils ainsi que les taux correspondants pour l'impôt supplémentaire sur les bénéfices et que les taux de redevances soient négociés et régis par un accord pétrolier.

M. le président, un *Petroleum Fund* sera par ailleurs créé en tant que *Special Fund* en vertu de la *Finance and Audit Act*. Dès lors, le paiement des charges et autres frais par les compagnies pétrolières sera crédité à ce Fonds. Je tiens à indiquer que le *Petroleum Fund* sera administré par un Comité de gestion et que sa structure de gouvernance sera définie par des règlements.

Pour ce qui est de l'utilisation des ressources financières, toutes les sommes créditées au Fonds seront utilisées au profit du développement économique de notre pays et pour le bénéfice des générations futures.

M. le président, avant de conclure, permettez-moi de réitérer l'engagement de ce gouvernement en faveur d'un développement économique durable et soutenu pour notre pays. Tout en examinant l'aspect économique du projet de loi, nous n'avons pas négligé les impacts environnementaux potentiels de ces activités.

En effet, le nouveau projet de loi sur le pétrole *offshore* intègre des sections de la *Environment Protection Act* de 2002 afin de s'assurer qu'il reste respectueux des normes environnementales que Maurice a établies.

Le nouveau projet de loi prévoit également l'obligation d'une évaluation de l'impact sur l'environnement avant le début de l'exploration ou de la production de pétrole. Il exige également que des stratégies d'atténuation soient étudiées avec la protection de l'environnement marin et la prévention de la pollution en ligne de mire.

En sus, le cadre législatif portant sur les hydrocarbures *offshore* comprend également un *Environmental Code of Practice*. Il contient des dispositions visant à assurer la protection de

l'environnement marin et à préserver le potentiel des ressources naturelles pour les générations futures.

M. le président, à entendre les intervenants de l'autre côté de la Chambre, il est triste et décevant de constater qu'ils persistent à faire de la politique sur tout. Et cela de façon systématique et irréfléchie. Or, ils devraient adhérer à la notion d'intérêt national. Comme lorsque notre pays est sorti de la liste de GAFI, ils auraient dû applaudir et non bouder et ronchonner dans leurs coins.

Dans un discours décousu et sans queue ni tête encore une fois, l'honorable Dr. Arvin Boolell a fait un faux procès au gouvernement en nous imputant toute sorte de motifs malveillants. Permettez-moi de rappeler que lorsque l'honorable Dr. Boolell était ministre des Affaires étrangères dans le gouvernement Travilliste, il se faisait le champion du concept de l'État océan. Mais, pour ne pas changer, son concept à lui était vide, sans aucune substance, sans aucune vision. Le vide complet, le néant.

Il nous parle de corruption potentielle, or il oublie, ou fait semblant d'oublier ce gros coffre dégoulinant de billets de banque, flambant neuf. Ou encore les pâtes Panzani, cette photo qui a circulée. Il essaie de faire oublier ces images, mais malheureusement ces images resteront gravées.

M. le président, ce gouvernement sous le leadership du Premier ministre, Pravind Jugnauth vient non seulement proposer une vision mais aussi, et surtout, un cadre de gouvernance moderne et avant-gardiste qui servira de prémisse juridique, règlementaire et institutionnel au développement durable des ressources de la mer.

L'*Offshore Petroleum Bill* s'inscrit dans le droit fil de cette vision. Le Programme du Gouvernement 2020-2024 avait, rappelons-le, un *Petroleum Bill*, un *Seabed Mineral Bill* et un *Marine Biotechnology* hub comme des éléments constituant l'architecture de l'économie bleue qui se met en place.

Je tiens à rappeler à l'Opposition que l'équilibre entre le développement économique et social et la protection de l'environnement est au cœur de la vision de ce gouvernement. Ce projet de loi établit des droits mais aussi des responsabilités pour les autorités ainsi que pour l'industrie, qu'ils soient économiques, sociaux ou environnementaux. Il nous incombe maintenant d'attirer

les entreprises du secteur pour faire de ce potentiel de création de richesse et d'emploi une réalité.

Je termine en citant Tite-Live –

« Il faut oser ou se résigner à tout. »

Merci de votre attention.

(7.15 p.m.)

Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): *Le Offshore Petroleum Bill* avait été introduit à la Chambre à la veille du COP26. Et puis, il y a eu le COP26, et, aujourd'hui, les débats reprennent quelques jours à peine après qu'un expert des Nations Unies, le Dr. Orellana, vient de nous mettre en garde et vient de demander au gouvernement de ne pas aller de l'avant.

Nous savons tous quel était le but du COP26 : empêcher que le réchauffement planétaire ne dépasse 1.5°, et pour ce faire, réduire au maximum le plus vite possible l'usage du charbon et du pétrole. COP26 a été un échec, il faut le reconnaître. COP26 a été un échec par rapport à ce but d'empêcher que le réchauffement de la planète ne dépasse 1.5°. Mais, il y a eu des percées et l'avenir a été préservé. En effet, alors que les ambitions des différents pays concernant le *climate change* étaient présentées tous les cinq ans, et là, ces ambitions ont été présentées à COP26. Et pas maintenant, dorénavant, tous les ans, chaque pays, y compris l'île Maurice, devra revoir à la hausse ses ambitions. C'est une grande avancée mais il faut construire cet avenir. Et en même temps, pour la première fois depuis toujours les producteurs de pétrole et de charbon avaient réussi à bloquer toutes références aux conférences des Nations Unies au charbon et au pétrole. Cette fois-ci, mention est faite de ces deux produits, et condamnée pour la première fois. C'est pourquoi COP26 a été un échec mais l'avenir a été préservé. C'est à nous, tout le monde, la planète entière de construire cet avenir.

Et il ne faut pas oublier que la COP26 a vu la naissance d'une nouvelle alliance internationale, le *BOGA – Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance*. Les pays qui y voient loin, qui regardent de loin ont créé une nouvelle alliance - *Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance*, avec à la tête l'Irlande, la France, la Nouvelle-Zélande, le Danemark. Et en même temps, il ne faut pas oublier que tout ça s'est fait après un rapport en date de mai de l'*International Energy Agency* qu'est

l'organisation pour les questions de pétrole, d'énergie en général ; international - tous les pays, tous les grands pays, tous les pays moyens en sont membres sauf la Russie. Dans un rapport de mai, l'*International Energy Agency* avait réclamé la fin des investissements dans des nouveaux projets charbon et pétrole. Et avant moi, l'honorable Lobine a bien cité cette phrase de cet expert des Nations Unies, le Dr. Orellana, dans son ébauche de rapport –

“Allowing for oil exploration in the knowledge of the climate emergency is akin to self-injury, and it is incompatible with the human rights obligations to respect and protect the rights to life, health, and a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment.”

Seulement, il faut regarder les choses en face. Tout ça remet en question le charbon, en toute priorité, et le pétrole; mais, il y a les autres pays. La semaine dernière à Madagascar a décidé de relancer la prospection pour le pétrole à Madagascar. Les Seychelles continuent de chercher. L'Afrique du Sud continue de permettre la prospection pour le pétrole. Il faut voir tout cela, mais il faut aussi écouter les experts quand il faut les écouter.

Sur le plan mondial, M. le président, l'évolution réaliste qu'on peut souhaiter et travailler pour, c'est le *natural gas*. Ce qui se fait, ce qui est en train de se passer sous nos yeux à l'échelle internationale, le *natural gas* va remplacer de plus en plus le charbon et le pétrole en attendant que ces deux produits disparaissent de la circulation. Élimination du charbon et du pétrole, gaz naturel comme un *stopgap measure* en attendant que le *battery technology* pour storer l'énergie renouvelable se développe, et que le *hydrogen technology* aussi se développe. Le monde est en train d'évoluer dans cette direction. Ici, à Maurice, nous avons éliminé le gaz naturel. Il faut y réfléchir bien. Mais nous avons éliminé - nous avons décidé d'éliminer le gaz naturel. Si ça se passe au plan mondial, ici, à Maurice, il ne faut pas oublier que le *Petroleum Act* de 1970 permettait la prospection déjà, et la prospection s'est faite ; on a mentionné Texaco et d'autres cas aussi. Donc, le *Petroleum Act* de 1970 permettait déjà la prospection et elle s'est faite. Mais nos engagements sont maintenant quoi ? Le temps passe.

J'entends des orateurs parfois faire référence à ce qu'on a dit 20 ans, 25 ans de cela, mais aujourd'hui on est à l'heure de Glasgow, l'année prochaine en Égypte. Quels sont nos engagements ? Extrêmement ambitieux les engagements de la petite île Maurice ! Éliminer le charbon *before 2030*, pas d'ici 2030 ! Éliminer le charbon et je suis tout à fait d'accord. Éliminer le charbon *before 2030* et produire 60 % de *renewable energy by 2030* - d'ici 2030. Mais

éliminer le charbon *before 2030* ! Et cela, je pense qu'on n'y réfléchit pas assez, nous prenons cela comme un engagement vis-à-vis des Nations Unies, vis-à-vis de la communauté internationale à un moment où la bagasse diminue d'année en année. La superficie sous canne diminue d'année en année, malgré que maintenant on commence à donner un prix valable. Mais ça va continuer à baisser. On prend l'engagement d'éliminer le charbon *before 2030*, alors que la bagasse diminue et que vous avez – vous, en tant que gouvernement - éliminé le gaz naturel. Parfois j'ai envie de re-réfléchir à cela. *Li pas tro tar*.

Comment réussir cette transition? C'est angoissant. C'est un des défis les plus difficiles à relever d'ici 2030. Comment réussir cette transition à Maurice, en finir avec le charbon, s'éloigner du pétrole au maximum, aller vers les énergies renouvelables au maximum, le *battery technology*, c'est un défi immense que la petite île Maurice aura à relever; un enjeu national et vital. C'est pourquoi nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre. L'île Maurice n'a pas de temps à perdre, elle n'a pas le temps de ne pas prendre les décisions qu'il faut. Ce sont des décisions difficiles. De quoi on parle ces temps-ci? On parle mal et on ne parle pas assez. Comment réussir? Aujourd'hui, le charbon et la bagasse, c'est le cœur de notre énergie. La CEB importe *heavy oil*, les produits pétroliers mais le charbon et la bagasse, c'est le cœur, le moteur de notre production d'électricité.

Alors maintenant, on parle mais on ne parle pas assez, pas assez sérieusement y compris le gouvernement. On parle de nouvelles centrales électriques; *non-coal*, ça veut dire nécessairement l'huile lourde, produits pétroliers. Qui va faire ça? Quel va être le rôle de la CEB? Quel va être le rôle des compagnes sucrières qui, pour le moment, se servent de bagasse et de charbon? On parle de biomasse miraculeux. Ça ne va pas être facile. On parle de *green waste use*, tout ça oui, il faut en discuter; il faut travailler là-dessus et certains le font mais pas au niveau national. Je ne sens pas que le gouvernement est conscient que nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre; que cette transition énergétique dont je parle va décider - pétrole ou pas pétrole - de l'avenir du pays en général.

Je souhaite moi un débat national et urgent sur cette transition énergétique Nous sommes où nous sommes. Nous ne perdons pas notre temps à rêver de pétrole alors qu'il est déjà tard, très tard pour réussir cette transition énergétique.

Je pense qu'il faut aussi réfléchir si nous trouvons du pétrole commercialement viable. 'Si'. Qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire pour protéger ce pays, pour préserver ce pays-là? Mon ami, l'honorable Boolell a parlé avec raison du *Oil Curse*, la malédiction du pétrole. Malheureusement, la plupart des pays qui ont découvert le pétrole de par le monde, pas tous mais la plupart des pays, ça a été leur malheur - le *Oil Curse*. Il suffit de fermer les yeux et de voir le Nigéria mais pas seulement le Nigéria; le Venezuela, l'Angola, le Congo, je peux continuer. La plupart des pays qui ont découvert du pétrole, ont attiré sur eux, la malédiction du pétrole - le *Oil Curse*.

D'abord, le *Oil Curse* concernant l'environnement et là, il est bon de rappeler que dans son discours, le Premier ministre avait reconnu sans hésitation et bravo, avait reconnu que *we are also mindful on the environmental and ecological risks associated with petroleum activities* mais il ne faut pas le dire; ça peut passer à autre chose. Le risque est énorme. Wakashio est là pour nous le rappeler et je ne souhaite pas le malheur de Maurice mais Wakashio peut être un badinage comparé à ce qu'on a vu à travers le monde; en termes d'explosions, des fuites gigantesques dans le golfe de Mexico, un peu partout, si on ne prend pas toutes les précautions nécessaires si on découvre du pétrole commercialement viable. Mais pas seulement les risques à l'environnement; à l'économie toute entière.

Regardons les pays qui ont découvert du pétrole. Mais tout le reste de l'économie disparaît. Il y a une *distortion* de l'économie. On ne parle plus que pétrole; on ne court plus qu'après le pétrole et les autres secteurs y compris tourisme dans certains pays, ont couru à la catastrophe et la corruption. Il y a très peu de pays qui ont découvert du pétrole et qui ne se sont pas noyés dans la corruption à tel point que la corruption nourrie par le pétrole, a mis en danger la démocratie elle-même dans beaucoup de pays. J'ai mentionné le Venezuela. Et là je pense qu'il y a un pays que nous devrions tous étudier attentivement; Guyana, la Guyane ex-britannique. La Guyane a une forêt amazonienne extraordinaire et la Guyane était donnée en exemple, the *green country* à l'avant-garde et à tel point que la Norvège; on cite beaucoup la Norvège avec raison. La Norvège avait des milliards mais il est en train d'arrêter parce que maintenant Guyana court derrière le pétrole, à découvert du pétrole mais pendant des années, la Norvège a subventionné les forêts de Guyana à coût de milliards. Mais là, depuis deux ans, Guyana a commencé à exploiter son pétrole et je dois dire, je vous cite un article. C'est Exxon,

un des grands majors, une grande compagnie pétrolière; Exxon, qui est entrée en Guyana, qui a découvert du pétrole et qui est en train d'exploiter à mort -

“Exxon’s oil drilling gamble off Guyana coast poses major environmental risk”

Et ils se sont faits avoir. La Guyane s'est fait avoir par ce monstre américain -

“Guyana to seek better royalties and terms for future oil contracts.”

On a à faire à des *bébêtes là*. Cette compagnie pétrole internationale, ils ont l'argent, ils ont le pouvoir mais surtout l'argent. Je suggère au gouvernement de suivre de près ce qui se passe depuis deux ans là et maintenant ces jours-ci, en Guyana. Et, en Guyana aussi, mais surtout encore une fois la Norvège. Ce *fund* dont le ministre des Finances a parlé tout à l'heure, qu'on va ramasser si on découvre du pétrole encore une fois, en quantité commerciale, tous les profits, tout ça seront mis dans un *fund* géré par - mais ce n'est pas ça qu'il faut faire enfin. Ce n'est pas ça que la Norvège a fait. La Norvège à un fonds indépendant, géré de façon professionnelle, moderne.

Même Guyana a voté un Acte. La Guyane ex-britannique a voté un Acte du Parlement rien que pour mettre sur pied ce *national fund*. Soyons sérieux. 4 lignes dans ce texte de loi, pas 5 lignes, 4 lignes dans ce texte de loi pour annoncer un fonds qui sera géré par le Ministre des Finances. Mais ce n'est pas comme ça; pétrole ou pas pétrole, ce n'est pas comme ça que l'île Maurice va progresser. Donc, j'adresse les mises en garde, si on découvre du pétrole commercialement viable, il faut à tout prix éviter ce *Oil Curse* que tant de pays ont connu.

M. le président, j'ai écouté attentivement le discours du Premier ministre quand il a présenté le texte de loi. Je dois dire que ça m'a laissé beaucoup sur ma faim. Il y a beaucoup de renseignements que je souhaitais entendre mais qui n'étaient pas là.

Par exemple, quand le Premier ministre est venu dire qu'en terme d'expert advice, le Commonwealth nous a aidé. Très bien, le Commonwealth parfois fait un très bon travail, mais initialement, le final Bill, à quelle critique d'experts, examen d'experts, le final Bill dans la final version qui est devant nous, quel avis d'expert a été recherché ? Mais il n'est pas trop tard. Je reparle de Guyana. Ils sont en train de faire face à beaucoup de problèmes mais ils ont appris très vite. On peut tap their experience. Mais l'Inde aussi, L'Inde a une vaste expertise et c'est un pays ami là, de l'autre côté de l'Océan Indien.

Donc, moi j'aurais souhaité que le gouvernement - il n'est pas trop tard - aille rechercher l'avis d'experts. La Norvège aussi je suis sûr, seulement, je ne sais pas avec ce que cet expert des Nations Unies vienne de dire, je ne sais pas. Mais la Norvège, l'Inde, Guyana, il n'est pas trop tard, allons leur demander leur avis d'expert, ce que leur expérience leur dit sur le texte qui est finalement devant nous.

Pareillement, en ce qui concerne la Compagnie Générale de Géophysique, - compagnie française - le Premier ministre nous a dit qu'il y avait eu un accord. Il y a eu un accord signé avec eux, il y a eu *four selected areas*, mais on est en droit de savoir où ces *selected areas*, pourquoi *four selected areas*, *how identified* ? Est-ce que cette compagnie qui a un accord depuis plusieurs années déjà avait commencé son travail dans ces *four selected areas* ? Est-ce qu'ils sont toujours là ?

Je cite les chiffres de pertes que j'ai découvertes sur internet naturellement de ce fameux groupe CGG –

- Avant le Covid, en 2019, ils avaient fait 69 millions de dollars de pertes. Avant le Covid, en 2019 !
- En 2020 avec le Covid, ils ont accumulé 442 millions de dollars de pertes !

Est-ce qu'ils sont toujours là ? Est-ce qu'ils sont toujours intéressés ? Dites-nous ! On a le droit de savoir. Le pays a le droit de savoir. De même, je pense que nous avons droit à une copie de cet accord avec cette Compagnie Générale de Géophysique.

Une chose, je dis un grand bravo à mon collègue l'honorable Dr. Boolell, c'est que Maurice et les Seychelles ont réussi à faire ensemble. Cet accord de 2012/2013. Exemple ! Je ne connais pas un cas à part ça où deux pays, au lieu de se discuter, ils mettent la tête ensemble comme on dit. Exemple ! Bravo ! Et il faut préserver cela, il faut construire là-dessus. Ça c'était un exploit !

Et maintenant, si on va aller chercher du pétrole, là aussi dans ce *joint continental shelf*, on prend toutes les précautions. J'ai noté que le Premier ministre avait dit que *separate legislation* sera présenté sans tarder et en faisant bien attention de ne pas froisser, de ne pas antagoniser les Seychelles. Mais seulement, si on regarde au-delà des Seychelles, il y a un peu problèmes dans l'air. Il y a un litige de souveraineté entre Maurice et Maldives. Pas ce qui vient

de se passer devant une Cour Internationale de Justice, non ! Il y a un litige parce que Maurice mesure sa zone économique à partir des Chagos, Maldives mesure sa zone économique à partir de l'île la plus rapprochée des Chagos et il y a un conflit. Moi, je souhaite qu'on fasse bien attention aux Maldives aussi et qu'on règle, parce que ça vient mordre sur le ton, nous avons besoin des Maldives. Il faut une entente Maldives-Maurice. Il faut pardonner certaines choses que les Maldives ont faites récemment mais il faut regarder l'avenir. Mais il y a un litige ! Il faut y travailler.

Et bien sûr, il y a aussi le litige sur Tromelin. Est-ce qu'on va aller prospecter ? Parce que nous, nous avons toujours dit, que Tromelin est sous souveraineté mauricienne. Donc, strictement, la loi que nous votons là, s'applique. Donc, je demande que dès à présent, au-delà de ce texte de loi, qu'on regarde l'avenir, qu'on fasse les efforts nécessaires en direction des Seychelles, en direction des Maldives et des autres îles dans l'Océan Indien.

Je vais terminer, M. le président, en disant ceci : la loi de 1970 méritait d'être mise à jour, oui ! Mais de mon point de vue, je le dis sans aucun fanatisme, je le dis avec tout ce que j'ai lu, que j'ai travaillé, la loi qui est devant nous aujourd'hui est un recul par rapport à la loi de 1970. C'est un recul surtout en ce qui concerne l'absence de transparence et en ce qui concerne les *tenders* éventuels. C'est un recul.

Là, ce que cette loi fait, c'est tout mettre entre les mains du Premier ministre, du *Prime Minister's Office* et de ce département, *the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration*, qui est un département du *Prime Minister's Office*. Je ne crois pas qu'il y a un autre pays qui fasse ça. Dans tous les pays respectables, sérieux que j'ai étudiés, il y a un organisme indépendant, une institution indépendante, séparée des ministères qui gère ce dossier zone économique, pétrole, etc. Et là aussi, il n'est pas trop tard. Pour notre propre crédibilité, il ne faut pas aller de l'avant avec ce qu'on est en train de proposer, tout centraliser dans le *Prime Minister's Office*, ce département du *Prime Minister's Office*. Je demande, moi, que ce soit réexaminé. Il y a une chose aussi qui m'a bien troublé. Il y a une phrase dans le discours du Premier ministre, le Premier ministre nous avait informé qu'un comité sera mis sur pied, je le cite –

“A committee comprising all relevant institutions and experts will be set up with the mandate to examine all title applications.”

Mais c'est une phrase clé –

“A committee comprising all relevant institutions and experts will be set up with the mandate to examine all title applications.”

Formidable! Formidable en termes de transparence! Sauf que ça ne figure pas dans le *Bill* du tout ! Ça figure dans le discours du Premier ministre avec raison. C'est annoncé dans le discours du Premier ministre. Ce matin encore, j'ai réexaminé page par page, paragraphe par paragraphe, je n'ai trouvé aucune part dans le texte de loi une référence à ce comité.

Il y a bien autre chose à dire en ce qui concerne cette décision de tout mettre dans les mains du Premier ministre, dans les mains du *Prime Minister's Office*, dans les mains de ce département du *Prime Minister's Office*.

C'est pourquoi je terminerais, M. le président, en souhaitant - en tant que patriote, en tant que mauricien - que le gouvernement prenne le temps de revoir le *Bill*. Le *Bill* avait été présenté à la veille du COP26, ensuite mis en parenthèse. Maintenant, nous reprenons les débats après ce rapport d'experts des Nations unies. Je demanderai quant à moi, parce que ce projet de loi est un recul par rapport à 1970 sous certains aspects - c'est une avancée sous certains autres aspects mais j'aurais souhaité, en tant que patriote, en tant que Mauricien, quelques jours après le COP26, alors que nous préparons déjà le COP27, alors que nous allons chercher des milliards, avec raison, pour protéger notre environnement, qu'on prenne le temps.

J'aurais souhaité moi que le gouvernement revoie certains aspects de ce *Bill* et que nous trouvions un consensus.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(7.44 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Merci M. le président. M. le président, permettez-moi de m'adresser à la Chambre très brièvement - autant que ça puisse se faire - sur ce projet de loi si important pour le Gouvernement et la nation dans son ensemble. Malheureusement, tel n'est pas le cas semblerait-il pour l'Opposition. Tant pis !

Mais je dois vous dire que j'ai écouté, j'ai lu et j'ai relu les discours des honorables membres de l'Opposition. Hormis, peut-être, le précédent orateur, l'argumentaire de l'Opposition a été truffé d'exagération, d'incohérence, de contradiction, de démagogie et beaucoup de procès d'intention.

Le Leader de l'Opposition lui-même dans son discours, il s'est acharné sur ce projet de loi. Je vais le citer. C'est juste pour souligner les incohérences de l'Opposition. Voici ce qu'a dit le Leader de l'Opposition, M. le président –

« There is no guarantee that any oil will be found... that oil in sufficient commercial quantities will be found and extracted. »

parce que, dit-il –

« Mauritian waters are extremely deep. »

Et il ajoute –

« What is the commercial benefit of extracting oil in Mauritius deep waters? »

Donc, il décide, lui –

« The quantity, even if it is there and whether the price will be sufficient to cover the cost of extraction. »

Que des suppositions, M. le président ! Des hypothèses, des spéculations, rien de concret, rien de scientifique basé sur des données saines ! Sans aucune étude sérieuse, il arrive à de telles conclusions. Puis, il *challenge the oil project itself. He addresses the problem of transparency. He comments on the license granted to CGG* et il commence à faire des procès d'intention comme je viens de dire. And the hon. Minister of environment so rightly reminded him that, in his capacity of Minister of Finance a few years ago, he was part of the Government, which, in 2015, presented the Government Programme to this House, *dont le paragraphe 223 lit comme suit* –

“Government will actively promote research expedition in our quest for fossil fuel and other minerals that can be suitably exploited.”

Mais pire, en 2015, le Cabinet d'alors agreed that a regulatory framework will be elaborated for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in the Exclusive Economic

Zones of Mauritius and the extended continental shelf, except the part under the joint jurisdiction and jointly managed by Mauritius and Seychelles.

En effet, en 2015, following assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat, a Technical Committee was set up under the Chairperson of the Director-General Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploitation to work on the new draft of the Offshore Petroleum Bill, M. le président.

This Committee was conducting several working sessions from the draft Bill and it comprised, *inter alia*, representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the AG's Office, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Blue Economy, *M. le président*. Then, thereafter, drafting instructions were submitted to the AG for the finalisation of the Bill. *Voilà donc en ce qu'il s'agit de l'amnésie du Leader de l'Opposition, M. le président.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of the Opposition, in fact, have expressed their disagreement with this Bill on an environmental, ecological, climate change perspective, or a good governance transparency issue. Unfortunately, I will not be able to rebut all the different points that they made with regard to these two principal issues in challenging this Bill.

The Leader of the Opposition, hon. Mohamed, in their attempt to discredit the Bill, the project of setting up this new regulatory regime for the prospecting, exploitation and production of petroleum, came up with this idea which we all remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, and one of their main arguments was about this public auction. To quote the hon. Leader of the Opposition –

“... there seems to be no mention of auction in the whole process.”

Hon. Uteem also argued in his speech –

“Where is the requirement to have a tender exercise? Where is the requirement to have an auction?”

And hon. Mohamed also –

“Auction procedures are an important means of selecting the most suitable company for production...”

He was quoting from a report to the CMI Institute to make his case. *Aucune procedure!* No auction procedure, Mr Speaker, Sir. And this was, according to him, the “means of avoiding the pitfalls of corruption”. I am quoting his own words.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to denounce this hypocrisy of the argument of where is the public auction. Let me remind these hon. Members, and the House also, Mr Speaker, Sir, that auction procedures, two already exist in our legislation, and they are available for use in the cases of leasing *Pas Géométriques* and State Land in our two pieces of legislation, which I have in my hand: the State Land Act and the *Pas Géométriques* Act. The sections there prescribe auction in case of granting lease with regard to *Pas Géométriques* and State Land.

And we are all aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that beaches, *Pas Géométriques* which are public assets, have been commercially exploited in our country, have been leased by the Labour/PMSD Government to promoters so many times. But the procedure of an auction, which exists in our Law, has never been used *quand il s’agissait de* lease of *Pas Géométriques* land, even to individuals or to Corporates. Why then now are they claiming that there should have been the mention of auction, the procedure of auction, in this Bill that we are debating, when in the case of many touristic projects, we know, Mr Speaker, Sir, many hotel projects in spite of the fact that auction procedure is inserted in our law. When they were in power, this procedure has never been used to dispose or to lease land to hotel promoters.

M. le président, I am today, I must tell you, privileged to be able to comment on this piece of legislation. This Bill, according to me, could be a new dawn to lead our nation to scale up its development strategies and usher in a new era of economic development and prosperity.

A lot has been said, Mr Speaker, Sir, about the country being a large ocean state, indeed, I will not repeat what has been said before me but with this EEZ of 2,300,000 km², we have indeed an immense expanse of ocean over which we exercise various rights and jurisdiction. The size of our EEZ puts up at the 19th place, *19ème place*, of the world’s largest ocean states right after India. By comparison, our EEZ is as big as the land size of the second largest country in Africa, the DRC, the Democratic Republic of Congo; three times the land size of France. In addition to our EEZ and expanse of approximately 400,000 km² of extended continental shelf is jointly managed by Mauritius and the Seychelles.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this size of our maritime zone is a potential boon for us. Only timid exploitations with indeterminate results have been conducted since now. The problem has been: words have not been followed by actions. And this is a change that is happening today by way of this piece of legislation and this will be the change. It is but normal that a country should make an inventory of its assets and should know what resources are available in this huge zone. Ever since the concept of ocean economy has become part of our national discourse, in fact, in the past lip service was paid to developing this sector. All acknowledge the immense potential of the blue economy; many preach that the blue economy is a panacea for the next generation economic boom of the country. Yet it is only today, through the vision and courage of our Prime Minister, that the dream will be translated into concrete reality. This legislation before the House is an avant-garde as it is bold, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Prospection for petrol done by commercial companies which have the know-how, the experience, the personnel and the equipment for carrying out such studies are normal. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, any prospection should be carried out under a proper legal framework which lists out all the measures for safeguarding the interest of the country and for safeguarding its environment. This is why this Bill is being presented to the Assembly; without this law we would not have a framework to enable the prospection of our maritime zone and it is normal for us to have an inventory of our existing assets. The law of the sea exists since independence; our EEZ has been delimited since decades back. How much has been done to explore and determine our assets, Mr Speaker, Sir? Some people are asking: why now? The question is: why not now? Mr Speaker, Sir, how much time are we going to waste?

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is the fitting response of our Government and which will propel the development of the country to another level. Our transformative journey from mono-crop agriculture to manufacturing and onward to financial services must have a befitting legacy. The sustainable development of our country must be put in surer path. The objective of this Government is to scan the horizon after 2030 to foster favourable conditions to create an enabling environment for the future generations to pursue on the path of sustainability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for too long the absence of a proper national framework to unlock the potential of the ocean economy has hampered the development of this country. This Bill overrules the existing legislative framework governing the petroleum sector aligning it to

international best practices and not only modernizes the outdated 1970 Petroleum Act, but it reflects our international commitments with respect to the environment and resource governance. The Bill represents a valuable building block in the development of the blue economy. The approach taken fits with the Government's vision on sustainable development and under this Bill, oil exploration and exploitation would become an integral part of the blue economy together with the requisite parameters to ensure sustainable use of the resources found in our ocean.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment and other orators on this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, have already elaborated on the multiple necessary safeguards to ensure optimum marine environmental protection and for the application of precautionary measures including the EIA, the creation of an offshore petroleum environmental code of practice as well as a safety code of practice. I will not comment more on this aspect.

This Bill encapsulates the protection of the environment as a key driver of development, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Government is fully committed to preserving the environment and as on the basis of expert advice included in the Bill are necessary safeguards and parameters to protect the environment. The Bill requires that a proper assessment of possible environmental impact will have to be undertaken prior to granting a licence. It provides for the development of environmental code of practice with clearly defined parameters on the protection of marine environment and marine ecosystem, preservation of Marine biodiversity and species of wild flora and fauna amongst others. And this code of practice will be developed, as we can see, in broad consultation to those key stakeholders to ensure that it is an inclusive process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would say a few words on what is now termed as the transition process. And I will come to what the hon. orator before me said concerning the Norwegian Government. But before I do so, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like just to say that we must look at this scenario, for example, if we decide not to carry out exploration for petroleum because like other countries we have taken commitment to move towards renewable energy. But we should remember, Mr Speaker, Sir that the move to renewable energy to a green economy is not instantaneous, *instantané*. There is a transition period; during the transition period we still have to import petroleum products; during this period most cars will still run on petrol. How many commercial flights today ran on renewable energy? Do we see any change in the coming years? It is going to be quite some time before commercial flights run on renewable energy. What do we

do in the meantime continue our imports while not even exploring whether we have any reserves; we have assets, Mr Speaker, Sir; do we ignore them and keep importing? Do we have a substitute yet for the LPG which we use extensively for cooking in Mauritius? LPG is made from crude oil, but it is less polluting. If we decide to make the big move tomorrow, do we go back to cooking on wood fire or do we use an electric cooker which still uses electricity generated from fossil fuels Mr Speaker, Sir? There is no simple solution. What we are debating today, Mr Speaker, Sir, *est quelque chose de très compliqué*. There is equilibrium, *une balance qu'il faut garder*. We need to plan the transition and during this transition, they will still be a place for petroleum products and not necessarily for energy production only.

Remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the transition is for moving towards renewable energy and not for stopping the use of petroleum products. Do you foresee any immediate substitution product for asphalt, for bitumen? These are used for surfacing of roads, these are produced from crude oil. We do not necessarily have to use our crude oil once we find it for generating energy. We can exploit it for its other uses. There are so many essential products used today that are produced from crude oil and from which there is no substitute yet: solvents, ink, car tyres, nylon ropes, heart valves, anaesthetics, several medicines, aspirin, antihistamines, ammonia using several industrial processes and refrigerants to name only a few.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, oil exploration is not just for energy generation. This is too simplistic a way of looking at things. There is more to oil than just petrol for engines. Let us move from this narrow vision. There is a big industrial link to non-energy petroleum products and it is in this direction that we should look. And I wanted here, Mr Speaker, Sir, to come back to what hon. Ramano quoted when he was making his speech. He quoted from a document called 'Mapping the oil and gas industry to the Sustainable Development Goals: An Atlas.' This is what is said in that Report, and I quote –

“As recognized in Sustainable Development Goal 7 (Clean Energy), countries need affordable and reliable energy to run modern economies. Countries want to ensure that the transition to net-zero emissions will not sacrifice economic development, high employment and other social objectives. Moving from a high-emission world economy to a net-zero emission economy over the course of the century will require concerted scale-up actions by Government, business and civil society. To help implement some of the

elements that will be needed to reach a net-zero emission future, the oil and gas industry has a unique role to play. In the near term, natural gas can serve as an effective transition fuel, helping countries to switch from coal-fired power to a cleaner alternative while, (...).”

Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps it is for that reason that the recently elected Norwegian Government, – and this is to answer directly to what hon. Bérenger said before me – Mr Speaker, Sir, has decided to expand and not to dismantle its offshore petroleum industry. Norway will carry on exploring and producing from new oil and gas offshore fields for the decades to come in order to be able to extract the full value from their continental shelf assets. They intend to make sure the transition towards a greener energy industry is gradual and yet, Norway is also a global leader in climate change initiatives and even a member of the International Energy Agency, Mr Speaker, Sir.

It is true that the EIA has recommended that new offshore oil and gas exploration should be stopped. However, if Norway has decided not to follow this recommendation when it is a member of the EIA, Mr Speaker, Sir, we must take this as an example. With all due respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a lesson that we have to learn from and this is why I was making this argument and quoting from this UNDP document, which I was just quoting and which was referred to by the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end up by saying the following. I come to this regulatory framework and in terms of this regulatory framework in the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill proposes a well-defined framework which will help attract investors to develop the blue economy sector. The Bill creates an investor-friendly regulatory and licensing framework with clear and predictable requirements enhancing the attractiveness of Mauritius to foreign investors. As a SIDS, Mauritius needs to diversify its economy which is still vulnerable to external shock. The development of the petroleum sector is thus inscribed in our diversification strategy in a period of transition and will create a new source of foreign direct investment and revenues.

Aside from the monetary benefits, Mr Speaker, Sir, data from oil prospection and exploration would be invaluable to us in further developing its blue economy. When it comes to the licensing procedures that are described in the Offshore Petroleum Bill, once again I would like to take the example of Norway to give more clarifications. The Department for Continental

Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration is in other words acting as the equivalent of the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate which has put in place a similar system of licensing around blocks to be opened for exploration. I would strongly, Mr Speaker, Sir, in all humility encourage the Members of the Opposition, hon. Uteem, hon. Osman Mahomed and even hon. Bérenger to see for themselves that we have adopted a similar regulatory structure as Norway has done.

Moreover, the Government of Norway also makes the final decision on which blocks are to be announced, including any special environmental and fisheries-related requirements for petroleum activities and same is being laid out in our Offshore Petroleum Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few words about our global governance solution, Mauritius is not lagging behind on the question of global and sustainable governance of oceans. Mr Speaker, Sir, we remain an active participant in discussions regarding issues relating to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in New York specially. We participated in the UN negotiation process for the elaboration of a legally binding international instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond our national jurisdiction. In addition, in December this year, Mauritius will commence its fourth year term on the Council of the International Seabed Authority established under UNCLOS to regulate deep seabed mining while ensuring the protection of the marine environment from any harmful effects which may arise during mining activities.

I must also indicate, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are committed to implementing the recently concluded EU-OACPS Post-Cotonou Agreement which places a list of emphasis on sustainable development and sustainable management of natural resources and marine resources. A comprehensive agreement on trade and sustainable development is being discussed under the negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU, Mr Speaker, Sir. What I mean to say is that the Offshore Petroleum Bill is in no way contradictory to our adherence to international law as well as on the protection of environment.

The introduction of this Bill is not a mere coincidence; it is the culmination of a deliberative process within the ranks of Government. It is testimony of the efforts that this Government is continuously engaging, it characterises the strong leadership of this Government to waste no time in improving the lives of our fellow citizens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, COVID pandemic has brought in its wake the global realisation that lives, livelihoods and our environment hang in a delicate balance. Nature, as a provider of the resources we need must be protected and its fruits used judiciously. True it is that this pandemic is still with us, Mr Speaker, Sir, however, it is in times like this that we need to lay the base of our next development. This is what the Offshore Petroleum Bill purports to achieve, a source of inspiration and hope for our population, a fitting legacy for the generations to come. Accordingly, I support this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I am done. Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the sitting for one hour.

At 8.13 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.19 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Prime Minister!

(9.20 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me thank all the Members who have intervened during the debate on the Offshore Petroleum Bill (No. XIV of 2021).

I appreciated some of the interventions which were constructive in nature. But it is unfortunate that some Members of the Opposition have chosen to pursue on the trail of systematic criticism of whatever Government initiates. In fact, they continue to drown themselves in the colourable waters of abject demagoguery.

Let me, at the outset, state that the Bill is premised on expert advice and has been the subject of careful preparation since 2014. Indeed, the Government of Mauritius benefited from a first technical advice from the Commonwealth Secretariat on international benchmarking of fiscal terms for investment in petroleum exploration, development, and production. It is on the basis of such advice that the Bill and its provisions have been worked out. Furthermore, the Republic of Mauritius was supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat that presented comprehensive drafting instructions and a draft Petroleum Bill together with a model petroleum agreement for our consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was clear that the Petroleum Act of 1970 was outdated and no longer provided a suitable basis for the regulation of an active and modern petroleum sector in Mauritius. As you would know, the 1970 Act has been practically dormant for decades and it would be difficult for Mauritius, under such legislation, to embark into petroleum exploration activities that would constitute considerable regulatory risk for the Government and bear uncertainties for potential investors. More so, it was an opportune time to adopt a comprehensive reform without impacting on existing permits or related business activity in Mauritius. The Petroleum Act of 1970 does not explicitly make provisions for environmental considerations. It is no doubt, at this stage, crucial for Mauritius to effectively strengthen its environmental and safety requirements when it comes to petroleum activity. And when I heard the last orator from the Opposition saying, '*cette loi est un recul - ce Bill, c'est-à-dire, qui va être voté - par rapport à la loi de 1970*', I am really flabbergasted, Mr Speaker, Sir, because of all the emphasis that has been laid by the Opposition on environmental issues! And, yet, what we have proposed in this Bill with regard to protection of environment and security measures, and the hon. Member says it's *comme si un grand recul*.

As I stated while presenting the Bill at Second Reading, the Offshore Petroleum Bill has, as main objective, to repeal the 50 year-old Petroleum Act so as to provide for a more modern and comprehensive legal and regulatory framework adapted to offshore petroleum activities in Mauritius. We have presented a new and more appropriate regulatory regime for the conduct of petroleum activities, which is not only at par with environmental and safety commitments but also embraces international best practices and modern technology in this field. This also demonstrates the commitment and willingness of my Government to revamp archaic laws by providing more robust and updated legislations, which again reflects the proactive endeavours of my Government in shaping an *avant-garde* nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill has been the subject of numerous consultations between all major stakeholders, including the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources and Shipping, the Economic Development Board, and the Attorney General's Office.

The Offshore Petroleum Bill provides a new regulatory regime and is underpinned by the following principles -

- First, to encourage private sector participation in offshore petroleum exploration through the establishment of a modern and stable regulatory environment providing for the transparent and even-handed treatment of investors, and access to and security of tenure over an area of petroleum potential;
- Second, to establish streamlined and effective institutional arrangements for the management of the offshore activities, and
- Third, to apply the principles of predictability, transparency and accountability for the administration of petroleum activities.

The centrepiece of this new regime is the establishment of a concession-based regulatory system which is commonly applied in both frontier jurisdictions, like ours, and mature jurisdictions. Under such a system, rights to engage in petroleum exploration would be granted by the Government to investors seeking to carry out petroleum activity in defined areas or blocks during an agreed period.

The Bill and its subsequent regulations shall establish the core regulatory concepts and elements. It will be supplemented by a petroleum agreement which will be negotiated with the investor under established provisions. The subjects of the negotiation will be predicated on a model agreement which would be publicly available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I take note that there is, in principle, no major objection to the Offshore Petroleum Bill, from some Members, because when I read with attention what partly has been said by hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, who, despite criticising some aspects of the Bill, went on to recommend the setting up of a Sovereign Fund whereby money obtained from petroleum receipts could be shared with the people of Mauritius through the allocation of shares. This proves that the hon. Member believes that there could arise a situation where Mauritius would derive wealth from petroleum proceeds and that such wealth would need to trickle down to the masses. This is quite, I would say, a positive thinking and I can tell the House and the Nation that our aim in Government is to harness the full potential of our territorial assets for the benefit of our people and our Republic. I have also read, apart from listening to hon. Mahomed, these comments that he made in *l'Express* of 21 October 2021, where he interestingly stated, and I quote -

“Maurice importe beaucoup d’énergie fossile pour les voitures et la production électrique. Une potentielle exploitation du pétrole requiert une bonne gestion. Si on découvre des gisements dans nos eaux et que c’est économiquement viable de s’y adonner, cela améliorera notre situation. Mais, il faut gérer le risque écologique et ne pas ternir notre image touristique. La bonne gouvernance doit entrer en jeu.”

to which I agree.

Mr Speaker Sir, it is clear that hon. Osman Mahomed is fully conscious of the economic potential that Mauritius can derive from petroleum exploration in our territorial waters if ever oilfields are found, and he knows that Government is doing the right thing. He expressed concerns, of course, on environmental aspects, rightly so as I say, but the Bill adequately caters for his concerns, and I shall come to that aspect later on. One thing should be clear: this Government will, in no way, put into jeopardy our environmental assets which are so precious for present and future generations.

Mr Speaker Sir, having given this assurance, I will now address certain issues and apprehensions that have been expressed by some Members. Indeed, some Members have time and again stressed upon the bad timing of introducing the Bill into the National Assembly in view of the COP26 Conference on Climate Change. Unfortunately, I must say they have gone astray. The Bill before the House, as I have extensively explained, is the fruit of several years of consultations and drafting. When a Bill is ready, there is no reason to delay its introduction into the National Assembly, except, of course, if someone has ulterior motives or is stuck in the web of an outdated past.

As regard references to COP26 Summit in Glasgow, I believe that introducing this particular Bill is not, in any way, contradicting the agenda or objectives of the Summit which relate to Climate Change. The commitments I took and the concrete actions I mentioned in my speech at the Summit testify that Mauritius, as an Island State, means business with regard to the Climate Change worldwide agenda. In fact, at the COP26, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Antonio Guterres, reiterated that a 45% cut in global greenhouse gases emissions by 2030 was needed to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and that continuing on the current trajectory “puts us on a catastrophic pathway”.

Achieving carbon neutrality does not imply a state of zero emission but striking the right balance to capture and off-set carbon dioxide emitted, and according to the definition of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), carbon neutrality refers to carbon dioxide emissions and is a state of balance between carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere and carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere.

There are various Small Island Developing States which have legislation for oil exploration and exploitation. Vanuatu has a Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act since 1997. Fiji also has a Petroleum (Exploration and Exploitation) Act since 1978. Seychelles does not currently commercially produce oil, gas or minerals, even though international companies are exploring for petroleum offshore. The parastatal company, PetroSeychelles, is responsible for regulating the upstream petroleum sector and overseeing petroleum activities. The Bahamas also recently had a Petroleum Bill passed in its Parliament. It replaced its earlier legislation which dated back to 1971. The Senate in the Bahamas also passed a legislation to provide for a Sovereign Wealth Fund to govern the use of any future oil and gas revenue. The Kutubu Petroleum Development Project in Papua New Guinea is considered as a successful attempt in this South East Asian country. The project started in 1990 and by 1992, it not only turned the country into an oil-exporting country but also maintained its environmental protection and community welfare objectives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government is also working on the long-term energy strategy with a view to achieving carbon neutrality. In fact, at the Climate Ambition Summit in 2020, I stated that Mauritius would aim to achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2070. For a Small Island Developing State like Mauritius, fossil fuel can be used as a transition fuel in shifting from coal to renewable energies. This is in line, as has been mentioned before me, with the report 'Mapping the oil and gas industry to the Sustainable Development Goals: An Atlas', which is based on a mapping exercise carried out in 2017 under a UNDP project, wherein it is stated that, and I quote –

“The enormity of the energy challenge should not be underestimated. Energy is at the heart of the modern economy and essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As recognized in Sustainable Development Goal 7 (Clean Energy), countries need affordable and reliable energy to run modern economies. Countries want to ensure that the transition

to net-zero emissions will not sacrifice economic development, high employment and other social objectives. Moving from a high-emission world economy to a net-zero emission economy over the course of the century will require concerted scale-up actions by Government, business and civil society. To help implement some of the elements that will be needed to reach a net-zero emission future, the oil and gas industry has a unique role to play. In the near term, natural gas can serve as an effective transition fuel, helping countries to switch from coal-fired power to a cleaner alternative while, in parallel, the industry continues and increases its efforts to manage the methane emissions associated with natural gas production.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, no later than 03 December, 2021, the South African High Court ruled against an application to interdict the company Shell from conducting 3D seismic survey off the South African Coast.

The Judge said the applicant had failed to produce evidence to convince the Court that the form of surveys would result in irreparable harm to the marine environment. Following 325 seismic surveys conducted by oil companies, there is no evidence to suggest that seismic surveys could cause irreparable harm to the environment; no death or harm to the ecosystem were reported.

Recent discoveries of oil and gas in southern Africa have resulted in the potential to drastically improve the region’s socio-economic prospects, powering industries and spurring economic development and growth. The oil and gas industry supports millions of jobs worldwide, and offers Africa the opportunity to industrialise and ensure energy security.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I hear some Members of the Opposition speaking, it is as if tomorrow, we will not need or we will not rely on oil and gas. It is as if not only tomorrow, maybe in years to come also, we will not depend at all; we will have other sources of energy.

Let me quote what OPEC has stated - the Oil Demand Forecast. I need not go through all these countries which are producing millions of barrels and exporting to the world. The organisation of the petrol exporting countries forecasts that oil demands will grow sharply in the next few years as economies recover from the pandemic; adding that the world needs to keep investing in production to avert a crunch despite an energy transition.

We know Mauritius depends heavily on petroleum imports. For the year 2020, Mauritius imported around 1 million tonnes of petroleum and in financial terms, this represents a cost of around Rs38 billion. Rs38 billion!

When I listen to some comments being made, that we need to switch to renewable sources to produce energy and we need to be less dependent, of course, we have taken a commitment to phase out coal and to be less dependent on oil and gas. But will that happen tomorrow? Has any Member of the Opposition told this House in how many years we will be able to switch from oil and gas to other renewable sources of energy? Has anyone said so? Making beautiful speeches, being like we are all for protection of the environment and this should not be done. Yes, of course, we adhere to that! If that could have been done tomorrow!

Members are talking about COP-26; this is what has been discussed, this is what happened. Well, some think that *ça a été un échec. Mais pourquoi? Il faut se demander! Pourquoi on n'est pas allé plus loin ?* There were all the countries there, the major economies; in fact, those which have the power to decide, those which can influence! But why is it that we could not go further than what has been agreed?

I will simply ask the question and I will ask people to think about it. Because Mauritius – *nous, on est en train de dire* as if we should have come to this House and only repeal the Petroleum Act of 1970, and that's it! And then, be continuously dependent on oil for years and years and years to come. As rightly pointed out by hon. Ganoo, it is not only about energy. We are making use of oil for other purposes as well. Now, I find that to be too simplistic just to come with argument that because of environmental issues, because of this.

Anyway, we are talking about what has been agreed at COP-26. Each one can have his own opinion when instead of phasing out of coal, it has been replaced by phasing down. But it has not been the same thing for oil and gas. Of course, there are issues; of course, there are emissions of methane; of course, we need to try to reduce such kind of emissions! But we have to be realistic also! And that is why I say to adopt radical green policies would only contribute to skyrocketing the price of energy. We rather need a gradual phasing down approach and thus ensuring a smooth transition for a small economy like ours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not only the first Government to announce that the green economy will be the next pillar of our economy, but we are also the first Government to finally

provide this much-needed piece of legislation to pave the way for a regulated, monitored, and sustainable exploitation of our vast Exclusive Economic Zone. We know that successive Governments in the past have announced that under their mandate, the Exclusive Economic Zone would be exploited. But nothing concrete materialised. I have my own opinion why is it that some Members who used to form part of previous Governments now have to stick to their roles of sitting on their hands while watching my Government finally unlocking the potential of our Exclusive Economic Zone. My Government is keen on bringing the star and the key of the Indian Ocean back and right on its pedestal.

I wish to remind Members on the other side of the House that in Government Programme 2005-2010, the then Government, under the leadership of Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, had stated that, and I quote –

“Government will consolidate the existing pillars of the economy while diversifying the economy by setting up new pillars of development such as the exploration of marine resources.”

In the Government Programme 2012-2015, which was a Labour-PMSD Government, they had mentioned that, and I quote –

“Mauritius must have the right regulatory regime and the level of skills required to license and supervise ocean activities and also to service the operators involved.”

In the Budget Speech of 2013, the same Government, with the hon. Leader of the Opposition as the then Minister of Finance, had mentioned that it will look for strategic partners for the exploration and exploitation of our mineral resources.

However, they have done nothing over all those years for the exploration and exploitation of our Exclusive Economic Zone. They have been selling dreams to people. That is a blunt fact they cannot deny. Whereas I make things happen and my Government has a lot of achievements under its mandate to prove that we mean business and that the superior interest of the country and our people matters the most for us.

I have listened carefully, as usual I must say, to the *charabia* of hon. Dr. Boolell, rightly said by earlier interveners, *sans queue ni tête*. It has been mentioned before, but I will still remind him what he himself has stated *en parlant du pétrole* –

“Y-a-t-il du pétrole au fond du plateau continental cogéré par le tandem Maurice-Seychelles ? Si tel est le cas, les retombées seront substantielles pour nos deux pays. Comme le souligne d’ailleurs, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Arvin Boolell, nous ferons un pas de géant en temps qu’une économie de services en devenant un fournisseur majeur de produits pétroliers dans la région. ”

Mr Speaker, Sir, this reminds me of one thing. When they were talking about all the potential that could be unlocked for petrol, but, then, there was no need to consult the people? There was no need to go for referendum? They just come and make statements, *‘on va faire un pas de géant’!* But did he mention, before making such statement, *‘we are going to consult the people; we are going to discuss with all the NGOs?’* Today, they come and they give lessons ; *‘il faut passer par le peuple, il faut faire des referendums’.*

Enfin, M. le président !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

The Prime Minister: Et avec raison! Mais je ne critique pas l’honorable Dr. Boolell pour ce qu’il a dit ! Il a raison dans ce qu’il a dit. Maintenant il change un peu d’argumentations. Ce qu’il a dit –

« En 2012, Maurice a importé des produits pétroliers pour une valeur de R34,5 milliards. Ce qui représente 21,44 % de la note totale d’importation qui s’élève à [tant de milliards, etc.] »

Mais oui, vous aviez raison honorable Dr. Boolell de dire ça, et c’est ce que nous disons nous aussi aujourd’hui ! C’est intéressant. M. le président, je ne vais pas aller dans tous les détails, mais parlant de ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No comments!

The Prime Minister: Justement, parce que, avec raison, il a eu les félicitations pour ce que nous avons pu accomplir entre Maurice et Seychelles.

Et laissez-moi lire peut être la partie qui nous concerne directement –

« Il y avait établi déjà un *three tiers system* à Maurice. Au sommet de cette structure, il y a le *Ministerial Council*, puis une *Joint Commission*, et un *Designated Council*. À Maurice, le *Ministerial Council* tombe sous la responsabilité du ministre des Affaires étrangères, de l'Intégration régionale et du Commerce international. Quant à la *Joint Commission*, il s'agit d'une unité connue sous l'appellation d'*Ocean Matters* qui est placée sous la houlette du Bureau du Premier ministre... »

A ce moment-là, il n'y avait pas de problèmes. Pas de problèmes ! Pourquoi le Premier Ministre ? C'était *okay* à cette époque ! Aujourd'hui, quand on parle du Premier ministre, on a toutes sortes d'objections, toutes sortes de spéculations, et j'en passe, M. le président ; des insinuations qui ont été faites. Je ne voudrais pas entrer dans ces détails et réfuter ces allégations.

Quant à la *Joint Commission*, sous le bureau du Premier ministre, elle a pour membres le Secrétaire au Cabinet, à cette époque c'était Monsieur Seeballuck, le *Solicitor General*, Monsieur Dabee, l'ambassadeur Koonjul et Monsieur Rezah Badal, anciennement directeur de l'Institut d'Océanographie de Maurice et actuellement *Head of Ocean Matters*. Alors le *three tiers system* des deux pays se sont penchés sur plusieurs points, dont l'élaboration d'un *Joint Fiscal and Taxation Code* et, M. le président, l'ébauche d'un *Petroleum Bill* ; un document de 200 pages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Offshore Petroleum Bill, as I would also put it, is a major leap for the diversification of our economic base.

The Leader of the Opposition and some Members have been putting forward the argument that there is a lack of transparency with regard to the grant of titles by the Prime Minister. Well, I will not, in fact, indulge in the not-so-transparent practices condoned by the previous Governments where hon. Duval was a member, but, of course, I do reject this argument that the Offshore Petroleum Bill does not provide for a transparent mechanism for the grant of titles. In fact, the very principles of the Bill, as enunciated earlier, comprise the application of

predictability, transparency, and accountability to the administration of the intended petroleum activities. The Offshore Petroleum Bill sets out the whole process for each of the phases.

First of all, the Economic Development Board will be involved in the market research and promotion of the Mauritian Offshore Petroleum Industry.

Applications received will be reviewed by a Committee chaired by the Director General, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, and the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. Recommendations of the Committee will then be channelled through the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service and Supervising Officer of the parent Ministry before being approved by the Prime Minister, in line with clause 16 of the Bill. And if the hon. Leader of the Opposition has any issue with the Prime Minister, who is also the Minister responsible for non-living marine resources, giving his final approval to the grant of titles, then I should ask him who else should grant the titles.

Nonetheless, Mr Speaker, Sir, a Petroleum Register will be established and managed by the Department for Continental Shelf. The Register shall provide a mechanism to ensure the accurate registration of titles, interests in titles, together with transfers and dealing concerning permits and licences granted under this new legislation.

All title holders shall be bound by the provisions of the Act and as supplemented by the Petroleum Agreement. The Act makes provisions for a due diligence process to be engaged, thereby selecting companies with right credentials and abiding to international standardized practices. Moreover, there shall be experts appointed as inspectors who will be performing onsite inspections and determine compliance of title holders with the Act.

Another provision is on the capacity building of our local experts. Officers of the Department shall be continuously trained in order to monitor compliance by title holders of their obligations and undertakings. This Bill makes provisions for officers to be trained at each stage of the petroleum activities, namely prospecting, exploration, and development stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some Members have also raised concerns that my Government is in contradiction with the worldwide trend and stance of reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Let

me say as forcefully as possible that the introduction of the legislation does not impede on my Government's commitment and pledge for the reduction of carbon emissions in favour of more green and sustainable projects. In fact, in Budget Speech 2021-2022, it was announced that the green economy would constitute a new pillar of the economy. Accordingly, several measures had been announced to promote the green economy and they are being implemented. Indeed, developing its blue economy is of paramount importance for an insular Island State like ours. The revenue to be generated therefrom will certainly help to build our green economy. This has been the common pathway adopted by many developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan, which are now able to invest more in greener technologies for energy production. Therefore, the Offshore Petroleum Bill is not in contradiction with my Government's mandate to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, but, instead, it will fuel Government's activities for a greener economy.

I would also wish to highlight the abject hypocrisy of some Members who are first to make public stunts in decrying the Offshore Petroleum Bill for not being environment-friendly or ecologically unsafe. I would wish to ask them what they or their Parties have done when they were at the helm of Government! My Government has for its part contributed in the paradigm shift for the promotion of greener technologies. Our energy sector is surely on the right track in adopting more environment-friendly initiatives. In fact, we are now promoting the smart consumption of energy so as to reduce our over-reliance on fossil fuels which I would like to highlight, constitute a large chunk of our imports. Our steps in the green energy sector need to be well thought with a coherent and phased strategy unlike the headless approach advocated by some Members of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also taken cognizance of the end-of-visit statement of Dr. Marcos Orellana, United Nations Special Rapporteur, on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, following his visit to Mauritius from 25 to 29 October 2021. Of course, I have read what he has stated, and I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Dr. Marcos Orellana has neither consulted the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration nor sought any clarifications about the Offshore Petroleum Bill.

Mauritius is a Small Island Developing State with an insignificant global emission of greenhouse gas emission of around 0.01%. Mauritius is not a historical emitter of greenhouse gases as compared to industrialised countries. And it is worth noting that Mauritius submitted its first Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat in September 2015. At that point in time, Mauritius was ranked 13th country with the highest disaster risk and 7th as the most exposed country in the world. The funding estimate for the implementation of the INDC was USD 5.5 billion, that is, USD 4 billion for adaptation and USD 1.5 billion for mitigation. In its first NDC, Mauritius committed to a reduction of 30% greenhouse gas emission by 2030, based on a business as usual scenario.

Six years later, Mauritius submitted its updated NDC to the UNFCCC Secretariat in October 2021. Mauritius is now committed to a reduction of 40% greenhouse gas emission by 2030, based on a business as usual scenario, of around 6.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The total financial needs for the implementation of the updated NDC are estimated at USD 6.5 billion: USD 4.5 billion for adaptation and USD 2 billion for mitigation. Government and the private sector will provide resources to the tune of USD 2.3 billion, that is, 35% of the estimated financial requirement, while the conditional funding amounting to USD 4.2 billion (65%) will need to be mobilised from international community and donor countries or agencies. Now, Mauritius is investing around 5% of its GDP on climate action compared to around 2.15% over the last 5 years.

Mauritius will aim at achieving this target in the next 10 years by, *inter alia*, increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix to 60% and the total phasing out of coal by 2030, and by increasing energy efficiency by 10%. The key mitigation sectors include energy, transport, waste, industrial processes and product use, agriculture and land use, land-use change and forestry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some Members have raised concerns regarding the Petroleum Fund and Taxation regime and even its constitutionality. The Petroleum Fund refers to the payment of charges and such other fees by petroleum companies as the Department may determine under clause 9(b) of the Bill.

As regards royalty, income tax, including the petroleum additional profits tax, VAT and other taxes payable by petroleum companies, such payments will accrue to the Consolidated Fund and not the Petroleum Fund being given that they are taxes levied under the respective revenue laws and not under the Offshore Petroleum Bill.

If funds are to be transferred from the Consolidated Fund to the Petroleum Fund, an appropriation of those sums by votes of expenditure in the National Assembly will be required. The Petroleum Fund will be set up as a Special Fund under the Finance and Audit Act. A Special Fund is administered by a Managing Committee and its governance structure will be laid down in regulations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated earlier, there will be regulations to ensure that this legislation is well armed to face any scenario. As such, there will also be an Environment Code of Practice and a Safety Code of Practice which will provide for offshore petroleum activities to be regulated. A model Petroleum Agreement has also been prepared and any entity wishing to indulge in offshore petroleum activities would have to abide to the terms and conditions that are laid therein. The Petroleum Agreements will be negotiated by the same Committee which will be set up to examine the applications for titles.

Let me also reply to some other issues that have been raised by some Members. One is regarding the Joint Management Area, whether it will be open to petroleum companies and where matters stand with the establishment of the Joint Commission. On 31 August 2018, Government had agreed to the proposal of the Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Commission to issue a notice in the International Press, announcing that the exploration blocks in the Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Management Area in the Mascarene Plateau Region are now opened for commercial exploration. The Joint Commission has had 21 meetings since 2012, with the last one being held in Mauritius on 17 November 2021. The main outcomes of the meetings of the Joint Commission include –

- (i) the elaboration of the Joint Management Area Model Petroleum Agreement;
- (ii) the Offshore Petroleum Safety Code for the JMA;
- (iii) the Joint Fiscal and Taxation Code;
- (iv) the Environmental Code of Practices for the JMA, and

- (v) Marine Scientific Research Code.

These documents have been endorsed by the Governments of both countries. The successful accomplishment of its strategic plan, including a joint declaration for the sustainable development of the JMA, up to this date it has been focusing on 5 main strategic objectives, namely –

- (i) setting up the institutional framework and building technical capacity necessary to govern the JMA;
- (ii) promoting the JMA as an attractive destination for investment by international oil companies;
- (iii) setting up a centralised data and information systems for the management of the JMA;
- (iv) defining priorities for data acquisition for the management of the JMA, and
- (v) establishing a comprehensive system of multi-use marine planning for improved decision making for sustainable marine activities in the JMA.

Discussions are ongoing at the level of the Joint Commission on a number of issues, amongst which –

- the modalities for the joint patrol and monitoring of the JMA including fish related activities that could potentially affect the underlying seabed;
- national capacity building in oil and spill response planning in the JMA;
- the capacity building of its respective scientists with the universities and international institutions for the conduct of marine survey in the JMA, and
- elaboration of a draft management framework for living resources on the seabed and subsoil of the JMA and conduct of seismic survey to evaluate the potential of hydrocarbons in the JMA.

There were other questions, information about the contract awarded to CGG Services SAS for multi-client seismic surveys and information about the survey carried out by the Joint Commission, reference to Prem Saddul's views also about the presence of polymetallic nodules

and a comment made by hon. Mahomed about the weak terminologies in the Offshore Petroleum Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me respond to the first one; the award of contract to CGG Services SAS. On 29 January 2016, Government agreed to the issue of an expression of interest for the conduct of multi-client seismic surveys for hydrocarbon exploration in the four areas of our Exclusive Economic Zone. Government also agreed that the procedures laid down in the Public Procurement Act would be followed for the issue of the Expression of Interest and for the eventual of bids from potential companies. Government also agreed that the conduct of multi-client seismic surveys would be at no cost to Government.

Following the Expression of Interest, a Request for Proposal was sent to the companies which submitted their Expression of Interest. In response to the RFP exercise carried out on 04 October 2017, three companies were retained for evaluation. Subsequently, CGG Services SAS was retained as it was the best evaluated bidder on the basis of its highest combined score of technical and financial marks. On 04 October 2019, Government agreed to the award of the contract for the conduct of multi-client seismic surveys for hydrocarbon exploration, covering a total of 46,957 line kilometres in four selected areas of our EEZ to CGG Services SAS at no cost to the Government of Mauritius. In this connection, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling a map depicting the four selected areas where exploration surveys will be carried out. The contract between CGG Services SAS and Government was signed in January 2020; CGG Services SAS is expected to start the survey within two years. Of course, then, they will have to agree and to get commitment from oil companies.

Matters relating to Joint Management Area and Joint Commission, in March 2017, the Joint Commission agreed for a contract to be awarded to Spectrum Geo for the conduct of multi-client seismic survey in the Joint Management Area. In February 2020, the Joint Commission agreed that the license of Spectrum Geo, which merged into TGS, had expired, and the agreement was terminated. The Joint Commission is now contemplating negotiations with other companies which were in the original shortlist for the conduct of multi-client seismic survey in the Joint Management Area.

With regard to the seabed minerals, polymetallic nodules will be a subject of another piece of legislation, which is the Seabed Minerals Bill. The latter Bill is currently under preparation.

With regard to technical terminologies, they are referred to in the model of Petroleum Agreement which will be made public. Then, you will have plenty of time to look at those terminologies.

There was one issue raised by hon. Bérenger where he said that he did not see anywhere in the Offshore Petroleum Bill that a committee to examine the titles would be set up. I can refer the hon. Member to clause 7(f) of the Offshore Petroleum Bill which provides for the Department for Continental Shelf and Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration to set up such committee as may be necessary.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reiterate to this House the commitment of my Government in promoting renewable and sustainable energies and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. My Government, as a responsible Government, is very much mindful of the fact that, as a Small Island State, we are much more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. That is why my Government is the first Government in the history of Mauritius to have brought forth a legislation for Climate Change and now a legislation to make the most of our blue economy sector.

In these times of economic recovery and fragile financial system, I do believe that some of the Members of the Opposition are really of bad faith in criticising the introduction of this piece of legislation into the National Assembly.

In fact, Mauritius stands at the threshold of history with this piece of legislation, and I feel privileged, Mr Speaker, Sir, and proud as Prime Minister to be at the mantle of this Government at this particular juncture in time, to gear our Republic, our country, to new heights.

M. le président, nous poursuivrons notre route en vue de donner toutes les chances à notre pays de se hisser à un palier de développement supérieur. Nous exploiterons toutes les avenues pour maximiser notre potentiel économique. Ce ne sont certainement pas les critiques injustifiées de l'Opposition qui vont nous stopper. De toute façon, aucune des prophéties de malheur de cette Opposition disparate ne se réalise. C'est pourquoi je dis toujours que mon

gouvernement se focalisera sur son travail dans l'intérêt du pays et de la population et non sur les palabres quotidiens de cette Opposition qui est en constante perte de vitesse.

Nous savons tous que plusieurs études ont été effectuées pour déterminer la probabilité de sources pétrolières dans nos zones maritimes. Avec ce projet de loi, nous mettons en place la structure légale en vue de bouger à une autre étape, soit permettre l'exploration et l'exploitation de possibles ressources pétrolières dans nos zones maritimes, selon des paramètres strictes qui tiennent justement compte des appréhensions quant aux possibles impacts environnementaux. Je tiens à rassurer encore une fois que rien ne sera fait qui puisse porter préjudice à l'environnement. Nous y veillerons constamment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Offshore Petroleum Bill (No. XIV of 2021) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Offshore Petroleum Bill (No. XIV of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE MAURITIUS RECREATION COUNCIL BILL

(NO. XVII OF 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill (No. XVII of 2021).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, at this stage, I will call upon the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated! Hon. Minister Hurdoyal, please!

(10.23 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, for introducing the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill, which will have as main objective the development and promotion of recreational activities for the benefit of the Mauritian population at large.

During the last Sitting of this august Assembly, the hon. Member Wochit, in the course of his intervention, stated that the Bill should have been introduced by my colleague, hon. Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the hon. Member that the portfolio of Recreation has been attached to the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation. Hence, it is more appropriate for my colleague, hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint to come forward with this Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is the first time that a Government is giving so much importance to recreation which is a fundamental human need, particularly at a time when the world has to face unprecedented challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic.

While hon. Wochit and other honourable Members of the Opposition raised questions about the timing of this Bill amidst current prevailing COVID-19 situation, allow me to say that, on the contrary, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill came at the right time as it is setting the framework for the orderly organisation of leisure and recreational activities in Mauritius.

I also wish to stress upon the fact that several studies on the psycho-social effects of COVID-19 have highlighted an increase in mental health problems such as depression and anxiety and engaging in leisure activities may provide protective benefits for psychological well-being. The World Health Organization and other leading health organizations have emphasized

the importance of allocating time for hobbies and leisure under their COVID-19 mental health support strategies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill is a forward-looking piece of legislation that would greatly contribute towards relieving the stress of the working Mauritians, reducing anxiety and depression among the youth and creating a balance between academic pressures and the mental wellbeing of the students. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recreation is essential in everyone's life. It is a special time set aside to do something exciting. It includes physical activities, intellectual activities, cultural and social activities, art and craft activities and outdoor activities like outings, sightseeing, excursions, camping and hiking. Participation in recreational activities generates a range of positive experiences from relaxation, fun and enjoyment to personal development and fulfillment. As rightly said by American Political Activist, Edward Bellamy, I quote -

“If bread is the first necessity of life, recreation is a close second.”

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recreation is an activity for the body and mind which relieves us from stress, restores our energy and promotes a sense of joy. In today's stressful world, a well-blended mixture of work and recreation is a prerequisite for personal growth and success.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, research has shown that children who are physically active, do better at school. This is simply because physical activity enhances cognitive functions, behaviour, concentration and academic achievement. At the community level, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recreation fosters solidarity. Many forces in modern society tend to separate people into distinct and often hostile groups based on differences in economic status, social position, race, creed, education and cultural background. Consequently, this creates suspicion and division in society. Recreational activities provide opportunities for reconciling the differences and promoting unity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the setting up of the Mauritius Recreation Council will go a long way in promoting unity and solidarity in the community through the organisation of various social, recreational, educational and sports activities. Such activities will not only provide opportunities for the members of the community to interact socially but also learn to live and prosper together. It also helps to foster inclusion and resilience from being part of a team.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have had the opportunity, as former Chairperson of the District Council of Flacq to construct several recreational shelters across the district, for the sole purpose of promoting recreational activities. These shelters have today proved their importance and they are regularly utilised by all inhabitants. I am also pleased to note that each year new recreational shelters are being constructed in different regions of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Recreation Council will be complementary to the Public Officers Welfare Council, which is responsible to cater for the welfare and recreational needs of public officers and their families and implementing projects for their benefit. The Council has, since its inception, organised an array of welfare and recreational activities for the benefit of the Public Officers and their families. The Council is continuously diversifying its activities to cater for the tastes and preferences of the new generation of public officers. In this context, last year the Council organised a Woman football tournament and Karaoke initiation sessions. These activities have provided public officers with opportunities to take a break from their stressful work environment and find an outlet to entertain themselves. They also provide an appropriate forum for bringing public officers together to promote a sense of belonging and foster team spirit across the Civil Service family. Moreover, such activities provide a platform for networking among Ministries and Departments. The POWC and the Mauritius Recreational Council will work together on common projects for the benefit of the Public Officers and their families.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill provides for the setting up of the Mauritius Recreational Council to establish an annual plan and calendar for recreational activities so as to ensure that all Mauritians are provided with recreational opportunities without any discrimination all year round and also invite recreational projects from the local community for the promotion of recreational activities. The Council will also provide assistance to organisations involved in the promotion of recreational activities and facilitate access to existing sport infrastructures at regional and national level.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, communication is of utmost importance in the proper functioning of any team, institution or body. One of the primary functions of the Mauritius Recreation Council is to communicate effectively and in a timely manner with the public. This will in turn ensure public interest and participation in recreational activities organized by the

council. Section 7 of the Bill provides for the setting up of a public and private sector Board to devise recreational policies, programmes and schemes to promote recreational activities at the community, regional and national level.

In his intervention during the last sitting of this august Assembly, hon. Wochit stated that most of these Board members will be appointed on the basis of their political affinities as a reward for their loyalty towards the ruling party in power rather than on their competencies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not correct to say that the Board will comprise solely of political nominees. In fact, section 7 of the Bill provides for the appointment of 8 ex-officio members of different Ministries and departments including a representative of Business Mauritius. It is also the first time that for such a Board, there is a representative of the private sector. This is mainly because the Government wishes to create a synergy between the public and the private sector for the organisation of leisure and recreational activities for the benefit of the Mauritians.

The presence of Business Mauritius on the Board will greatly help to democratise accessibility of Mauritians to private sector leisure facilities. Moreover, the leisure and recreational facilities of the different Ministries, private sector and local authorities could be utilised effectively and efficiently.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that this Government is firmly committed to the principle of providing positive recreation opportunities for all. We are convinced that recreation can be harnessed and promote ethnic harmony, leadership opportunities and the development of a healthy society.

This is why, in 2019, the Government has changed the appellation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports to the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation. The introduction of this Bill will not only promote the organisation of recreational activities for all but also greatly democratise access to leisure and recreational facilities.

I thank you for your attention.

ANNOUNCEMENT

DPM - STATEMENT

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I am advised that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has an urgent Statement to make. I have allowed the hon. Deputy Prime Minister leave to make the said Statement.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

FRANCE & MAURITIUS – TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr. S. Obeegadoo): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. With your permission, I wish to take the time of the House to make a statement on the issue of travel restrictions on passengers travelling between France and Mauritius.

As the House is aware, on Wednesday 01 December, further to the identification of a new COVID variant B.1.1.529, now known as Omicron, in South Africa, and against the background of a spike in COVID cases in France associated with a so-called fifth wave of the pandemic sweeping across Europe, the French Government added Mauritius to its *Rouge Écarlate* list of countries. This meant that firstly, all passengers, whether vaccinated or not, wishing to travel between France and Mauritius would need to establish the existence of a *motif impérieux*, that is, a compelling motive. In practice, it implied the immediate suspension of travel by French tourists to Mauritius and of course, French nationals to France. Members are aware that France is our main tourism market and that the rebound of tourism is critical to our economic recovery. The French decision therefore spelt disaster for our travel and hospitality sector just as it was trying to get back on its feet in the month that is the high point of any year for tourism.

But then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we immediately went into action under the leadership of the Prime Minister. A joint effort got underway with the Ministry of Health and Wellness building a case to show that COVID was well managed in our country according to the parameters established by Europe, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs embarking on a major diplomatic offensive, with the Ministry of Tourism reaching out to the relevant authorities in France and to the Travel industry in France, a joint effort coordinated by our Prime Minister.

As has been reported, I availed myself of a recent trip to the World Tourism Organisation to mobilise support against blanket travel bans and met with the French Minister of Tourism to explain our stand that the decision was both unjustified and unjust and to appeal to France to

reconsider its decision on the basis of the real COVID situation in Mauritius, as detailed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. In close consultation with the Prime Minister, I pursued these efforts in Paris over the weekend.

For its part, Business Mauritius and *l'Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs de l'île Maurice* (AHRIM), also embarked on an intense and broad-based campaign to inform and explain the Mauritian COVID context to opinion leaders and travel operators in France, leaving no stone unturned to make the case for our country and its hospitality Industry. This formidable effort was carried out in close coordination with my Ministry and the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Agency (MTPA).

The result? Well, the House will be pleased to learn that further to the meeting of the *Conseil de Défense Sanitaire* chaired by President Macron yesterday, the French Government has just announced that Mauritius has been removed from the *Rouge Écarlate liste* to be reclassified on the *Liste Rouge*, with effect as from tomorrow, Wednesday 08 December 2021. In effect this means that all vaccinated persons, whether Mauritian nationals, business travelers or tourists can henceforth freely travel between France and Mauritius without any requirement of a *motif impérieux*. I am referring to vaccinated persons, of course.

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a major victory for Mauritius and a testimony to the power of public private partnerships when harnessed in a spirit of patriotism to defend the national interest.

I wish to thank all in Government and in the private sector who have contributed to this major achievement and to thank the Prime Minister in particular for his guidance.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ehsan Juman, please!

(10.42 p.m.)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In fact, we welcome the good news.

(Interruptions)

Mr Juman: *Nou enn patriote!* I am glad, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that something is finally coming to life at the level of the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation because for the last two years, sports and leisure have been the *parents pauvres* of the Government, especially amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, I fail to see how this Council proposed will be of any help in promoting leisure activities in the near future as its implementation will be an issue. Which is why, I think, this Recreation Council seems to be yet another *éléphant blanc* set up only to accommodate *les petits copains*. I will come to it in a few minutes.

What saddens me the most, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation had two years, yes more than two years, since the portfolio of recreation was handed over to his Ministry. He himself mentioned in his speech, I quote –

“The House would recall that in November 2009, the subject of ‘Recreation’ was added to my Ministry’s portfolio.”

He went further, saying –

“The change of application was a golden opportunity for my Ministry to realign its strategic objectives with a view to offering new services...”

Golden opportunity! But when you look at the Budget Estimates 2020-2021: Strategic Overview, not a single word on ‘Recreation’. When you look at the mission statement on the Budget Estimates, six months after the ‘Recreation’ subject added to his portfolio, not a single word on ‘Recreation’. More so, even the staffs attached to the Leisure Department remain at the level of the Ministry of Tourism; not a single cent budgeted for recreational activities.

Yet, after two years, he came with a half-baked product. By the time the Council will be set up, the Board constituted, and after the initial teething problems which are common in these cases - we all know what happened with the Veterinary Council, still not yet constituted - we would already reach the end of the present mandate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and nothing will be done. In fact, this is nothing new. The Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, or should I say the hon. Minister himself has been practically in deep slumber since the Indian Ocean Island Games in July 2019!

The Sports Section of his Ministry is in shambles. There is not a week or a day where we do not note from the Press, the lack of professionalism from the Ministry. Federations are flouting the authority of the Ministry and that of the Minister himself. The promise of a new Sports Act is like '*Anne, ma sœur Anne, ne vois-tu rien venir?*' Since 2020, Cabinet agreed to the introduction of a new Sports Act and still nothing. *Zéro!*

Likewise, the Youth Empowerment Division of the Ministry is underperforming, and not since months but since long. The National Youth Council Act deserves a total review. Still, the Minister is sitting and doing nothing. Now, as usual, and as the hon. Minister of Health usually does, they might sit on the fence and pretend that I am blaming the Ministry's officers for this poor state of affairs. But no, I hold only the Minister directly responsible for his poor performance, as he has been sitting and doing nothing for the last two years. What about accountability? What about good governance? What about the welfare of our youth, sportsmen and elderlies?

Today, after two years, he is bringing a legislation for the creation of a Recreation Council. The idea, I must say is good. But, as I said, at the beginning of my speech, its implementation would be a real challenge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in his speech the Minister decided to adopt a holistic approach, renting the services of a consultancy and to prepare a national policy document, and the goals are to promote an active healthy lifestyle, ensure inclusiveness, connect people with nature, foster an enabling environment, etc. But what is the role of the local authorities? I was expecting the hon. Orator just before me, to talk about local authorities, since he was himself a Chairman of the District Council, where most of the recreational activities are organised by the local authorities, by the Municipal Council, by the District Council, by the Village Council. Why not a member of the Association of Urban Authorities (AUA) on the Board or Association of the District Councils?

How to ensure an equal geographical distribution of activities? Because while listening to Dr. the hon. Ramdhany, it's as if the Bill is only for his constituency. How to ensure inclusiveness between all social categories? *Pourquoi pas un membre autrement capable sur le Board ?* How to ensure access to existing infrastructure? An analysis of the Bill provides us with an insight of how poorly drafted it has been.

Let us look first and foremost at the Objects, Functions and Powers of the Council. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, except for parts (b), (c) and (d) of paragraph 5, which are objects pertaining to recreations, all the other objects are generic matters that have nothing to do with recreation as such. They are merely general powers given to the Council.

In fact, if we look at that part (c), which I quote –

“establish an annual plan and calendar for recreational activities.”

I cannot but wonder if this will be done with a political objective. Will it give rise to a series of events, where Ministers, PPS and Government MPs will be making *défilé* and looking for political mileage?

Besides, Mr Speaker, Sir, to establish this annual plan and calendar for recreational activities, the Recreational Council will also, as part (b) of paragraph 5 –

“call for projects from the community in order to promote recreational activities”,

And part (d) –

“To assist organisations involved in the promotion of recreational activities”.

In other words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Council will itself not organise any recreational activities. So, my question is: what is the point of having such a Council? Moreover, a closer look at the Bill shows that there will be a concentration of powers in the hands of one single person, the hon. Minister himself. He will, according to Sub-Part B, regarding the Board of the Council, be responsible for the following –

1. appoint four members;
2. allowance payable will be determined by the Minister – paragraph 7(3);
3. in addition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to paragraph 7(4), I quote –

“(4) Where any person appointed under subsection (1) ceases to hold office, the vacancy shall be filled by another person appointed by the Minister (...)”

So, it is again the Minister who will decide. This is why I say that this Council will be yet another *éléphant blanc* to house more *petits copains* and political nominees. But again, according to paragraph 7, I just mentioned, subsection (4), I want to know whether the particular

appointment also include the ex officio members representing the other ministries or organisations because if this is so it defies all logic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Now, let us look at the powers of the Minister under paragraph 10, Sub-Part B –

“(1) The Minister may give such directions of a general character to the Board, not inconsistent with this Act, as he considers necessary in the public interest, and the Board shall comply with those directions”.

Does it imply the hon. Minister will have an upper hand over absolutely everything especially if it can give instruction of general character to the Board? Where will be the independency of the Board? *Pourquoi cette mainmise ministérielle?*

Same applies to number 2 paragraph 10, I quote –

“(2) The Minister may require the Board to furnish such information in such manner and at such time as he thinks fit in respect of its activities and the Board shall supply that information in a timely manner”.

Again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I cannot stop wondering whether the Minister will be in a position to twist and turn the activities to suit the political agenda of the Government.

When we look at the other part, Sub-Part C, now relating to “Staff of Council”; we again see the same thing, *mainmise du ministre* concerning the appointment of the Managing Secretary and the appointment of officers. Why such extensive, excessive powers to the Minister? In fact, it goes on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Even the income and expenditure of the Council as per Part III, pertaining to “Financial Provisions and Accounts” shall be submitted to the Minister and he should give his approval for the estimates and direct the Council in case he is not agreeable to the estimates, to amend same. I fail to see why the Minister wants to personally oversee all these things when the Finance Section at the level of the Ministry would have been in a better position, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to look after these matters. I do not understand why there is so much concentration of powers in the hand of the Minister.

If we look at the various Boards and Committees under his Ministry, as it is also the case for most ministries, almost all of them are made of *petits copains*. Hence, there is no doubt – that is why the hon. Minister who spoke just before me mentioned *ti copain*. Hence there is no doubt in this case also *ti copain* will be nominated.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we were expecting something more consistent. That is a Council that would respond to the needs of the community; that would be an important player in the recreational landscape but unfortunately, as I said, we find an *éléphant blanc*. It is a half-baked product. I would urgently appeal to the hon. Prime Minister not to allow this Bill to proceed and to request the hon. Minister to go back to his drawing board and review his copy. Nobody should be given so much power. *Trop de pouvoir tue le pouvoir*.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister Bholah, please.

(10.59 p.m.)

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to commend my colleague, the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, for presenting the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill.

This Bill aims to set up an appropriate body with a clear mandate and a proper legal framework to oversee the organisation of leisure activities in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been nine orators for this Bill including the mover of the Bill, that is, five from this side of the House and four from the Opposition side. Much of the criticism was centred around the composition of the Board and this is a usual rhetoric from Opposition Members on any Bill where there is a composition of any Board or Council, we are used to that. But I was stunned by the intervention of hon. Wochit during the last sitting. In fact, in a nutshell, he commented on the timing of the Bill whereas there is nothing sinister regarding the timing of the Bill. Moving forward, he said that Government had a hidden agenda when introducing this Bill. I do not know what Government or the hon. Minister is hiding behind this Bill. Moving forward, he said, and hon. Hurdoyal commented about this, that this Bill should have been introduced by a Minister other than the Minister responsible for recreation and he finally concluded by saying that this Bill should be simply withdrawn.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe that this discourse was meant for recreation time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, sport, fitness and leisure are often considered as seemingly too trivial, inconsequential and insignificant, and do not traditionally form part of mainstream debates but not for this present Government.

On this side of the House, we sincerely believe that sport, fitness and leisure do form part of the serious debate surrounding public health, safety and well-being. In our vision, they lie at the very basis of a pyramid on which a healthy and successful Nation can be built. Healthy people are key to the successful delivery of our vision to make Mauritius a prosperous nation.

In fact our human capabilities are our only native resource. As such, we should ensure that necessary frameworks and conditions are created for our People to be and to remain healthy. Reason why, this Government views sports, leisure, and recreational activities as key and has always ensured they form integral part of our development and get the attention and adequate levels of resources they deserve.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, life can at times be hectic, tiring and stressful for many of us and we all need to set time apart for recreational activities to strike the right balance between work and leisure. Ultimately the right balance contributes to our mental and physical wellbeing. Making space for recreational activities helps in removing sluggishness and prevents unwanted diseases. There is significant evidence that improved health outcomes, and lower health costs, are attributable to increased rates of physical activity within the population.

Moreover, engaging in recreational activities improves the society's sense of community as it encourages bonding with friends and loved ones on a regular basis. Besides, it is a known fact that multi-modal programmes, with a recreational activity component, can reduce the risks of anti-social or self-destructive behaviour among youths. When we attain a proper balance in our lives, it brings about a level of contentment. This, in turn, helps us to perform better and be successful. Thus, the overall quality of life improves. Studies have proven that devoting time to leisure increases workers' productivity also. This is because by practising a specific recreational activity, we master the art of staying focused, motivated and confident. Such an attitude leads people to perform to the best of their ability.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I have just detailed brings us to the conclusion that recreation is a crucial element to shape people. It is undeniable that health is wealth. Our wealth is our people. We need human capital in the achievement of our objectives. A healthy population and a healthy workplace are the drivers of economic prosperity. I believe that today, with the vision of setting up a Mauritius Recreation Council, we are formalising recreational activities as a backbone of the improved quality of life that we yearn for. At the same time, we are creating

the necessary conditions for our citizens to view leisure as a means to build happier and healthier lives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, be it in scope or depth, the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill comes to highlight the primary importance our Government places on recreational activities and their known benefits. The Bill also underlines the virtuous intent of Government with regard to the formalisation of the process, namely –

- (i) Practising recreation and related activities within an established framework.
- (ii) For the benefit of the public and with the active participation of the public thereby emphasising constant communication, coordination and collaboration.
- (iii) The basis of such a collaborative nature is further consolidated by the parts (b), (c) and (d) of Clause 5 of the Bill. Supporting community projects, establishing an annual calendar and assisting organisations have as message that the public is our partner. Such a synergy can only be beneficial, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Every voice from every segment matters. The collaboration with the Civil Society and private bodies gives the guarantee that nothing will be done in a unilateral manner.
- (iv) Led by a duly constituted council that will promote and organise recreational activities. Getting communities involved as we recognise it as a necessary precondition for the Mauritian public to own the projects to be put in place. This will eventually promote adherence and ensure the success of the recreational projects organised. Widening community participation in promoting of recreational activities will further Government's agenda of inclusiveness, that is, 'No one should be left behind'.
- (v) Furthermore setting up of the right framework and safe conditions that create opportunities for one and all to participate will pave the way for collective participation and contribution to community-led and community-based recreational projects.
- (vi) The introduction of the concept of annual planning and establishment of calendar for promotional activities is a laudable effort. This will ensure that recreational

projects sit high on the agenda of the community in turn safeguarding continuity and that the proposed plans are adequately resourced. Whether in the form of infrastructure, logistics, manpower or finance which the Bill seeks to provide under objective 2(d), namely, assisting organisations involved in the promotion of recreational activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the setting up of the Recreation Council also ensures that henceforth things will not be done in a haphazard way in the recreational sector. While practising a recreational activity, the prime concern of the organising party and the participants should be safety. This has been often neglected resulting in so many accidents at a very heavy human cost. I will just take the example of 'hiking' or 'nature walks' by individuals or groups setting out together at places like Les Gorges de la Rivière Noire or Sept Cascades. Very often, what promises to be an unforgettable day for our young people end up in accidents with youngsters either getting lost or injured or leaving bereaved families mourning for their loved ones.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recreational activities should not become causes of anguish, pain or misery reason why I applaud the measures to be taken in this Bill to ensure health, safety and security for recreational activities through adequate planning and a formal framework –

- The skills of organisers;
- the unpredictability of weather conditions;
- readiness to safely negotiate levels of difficulties chosen such as climbing;
- managing complexities related to unknowns in adverse conditions should stop being after thoughts and sources of regrets.

They should rather be planned and resourced adequately and I am convinced the Mauritius Recreation Council will improve such necessary preconditions and overall readiness.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, similarly the Council will ensure that the well-being of our senior citizens remains high on our agenda. Who in this House is not aware of cases of old people failing to enjoy their favourite activities or failing to perform basic, routine tasks as they effortlessly did in the past? There are many reasons why people give up doing things they once enjoyed. Perhaps a peer group that was associated with recreational activities is no longer around and social isolation has crept in unnoticed, leading to depression, loneliness and self-exclusion

from the real world. When we think of the elderly, our first thoughts should not be of them sitting idly in a chair or spending time in bed a world away from recreational activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, leisure should be part of the elderly's weekly schedule. It is a known fact that a majority of seniors rely on leisure activities to improve their physical, cognitive, and emotional health as well as their overall wellbeing and quality of life. Recreation is viewed by seniors as a therapeutic activity. We do not want our seniors to let go of what they enjoy doing. New recreation activities for our elders should be devised and encouraged, such as painting, embroidery, crochet or knitting and mind-game activities or adapted and lower intensity courses of stretching, yoga, or tai-chi. And I am hopeful, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that in this vein, the Mauritius Recreation Council will within the appropriate frameworks created be able to assist senior citizen associations to develop appropriate recreation activities for our elders.

A third group that is set to benefit directly from the setting up of the Mauritius Recreation Council are people with disabilities. Although there are a variety of activities that can help them to socialise, express their feelings and stay healthier, many of them are still facing difficulties to get involved in leisure and recreational activities. Article 26 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) calls for, and I quote –

“(...) appropriate measures, including through peer support, to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain their maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life”.

Government is conscious that recreation has the rare ability to transcend social, linguistic, and cultural barriers. Thanks to its universal popularity and ability to draw people of different backgrounds together, recreation is a fantastic tool for fostering the inclusion and well-being of all participants. Thus, our caring Government wants to ensure that disabled people have every opportunity to participate in the activities of everyday life, including leisure and recreational activities. I strongly believe that the Mauritius Recreation Council will be catalyst for social inclusion from that perspective. We can definitely expect that the necessary programmes for recreation will be developed for people with disabilities. And, once again, the element of health, safety and security with regard to disabled need to be a priority in these recreational activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the setting up of the Mauritius Recreation Council is even more relevant in the wake of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered many aspects of daily

life, including the pursuit of leisure activities. The pandemic has also imposed a new lifestyle for all of us. However, increased time for leisure has coincided with restricted access to popular leisure facilities, causing many to look toward activities available closer to home. Studies on the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 have highlighted an increase in mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Engaging in leisure activities may provide protective benefits for psychological well-being. In fact, health organisations and professionals have emphasised the importance of allocating time for hobbies and leisure.

More than ever, the recreation sector will need to be strategic and deliberate with how services are planned and delivered and how recreation experiences are re-introduced into communities. However, like all sectors of our economy, this recovery will need to be calculated and managed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Some leisure facilities are now reopened, but are operating with strict COVID-19 rules and regulations in place. We have to find new ways of practising leisure and recreation activities while still keeping the safety of ourselves and others as top priority. Ongoing collaboration with private operators in the leisure sector will be needed so that our collective response against the virus can be more coordinated, consistent and effective. This is where the Mauritius Recreation Council will prove to be a major partner for dialogue, policies and enhanced protocols. Hence, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the debates on the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill come at the most opportune time.

Empowering the Mauritius Recreation Council –

- as an organiser;
- as a lead agency;
- as a source of information and advice,
- and as the guide for the smooth implementation of recreational activities,

will bring a certain level of serenity. We can definitely expect the Council to cooperate closely with social players and other stakeholders to coordinate new activities or facilities.

I wish to add a note of praise regarding the proposed management of the Council. It is suitable and appropriate that the Ministry of Youth Empowerment is ensuring that it complies with good governance and transparency. Clause 5, part (e) of the Bill makes provision for compliance with the Public Procurement Act. Clause 15 of the Bill, regarding the publication of Annual Report, part (2) specifies that the Assembly will be in presence of annual report and

audited reports of the Council. So, hon. Members, especially from the Opposition side can rest assured that they will have the opportunity to query and obtain necessary information pertaining to the management of the Council.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as we are constantly called upon to innovate, evolve, and adapt, we have to give the chance to the new Council to be set up, to perform and prove itself on its set objectives for the benefit of our people. Along the way, there may be necessary improvements to be effected to further enhance its delivery. We will have the chance to come up with such proposals and suggestions as quality delivery is an ongoing process.

Let us give recreation the place it rightly deserves and I hope that the Mauritius Recreation Council becomes a worthy voice for the advocacy of recreation in its wider perspective and an even worthier operator of successful programme implementation for the safety, health and well-being of our people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am done.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister please, pull your mask on your nose!

Hon. Minister Toussaint!

(11.19 p.m.)

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): Merci, M. le président de séance. Permettez-moi d'abord de remercier tous les membres de l'Assemblée qui sont intervenus sur ce projet de loi, que ce soient mes collègues du gouvernement, aussi bien que les membres de l'Opposition qui ont apporté leur voix à ce projet de loi.

M. le président, mes collègues de ce côté de la Chambre ont été très clairs parce que nous parlons d'un projet de loi simple, direct et claire, et très bien défini, très bien écrit. Et je profite de l'occasion pour remercier et féliciter mes officiers du ministère aussi bien que les officiers de l'*Attorney General's Office* pour ce merveilleux travail. Mes collègues en ont parlé largement et ont expliqué ce que nous sommes en train de proposer dans ce projet de loi, c'est-à-dire, la création du *Mauritius Recreation Council*.

Cependant, M. le président, quand j'ai écouté attentivement les quatre orateurs de l'Opposition, cela m'a fait penser à 'Maman, j'ai raté l'avion !'

(Interruptions)

Et malgré que ce soit un projet simple, comme je l'ai dit, j'ai eu toutes les peines du monde à me préparer pour mon *summing-up* tellement que les discours des membres de l'Opposition étaient contradictoires et complètement hors sujet, M. le président. Je me réfère rapidement à ce que l'honorable Juman vient de dire, il a parlé de '*giving information to Minister*'. Mais si lui-même, dès que le conseil est mis sur pied, il vient de l'avant pour me poser des questions sur le conseil, *I will need to seek for information with Council and they are supposed to give me these information to be able to reply to hon. Juman*. Et il trouve ça bizarre que le ministre demande des informations au conseil ! Si ce n'est pas contradictoire ou hors sujet, M. le président, je me demande ce que c'est.

M. le président, en 2019, effectivement, après les élections le Premier ministre m'a donné cette responsabilité additionnelle qu'est le *recreation*. Et malheureusement, en mars 2020 - juste après décembre 2019, mars 2020 - nous prenions connaissance de la pandémie, de la Covid. Et évidemment, quand nous arrivons au moment du budget en juin, il y a eu des coupures puisque le pays était à genoux, il y avait un *lockdown*. C'est tout à fait normal qu'il n'y avait pas de sous budgétés pour le *recreation*. Cependant, M. le président, cela ne veut pas dire que les officiers de mon ministère se sont assis et ont croisé les bras pendant tout ce temps. Avec le budget à notre disposition, que ce soit au niveau du département des Sports ou du département de la Jeunesse, les officiers, sans aucune structure, sans personnel, sans un département spécial de *recreation*, mes officiers ont travaillé pour pouvoir venir de l'avant avec plusieurs activités déjà en ligne pendant le *lockdown*. Et plusieurs membres de l'Opposition ont parlé du timing, la Covid est là et qu'est-ce qu'on va aller faire comme activités récréatives. Laissez-moi rappeler à ces honorables membres de l'Opposition ; *internet existait, Zoom, TikTok existait*.

Et donc pendant le *lockdown*, les officiers sont venus de l'avant avec des activités récréatives et créatives pour offrir à la population qui était enfermée à la maison avec des activités *online* et malgré tout, donc nous avons eu un budget cette année et il était stipulé clairement dans le discours du budget *that we are going to set up a Mauritius Recreation Council* avec le budget que nous avons eu et en attendant toujours *the setting up of the Council*, c'est ce

que nous débattons aujourd'hui, pareil, mes officiers se sont assis et ont travaillé plusieurs programmes. J'ai en tête, par exemple, des activités que nous avons appelées loisirs *zen* qui permettent à toutes les personnes de venir participer, de venir utiliser les activités de mer que nous offrons au *centre outdoor* à Pointe Jérôme et à Anse La Raie par exemple.

Et j'avais parlé dans mon discours ; de kayak et pas plus loin que la semaine dernière justement M. le président, donc un groupe de jeunes à travers le *Plaine Wilhems Regional Youth Council*, un groupe de jeunes de Chebel, de la Cité Barkly ont fait appel au ministère parce que justement, oui, ils sont un peu fatigués de rester sans rien faire et ils nous ont demandé: quelles sont les possibilités? Ils ont entendu le *Recreation Council* et quelles sont les possibilités? Qu'est-ce qu'ils peuvent aller faire et justement donc les officiers sont en contact avec eux pour leur proposer des activités *outdoor* : le kayak, le vélo, le badminton dans soit le centre qui se trouve à Pointe Jérôme ou le centre de Anse La Raie. Donc ce sont des jeunes de Chebel et de Barkly, M. le président.

Rapidement M. le président, plusieurs membres de l'Opposition ont parlé que la majorité des membres, d'ailleurs je crois l'honorable Hurdoyal a répondu à cela, notamment l'honorable Wochit qui a parlé que la majorité des membres qui vont siéger sur ce conseil seront des petits copains, des petites copines, etc. M. le président, l'honorable Hurdoyal l'a dit. Alors voilà. Je cite exactement le Hansard -

“Therefore, I presume, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that most of these Board members will be appointed on the basis of their political affinities as a reward for their loyalty towards the ruling party in power rather than on their competencies.”

Ça veut dire e nous allons récompenser les colleurs d'affiches du MSM et de l'Alliance. C'est ça que l'honorable membre veut dire - “*most of these Board members*”. J'ai un peu mes mathématiques qui sont faussées là si je me réfère à ce que l'honorable Wochit a dit. Alors il y aura 13 membres sur ce conseil. 13 membres. Parmi ces 13 membres, je l'avais cité la dernière fois - *a representative of my Ministry*; qui est un fonctionnaire; *a representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of education*; un autre fonctionnaire ; l'environnement, finance, *Gender, Tourism, National Parks and representatives from Business Mauritius* qui nous font 8 sur 13 qui sont des fonctionnaires ou un membre de *Business Mauritius*. À moins que l'honorable membre est en train de dire que ces

fonctionnaires sont tous des colleurs d'affiches du MSM. Je ne sais pas. C'est ce qu'il insinue.

Alors soyons corrects puisque vous savez, M. le président, il n'est pas normal que tous les projets de loi que nous introduisons à la Chambre, les membres de l'Opposition systématiquement veulent faire croire que nous sommes en train d'apporter des lois pour caser les petits copains, les petites copines. Nous apportons des lois contre la population. Dans leur discours, ils sortent complètement en dehors du sujet et veulent faire croire à la population que nous sommes en train de mal faire notre travail. Donc je prends le temps de corriger cela. Ce n'est pas le cas. C'est un *board* où il y aura 8 personnes sur 13 qui sont des fonctionnaires et parmi dedans, une personne *from Business Mauritius* et ce ne sont pas des colleurs d'affiches. Si ces fonctionnaires *kontan* MSM, tant mieux. Je suis bien content moi aussi.

M. le président, rapidement, puisque beaucoup de choses ont été dites. L'honorable Quirin, dans son intervention, je cite -

«Or, ce texte de loi, M. le président, ne vienne nullement proposer ou encadrer techniquement les activités récréatives à Maurice ».

Je me permets d'informer l'honorable membre que, par exemple, j'ai demandé l'autorisation au directeur d'*Otelairie Mauritius*, Monsieur O.B, qui avait eu une formation avec le ministère dans le passé et qui, aujourd'hui a sa propre compagnie et il avait été formé, je cite-

« *Training in Rock Climbing [donc tout ce qui est escalade] was provided by a team of professional climbers from Roc Réunion Création.* »

Et que cette compagnie, pour pouvoir faire ses activités de *recreation*, a une licence délivrée par le *Tourism Authority*. Donc c'est un secteur où il y a déjà des cadres légales qui viennent encadrer ceux qui veulent se lancer dans ce secteur et aussi, cette compagnie M. le président, j'ai appris qu'elle travaille aussi souvent avec des chantiers. Elle travaille aussi souvent avec les grands bâtiments et elles sont enregistrées au niveau du CIDB puisqu'elles ont la connaissance, vous savez parfois on passe sur l'autoroute et on voit donc quelqu'un qui est en train de nettoyer les gratte-ciel et donc, il faut utiliser les cordes etc., cette compagnie fait ça.

Donc il est un peu faux de dire qu'il n'y a absolument aucun cadre pour encadrer ceux qui veulent se lancer dans ce domaine. M. le président, je cite aussi l'honorable Quirin qui avait parlé -

« Je pense qu'il aurait dû venir, d'une part avec un plan national et d'autre part inclure, etc., etc.»

J'ai mentionné dans mon discours M. le président, que nous avons eu recours aux services d'un consultant pour nous aider à développer ce secteur. Donc c'est ça le plan national et nous avons eu donc justement pas mal d'idées par rapport à ce projet.

M. le président, le projet de loi aujourd'hui et que nous avons débattu vient pour nous aider à mettre sur pied et à structurer ce domaine de *recreation* dans le but de donner une culture d'activités récréatives à la population parce que nous savons très bien qu'à Maurice, ce n'est pas trop notre domaine et il est encore une fois regrettable, on est obligé de le dire M. le président, il est encore une fois regrettable que les membres de l'Opposition ne sont pas venus avec des propositions et qui, comme à leur habitude, on fait un chapelet de critiques, pas nécessairement positives et là, je me réfère, alors M. le président, laissez-moi rapidement retrouver, ce que l'honorable Richard Duval a dit, je cite -

“M. le président, que la loi aurait dû avoir une définition plus élargie du mot ‘récréation’ étant donné que les disciplines concernées sont nombreuses tout comme les conditions qui sont attachées à la pratique. En effet, la chasse, la pêche, la natation,...”

Je suis désolé, honorable ami, dans une loi, on ne va pas pouvoir citer toutes ces différentes activités récréatives qui existent. Il y a des centaines et des centaines d'activités récréatives et ce n'est pas comme ça que nous faisons une loi pour citer tout ça. Évidemment, quand le conseil sera mis en place, ce conseil aura pour responsabilité de brasser large et de voir toutes les différentes activités possibles.

Je suis aussi navré de dire que malheureusement, l'honorable Duval a essayé de débattre et que dommage, quand il faisait son discours, son allocution, il était seul et il avait été complètement lâché par ses collègues du PMSD. Tout comme aujourd'hui, son leader n'est même pas là et pourtant il demande à ce qu'il n'y ait pas de vacances parlementaires ! Nous débattons un projet de loi aujourd'hui, M. le président, qui est important.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, nous débattons une loi importante et que...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Toussaint: Vous savez, M. le président, être bien élevé ce n'est pas donné à tout le monde. Ce n'est pas donné à tout le monde !

Et donc, je le redis parce que l'honorable leader de l'Opposition l'a dit haut et fort, a écrit et a dit partout, pas de vacances parlementaires, il faut travailler dur, il faut continuer à garder le Parlement et à débattre. La dernière fois, malheureusement, il a laissé mon ami tout seul à faire son discours. Aujourd'hui, encore une fois, il a disparu. Complètement disparu ! Peut-être *li en recreation !*

M. le président, il y eu beaucoup d'inexactitudes que l'honorable Wochit a dit et d'ailleurs mes collègues de ce côté de la Chambre ont corrigé cela. Donc, je cite –

“Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is my humble contention that this Bill should have been introduced by the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.”

Bien kontan ou madam!

Je suis désolé. Le portfolio de '*Recreation*', qu'on soit content ou pas, c'est avec mon ministère ! Et c'est tout à fait simple et logique que ce soit mon ministère, que ce soit moi qui apporte ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée. Je vais revenir avec le timing vers la fin de mon discours parce qu'on a parlé de *human restriction*, etc.

Autres incohérences qu'il faut corriger parce que tout ça, ça va rester dans *Hansard*. Je suis désolé, il faut absolument corriger cela. Je cite, toujours de l'honorable Wochit –

“Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, which is manned by a horde of Youth Officers and led by a Director of Sports.”

Ce n'est pas le cas!

Le department de la jeunesse, *youth department* is sous la direction du *Director of Youth Affairs and not Director of Sports. The Director of Sports has the responsibility of the department of sports.*

M. le président, quelque part aussi, l'honorable Wochit avait parlé dans son discours de l'arrestation d'un *Chairperson*. Je ne comprends pas qu'est-ce que ça à avoir avec le *Mauritius Recreation Council Bill*. Alors, je cite–

“The recent events at the Mauritius Sports Council and in one District Council where the Chairman was arrested on frivolous charges (...)”

(Interruptions)

Mr Toussaint: Complètement ! Complètement ! Alors, je ne comprends pas ce que cela vient faire avec le projet de loi que nous sommes en train de débattre et donc je tenais à le dire parce qu'il faut corriger quand quelque chose est mal rapportée, M. le président.

M. le président, le temps file très vite. Pour conclure, je vais dire deux choses. Premièrement, tous les membres de l'Opposition ont parlé du mauvais timing par rapport à la crise sanitaire etc. Les membres de ce côté de la Chambre ont parlé du bienfait de *recreation*. Et quand j'ai dit de contradictions au commencement de mon discours, je me réfère à un *Adjournment Matter* qu'avait soulevé l'honorable Joanna Bérenger. Je cite, M. le président, –

« M. le president, ma requête s'adresse au ministre de la Jeunesse et des Sports. Un communiqué de son ministère a été porté à mon attention - et, elle avait soumis le communiqué - Il date du 12 novembre et fait état des nouvelles restrictions par rapport aux mesures sanitaires. »

Elle continue pour dire –

« Mais, M. le président, le problème est que les enfants, mis à part les adolescents à partir de 15 ans qui ont accès aux vaccins Pfizer, les autres ne sont pas éligibles à la vaccination pour la Covid-19. Et, on a déjà privé nos enfants d'école, on les a privés de vie sociale, et maintenant on les prive aussi d'activité physique. J'implore dont le ministre responsable de bien vouloir mesurer l'impact de cette restriction sur la santé physique et la santé mentale de nos enfants et de bien vouloir agir en conséquence. »

Donc, elle faisait appel pour qu'on puisse autoriser les jeunes à pratiquer une activité physique et sportive. Aujourd'hui, quand nous venons de l'avant avec le projet de *Recreation Council Bill*, qui va s'occuper de toutes les activités récréatives pour toute la population, on parle de mauvais timing parce qu'il y a la Covid etc. S'il vous plaît, messieurs et mesdames de l'Opposition, accordez vos violons sinon ça fait beaucoup de fausses notes.

M. le président, comme j'ai dit aussi, pour terminer, je prends un exemple. Nous, dans cette Chambre, par exemple, nous avons les moyens de nous permettre de temps en temps une petite activité. Nous avons les moyens de prendre des vacances, de faire un petit voyage, d'aller à l'extérieur, de faire un week-end dans un hôtel et d'utiliser les infrastructures qu'il y a là-bas ; la piscine, les activités nautiques. Mais malheureusement, ce n'est pas le cas pour tout le monde. Et quand nous allons mettre sur pied le *Mauritius Recreation Council Bill*, nous allons offrir des activités qui ne sont pas nécessairement à la portée de tous et ceci pour le dire, *free of charge* ! Nous allons offrir un service. Nous n'allons pas faire de profits sur la tête des gens. Donc, nous, en tant que gouvernement responsable, qui a à cœur la santé et qui à cœur notre population, nous avons pensé à eux et nous voulons rendre l'accès facile à différentes activités de *recreation*.

Je prends un simple exemple, si quelqu'un veut aller faire un peu de kayak, M. le président, où le faire ? Combien cela coûterait-il ? Or, comme je le dis, nous faisons déjà des activités de kayak dans les centres à Pointe Jérôme et dans les centres à Anse la Raie, gratuitement.

Donc, nous donnons l'accès, nous venons démocratiser les activités récréatives et nous sommes donc, M. le président, un gouvernement qui à cœur sa population et qui veut le bien-être de toute la population.

M. le président, je termine ici. Encore une fois, je remercie tous les Membres qui ont apporté leur voix à ce projet de loi. Je remercie encore une fois, le Premier ministre, qui nous a donné cette responsabilité, mes officiers qui ont travaillé sur ce projet de loi, les officiers de *l'Attorney General*.

J'espère de tout cœur, M. le président, que malgré ce que les Membres de l'Opposition ont dit, qu'un de ces jours, je vais les voir dans nos centres en train de venir pratiquer une activité avec nous. Je les invite en avance !

With these words, I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

THE MAURITIUS RECREATION COUNCIL BILL

(No. XVII of 2021)

The Mauritius Recreation Council Bill (No. XVII of 2021) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Recreation Council Bill (No. XVII of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 10 December 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

Mr Ganoo seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment Matters! Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(11.45 p.m.)

MATTERS RAISED

MR A. A. - DEATH CERTIFICATE - SAUDI ARABIA

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to address an issue that can be either for the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage or the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

It concerns a Public Officer, Mr A. A. who passed away in Saudi Arabia in 2018 while performing the Umrah pilgrimage. Since then, the widow of that person is having a lot of problems to have a copy of his death certificate. She went to the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) and she was told that the problem is at the doorstep of our Embassy in Saudi Arabia. But, since 2018, she has not been able to have this certificate. So, I am not too sure which one has the full particulars of the deceased person. It is either the Minister; I can give it to him for a follow-up eventually. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I have taken note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of the request of the hon. Member. I will kindly ask him to provide me or my colleague with the necessary information and we will see to it that the needful is done.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Farhad Aumeer, please!

(11.47 p.m.)

**BOULEVARD PITOT POST OFFICE, VALLÉE PITOT – SECURITY
GUARD/POLICEMAN & SUNSHADE COVERINGS**

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you. My request is addressed to the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation regarding the Boulevard Pitot Post Office near Vallée Pitot.

I have had representations made on one hand by the staff working there and on the other hand, by pensioners and people who use this facility. It regards firstly, for the provision of a security guard or a policeman due to the high volume of cash that transit in that post office and that can cause and attract certain badly intended people, and secondly, the erection of some form of sunshade coverings for the lengthy queues that spill outside the very small office, particularly in the scorching sun for our old age pensioners.

I request the hon. Minister to see to it that these two requests can be taken on board.
Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Member for giving me advance notice of this question. I have in the meantime gathered information at Boulevard Pitot Post Office. I am being informed that in principle, money does not stay overnight at the post office. It is delivered in the morning for usage on the same day for payment of pension.

I am also informed that there are security measures already present in the post office. For example, CCTV cameras, alarm system and so on. However, I have discussed with the management team of the post to be able to have a Police Officer on day duty over there, because of the transactions of money that is being paid to the pensioners.

And the second part of the question, with regard to shelter, whereby there are senior citizens waiting in a queue to collect their pension, the hon. Member will appreciate that because of social distancing, the queues will be longer than normal. But, however, we will take into consideration to upgrade the comfort of our senior citizens by putting a shelter so that they do not stay under the sun for a long time in order to collect their pension. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dhunoo, please!

(11.49 p.m.)

A10 ROAD, 16^e MILLE - SLABS - REPLACEMENT

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Merci, M. le president. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse au ministre Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram ministre des Infrastructures nationales et du Développement communautaire.

Cela concerne la route A10 menant au village de 16^e Mille qui tombe sous la responsabilité de la RDA. J'aimerais remercier le ministre au nom de tous les habitants de 16^e Mille d'avoir, à travers la RDA, fait nettoyer les drains sous les trottoirs pour la première fois depuis que ces trottoirs ont été construits. Cela va aider pendant les saisons de grosses pluies. Mais on a aussi noté que les *slabs* sont en mauvais état, et s'il peut demander à son équipe de la

RDA, qui fait un travail formidable dans la circonscription, de remplacer les *slabs* endommagés des deux côtés de la route pour le bien-être des piétonniers et des habitants. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, please!

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for his good words. I will certainly look into the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger!

(11.50 p.m.)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE/CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au Premier ministre, qui n'est malheureusement pas là, mais j'espère que ça pourra lui être communiqué. Un peu plus tôt dans son discours, il nous a partagés des chiffres concernant les fonds dont Maurice bénéficiera pour lutter et s'adapter au réchauffement climatique.

J'aimerais lui demander en tant que *Leader of the House*, de bien vouloir demander au président de l'Assemblée nationale de mettre en place un *Environmental Committee* ou un *Climate Change Committee* au sein de l'Assemblée nationale pour inclure l'opposition parlementaire dans les discussions concernant l'utilisation de ces fonds. Un comité pour l'environnement n'existe pas encore au sein de notre Assemblée nationale. Merci beaucoup.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. That would be a policy matter.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Néanmoins, M. le président, la requête sera transmise à M. le Premier ministre.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Salim Abbas Mamode!

(11.51)

PLAINE VERTE - ONE-WAY STREETS

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): *Merci, M. le président.* My request tonight will be addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail in regard to various one-way streets in the Plaine Verte region in my constituency. Since these streets have been converted into one-way once, which is a good decision due to the narrowness, much confusion arise on the part of drivers whereby long deviations are required in certain places. So, I would request the hon. Minister to have all these issues thrashed out by the TMRSU for the benefit of all road users and the inhabitants of Plaine Verte.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Member for the request he has made to me. But I must firstly tell him that the decision to convert a street into a one-way street is done by the TMRSU after having made the necessary surveys. Nevertheless, he has apprised me of the situation earlier. I will look into the matter and I will liaise with the TMRSU to find if there is a possible solution to the problem that he has raised.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

(11.53 p.m.)

**CITÉ MARTIAL, KLEBER STREET, INDIAN LANE & TRANQUILLE STREET -
POWER CUT - 04.12.21**

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the Minister of Public Utilities. I am sure one of his colleagues will take on the matter.

On Saturday 04 December 2021, on or about 5 p.m. in the region of Cité Martial, the Kleber Street, Indian Lane and Tranquille Street, there was a power cut in electricity which was mainly caused by a *surcharge* of electricity from the CEB supply and as a result of this *surcharge* several electrical appliances, including refrigerators, air cons, TV sets have been damaged, and in some cases, damage beyond repairs. Complaints have already been filed at CEB, Port Louis, and they were being told to repair their appliances and then bring on their

receipts. The issue is that, not everybody has the means to repair their appliances. So, my appeal, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the hon. Minister, is for CEB to look urgently into the matter and to compensate the aggrieved parties ASAP. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Who will take the request?

The Minister of Land Transport and Light-Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I will take up the complaint and the request made by the hon. Member to my colleague, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Fabrice David, patient as you are, you are the last one I think for tonight.

(11.55 p.m.)

**POINTE AUX SABLES – ROAD CONGESTION – TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND
ROAD SAFETY UNIT – SITE VISIT**

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président, de me permettre de terminer cet ajournement avant qu'on ne change de date avec une requête qui s'adresse au ministre des Transports terrestres et qui renvoie un point que j'ai soulevé à l'ajournement du 30 juillet 2021, à savoir un flux de véhicules trop dense à travers les morcellements de Pointe aux Sables devenu depuis peu la source régulière d'accident de la route. J'avais alors humblement proposé comme solution le raccordement routier de l'avenue des Peupliers au rondpoint de la zone industrielle de La Tour Koenig pour décongestionner la circulation routière à travers Pointe aux Sables. Puis-je demander au ministre si la *Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit* a trouvé le temps d'effectuer une visite sur site pour étudier ma proposition ou toute autre solution routière adaptée. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light-Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to answer the hon. Member. I am informed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit that is site visit would be undertaken by the district engineer and a survey will be conducted, accordingly. I am informed that following the survey, appropriate remedial measures, if any, will be recommended to the local authority which is

responsible for the construction of roads within the area. The hon. Member can rest assured that construction of the said road will also depend on technical and financial feasibility.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I note that from three, last week, it is five this week, well done!

At 11.56 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 10 December 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

COP26 MEETING - MITIGATION & ADAPTATION MEASURES

(No. B/1320) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, he will state if, when he attended the recent COP26 Meeting, he has had other high-level meetings or taken initiatives in regard to the financial need of Mauritius for USD 6.5 billion for period 2021-2030 to take mitigation and adaptation measures in the light of the non-materialisation of the pledge for funding from donor countries and agencies at and outside of Glasgow.

(Withdrawn)

IBA - PRIVATE RADIOS LICENSES - DATE OF ISSUE & RENEWAL

(No. B/1325) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the private radios operating in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Broadcasting Authority, in each case, information as to the date of issue and of subsequent renewal/s of licenses thereto.

Reply: The Acting Director of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) has informed that the first private radio licences were issued on Thursday 04 April 2002 to Radio Plus and Top FM. Radio One was first issued a licence on Friday 10 May 2002. These licences

were valid for a period of three years and have been successively renewed and the licensees have been paying their licence fees on a yearly basis.

The licences of both Radio One and Radio Plus were last renewed on Sunday 04 April 2021. Their current licences will, therefore, expire on Wednesday 03 April 2024. As regards Top FM, its licence was last renewed on Thursday 13 December 2018. Its current licence will, therefore, expire on Sunday 12 December 2021.

In regard to WAZAA FM, its licence was first issued on Monday 17 December 2018 and will, therefore, expire on Thursday 16 December 2021.

Information regarding the date of renewals of private radios licences is available in the Register of licences at the IBA, which is open to inspection by the public, pursuant to section 26(2) of the IBA Act.

LA TOUR KOENIG - DRUG DEALINGS & LARCENY – JUNE 2021-DEC 2021

(No. B/1326) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the commercial centre found at La Tour Koenig, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to if an increase in the number of cases of drugs dealings and larceny and unsafe environment prevailing thereat have been reported recently and, if so, if consideration will be given for additional measures to be taken to address the issues, including increasing police patrols.

Reply: Parliamentary Questions B/1326 and B/1328 are replied together as they relate to the same subject matter.

The Acting Commissioner of Police has informed that the geographical area of La Tour Koenig comprises 20,000 inhabitants. This area includes an industrial zone, residential and commercial areas, other important buildings and educational institutions, amongst others.

The Acting Commissioner of Police has also informed that La Tour Koenig Police Station which is responsible for policing the area is staffed with 36 Police Officers who are supported in their day-to-day policing by the Emergency Response Service (ERS), Divisional Support Unit (DSU), local Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU).

In addition, on Mondays and Thursdays between 22.00 and 02.00 hours, the Special Support Unit (SSU) and Special Mobile Force (SMF) carry out mobile patrols and vehicle checks at strategic locations in the region of La Tour Koenig. The activities in the Station area are closely monitored by 57 Safe City Cameras.

Since 2004 to Thursday 02 December 2021, 6 Neighbourhood Watch Schemes (NWS) have been set up in the region of La Tour Koenig. Regular Community Policing Fora are conducted by Police with community representatives, NGOs, local authorities and other stakeholders with a view to resolving policing problems in the area. From 2010 to Thursday 02 December 2021, 459 Community Policing Fora have been organised during which 609 issues were raised, out of which, 520 had been resolved.

The Acting Commissioner of Police has further informed that for the year 2021, the number of drug cases and larceny established by the Police in the region of La Tour Koenig is as follows –

- 8 cases of drugs from January to May 2021
- 5 cases of drugs from June to 02 December 2021
- 42 cases of larceny from January to May 2021
- 48 cases of larceny from June to 02 December 2021

From these figures, it cannot be inferred that there is an increase in the number of drug dealings and larceny cases in the region of La Tour Koenig during this period.

The Acting Commissioner of Police has also informed that from 2014 to 02 December 2021, the Police have received seven complaints concerning methadone patients found loitering in commercial areas in the vicinity of the methadone distribution point which is at La Tour Koenig Police Station. The Police have promptly responded to these complaints and is continuously taking necessary measures to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants. Some of the additional measures which the Police have taken to maintain and preserve law and order in the region of La Tour Koenig are as follows –

- (i) foot and mobile patrols have been increased;
- (ii) targeted crackdown operations are being regularly carried out in places of complaint;
- (iii) Police is working in partnership with local community representatives, Non-Governmental Organisations and private security companies for resolving problems which could impact on the safety and security of the inhabitants;
- (iv) Safe City Cameras are being used extensively to monitor the movements of suspicious persons, drug peddlers, persistent offenders and habitual criminals preying over vulnerable persons;
- (v) elderly persons living alone considered as easy targets, are being visited during field counselling by Police Officers posted to the Crime Prevention Unit and are being sensitized on crime prevention measures;
- (vi) sensitisation campaigns have been intensified with a view to raising awareness among the inhabitants on the drug scourge and other anti-social behaviour;
- (vii) more Field Intelligence Officers (FIO) have been deployed on the ground with a view to gathering information on suspicious persons and vehicles wandering in the region and proactive measures are taken accordingly to put them at bay;
- (viii) regular training are being provided to Police Officers in order to improve their capacity building for the effective enforcement of law and order and for making the community safer;
- (ix) modern equipment are being provided to Police Officers to enable them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently;

- (x) social media platforms are being used to sensitize the inhabitants on crime prevention measures, and
- (xi) informers and whistleblowers are being rewarded for information shared on crime related activities.

It must pertinently be pointed out that since 2017, some 144 patients from the region of La Tour Koenig and neighbouring villages converge to La Tour Koenig Police Station on a daily basis between 06.00 and 07.00 hours for methadone treatment. After treatment, some of them loiter in the Commercial Centre which is in the vicinity of the Police Station and this is wrongly perceived by the public as drug-related activities. La Tour Koenig Police is continuously monitoring the distribution of methadone and appropriate actions are taken to disperse them.

It must also be pointed out that the National Drug Secretariat (NDS) of the Prime Minister's Office in collaboration with the United Nations agencies and the Ministry of Health and Wellness has conducted a national survey among people who use drugs in Mauritius. This survey is in line with the recommendations made in the National Drug Control Master Plan to address the issue of drug control. The study will provide comprehensive information, including socio-demographic characteristics of drug users, their living conditions, their employment status, age of onset of drug use, frequency and patterns of use and extent of drug use which will guide our national drug response. The results of the survey are expected to be finalised in January 2022. This will complement existing data available at the Ministry of Health and Wellness. We shall then be in better position to assess the extent of the drug situation in the country as a whole.

The Government has been working on all fronts to deal with the drug scourge. From January 2019 to September 2020, 19 Drug Prevention Programmes were carried out in educational institutions and companies at La Tour Koenig, reaching some 614 participants. Moreover, extensive anti-drug campaigns were held throughout the island, targeting the youth in and out of school, the workforce and the community at large. The total number of sessions and programmes held during the years 2020 and 2021 are as follows –

- (i) 255 awareness and educational sessions reaching 6,908 students and virtual meetings reaching 179 educators in the context of the Get Connected Programme;

- (ii) 98 sensitisation programmes in the community, reaching 3,175 participants and 83 programmes in the workplace, reaching 1,945 participants;
- (iii) 6 sessions reaching 73 out of school youth, and
- (iv) 18 radio and television programmes reaching the population in general.

In order to enhance the drug prevention programme, a community based approach has been initiated through the implementation of the Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drugs (YEPAD) since February 2021 by the Ministry of Health and Wellness in collaboration with the National Drug Secretariat, the Police, the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation and NGO partners targeting different regions of the country, including La Tour Koenig. A team of resource persons are present in the targeted region for a week for consultations and building capacity of community leaders to take lead of the drug prevention programmes at the level of their localities.

The YEPAD endeavours to empower and engage the youths for personal development as well access to training programmes, amongst others, through sensitization, recreational and physical activities.

To enable our youth to resist peer pressure, the Government is committed to empower and equip them with skills and aptitudes to face current life challenges. The Youth Section of the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation organises a series of programmes aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle and preventing substance abuse among young people. These programmes include –

- (i) an Afterschool Programme, which has been initiated since 2017, has been scaled up to all our schools. Life skills and physical activities are provided to the youth after school hours within the school compound by trained personnel;

- (ii) a Special Outreach Programme enables ongoing preventive peer education sessions on substance abuse with *Animateurs* who are working with vulnerable youths in different regions;
- (iii) conversion of Youth Centres into modern Youth Hubs through artistic, physical and other activities to promote a healthy behaviour in the community, and
- (iv) introduction of a Mauritius Recreation Council Bill for the establishment of a Mauritius Recreation Council which will be responsible for the promotion and organisation of recreational activities in Mauritius.

My commitment to the elimination of the drug scourge is relentless and unflinching, and I will resolutely leave no stone unturned to contain the drug problem Mauritius.

**ADSU – POLICE OFFICERS & COVID-19 PANDEMIC REGULATIONS -
COMPLIANCE**

(No. B/1327) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of Police Officers attached thereto, indicating the –

- (a) posting thereof, and
- (b) number thereof, if any, presently called to ensure compliance with Regulations concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reply: The Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) was set up in 1987, and falls under the responsibility of a Deputy Commissioner of Police. It is responsible for the prevention and detection of offences connected with drugs.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the Acting Commissioner of Police has informed that, as at Friday 02 December 2021, 454 Police Officers of different grades are posted to the different Units of the ADSU across the island.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Acting Commissioner of Police has also informed that, since the beginning of the month of November 2021, especially with the three public holidays in one week, it was observed that many people were not respecting the sanitary protocol, which led to an increase in the number of COVID-19 contaminations in the country. In these circumstances, the Acting Commissioner of Police made operational arrangements for all Police Officers of the following Units to enforce the COVID-19 Regulations in addition to their existing duties –

- (a) Special Mobile Force;
- (b) Special Support Unit;
- (c) National Coast Guard;
- (d) Criminal Investigation Division;
- (e) Divisional Crime Intelligence Unit;
- (f) Field Intelligence Unit;
- (g) *Brigade Pour la Protection Des Mineurs*, and
- (h) ADSU

The Acting Commissioner of Police has further informed that, for the period Monday 01 November to Thursday 02 December 2021, 13,042 contraventions have been taken for failing to respect the sanitary protocol in public places. This clearly shows that the operational arrangements made by the Acting Commissioner of Police, whereby the 8 Units of the Police, including ADSU, have also been tasked with enforcement of COVID-19 Regulations, are bearing the anticipated fruit of not only getting our citizens at large to realise and be apprehensive of risks to their own health, but also to instil into their minds the absolute necessity to abide by and scrupulously respect all sanitary protocols for fear of being booked by the Police for contravening them.

LA TOUR KOENIG - DRUG PROLIFERATION – JUNE 2021-DEC 2021

(No. B/1328) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for

Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to La Tour Koenig, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Acting Commissioner of Police, information as to the incidence of drug proliferation observed thereat since June 2021 to date, indicating the additional measures taken/to be taken in relation thereto, if any.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. B/1326)

MAURITIUS PORTS AUTHORITY – EMPLOYEES

(No. B/1329) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Ports Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if the Authority is having an excess number of employees and, if so, indicate if a reduction of the number thereof will be considered and, if so, by how many.

Reply: The Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has informed that, in accordance with the Ports Act 1998, the Mauritius Ports Authority is the sole national port authority to regulate and control the Port sector.

The Mauritius Ports Authority operates as a landlord Port with regulatory and controlling powers over port activities and services and is responsible for the provision of marine services both at Port Louis and Port Mathurin. In addition, the Mauritius Ports Authority is responsible to provide the main port infrastructure and superstructure, together with the related facilities.

The operational activities at the Mauritius Ports Authority are conducted on a 24/7 basis.

Presently, the Mauritius Ports Authority has a total staff strength of 556 employees, deployed both at Port Louis and Port Mathurin. Out of the total workforce of 556, some 300 employees are engaged in port operational activities and the remaining are in the general administrative, technical and support services.

For the smooth execution of its activities, the Mauritius Ports Authority carries out Human Resources Development Plan exercises which are undertaken at intervals of 4 to 5 years. In the context of these exercises, the appointed Consultants, besides making recommendations for salary/grading structure, also make recommendations with regard to manpower requirements.

The last Human Resources Development Plan report dates back to 2016.

A new Human Resources Development Plan exercise is underway and its report is currently being finalised. The recommendations contained therein will be applicable retrospectively as from the due date, that is, Wednesday 01 January 2020.

The finalisation of the exercise, which started in late 2019, has been delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has also informed that, according to the Human Resources Development Consultants, there is currently no surplus of employees.

**MAURITIUS PRISONS – COVID-19 POSITIVE PRISONERS –
CONTAMINATION - MEASURES**

(No. B/1330) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Prisons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to the number of prisoners who have –

- (a) been COVID-19 positive tested, and
- (b) died of COVID-19, if any, indicating the measures taken to minimise contamination thereof.

Reply: In regard to part (a) of the question, the Acting Commissioner of Prisons has informed that, since the detection of the first case of COVID-19 in the prisons on Tuesday 27 July 2021, 568 detainees, including 29 female detainees, have been tested positive to COVID-19. 7 detainees are still following treatment for COVID-19 within the prison premises as at Friday 03 December 2021.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the Acting Commissioner of Prisons has also informed that one detainee had died from COVID-19. The facts, as reported, are that on Wednesday 06 October 2021, detainee A. H. H, 41 years old, was sentenced by the District Court of Rivière du Rempart to undergo five weeks' imprisonment and one day as cost for the offence of "larceny more than two in number" and was admitted at the New Wing Prison. In line with the protocol in place, he was kept in isolation for a period of fourteen days together with

three other newly convicted detainees. The detainee became agitated during the night of 06 October and threatened to commit suicide. Following advice of the Prison Medical Officer, the detainee was referred to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital for further treatment. The detainee left for Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital at about 01 25 hours on Thursday 07 October 2021 where he was admitted in the Prison Ward and examined by the Government Medical Officer. Rapid Antigen Test carried out on the detainee was positive. At about 03 15 hours, the Prisons Department was informed by the Medical Officer at the hospital that detainee A. H. H. had passed away. A PCR test carried out thereafter confirmed the result of the Rapid Antigen Test. The case was reported to the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital Police Post and to the Barkly Police Station for further enquiry. The body was transferred from Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital Mortuary House to Victoria Hospital for post mortem. According to the post mortem report, the cause of death was COVID pneumonia.

The Acting Commissioner of Prisons has further informed that a number of measures have been implemented to minimize contamination with a view to protecting both the detainees and the prison officers. In that context, the hon. Member is referred to the reply to PQ B/469 on Tuesday 25 May 2021. Additional measures have also been taken following the detection of cases at the Prisons Department, as follows –

- (i) Rapid Antigen Tests are effected on all detainees on admission. These tests are carried out by the Prisons Health Service Officers after training dispensed to them by professionals from the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Since 29 July 2021 to 02 December 2021, 9,376 Rapid Antigen Tests have been effected on detainees by the Prisons Department and the Ministry of Health and Wellness;
- (ii) with the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in prison, the Petit Verger Prison was converted into a COVID Treatment Centre to accommodate a maximum of 250 COVID-19 positive male detainees for treatment. In addition, two more prisons were converted into COVID Treatment Centres, namely the Barkly Special Prison for Women for female detainees, with a maximum capacity of 12 detainees, and the Pirate Wing at the Central Prison, with a maximum capacity of 50 detainees for high risk detainees tested positive to COVID-19. The three Treatment Centres were manned by Prison Officers and Prisons Health Service Officers under the guidance of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. With a view

to addressing the issue of overcrowding in all penal institutions and after consultation with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Petit Verger Prison resumed its operations as a normal prison on Monday 08 November 2021. COVID positive detainees are now accommodated as follows –

- (a) female detainees at the Segregation Unit of the Women Prison or at the Special Prison for Women;
 - (b) male detainees of the Eastern High Security Prison at the Segregation Unit thereof, and
 - (c) detainees from the Central Prison, the Grand River North West Prison, the Richelieu Open Prison, the Petit Verger Prison and the New Wing Prison are isolated at the Pirate Wing, Central Prison.
- (iii) since the detection of the first case of COVID-19 and the opening of COVID Centres in prisons, the Prisons Department has procured Personal Protective Equipment to the tune of Rs3.6 m. for use by medical and prison staff working with COVID positive detainees;
- (iv) with the coming into operation of the COVID-19 (Restriction of Access to Specified Institutions, Places and Premises) Regulations 2021, subject to the said regulations, no person has access to a Reform Institution, including prisons, unless he produces –
- (a) his COVID-19 vaccination card certifying that he has been vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine; or
 - (b) in case he has not been vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine, an RT-PCR test result slip certifying a negative result dating back to not more than 7 days from the date of RT-PCR test was undertaken.
- Those who are allowed access inside the prison have to observe strict sanitary precautions which include the wearing of masks properly, maintaining social distancing, regular washing of hands and use of sanitizer.
- (v) with the increasing number of positive cases in the community and inside the prisons, the Prison Management has taken additional precautionary measures to

contain the spread of the virus to protect the health of staff and detainees. These include –

- (a) more frequent cleaning and disinfection of the inner and outer perimeter and good hygiene practices, and
- (b) allowing Skype visits where the relatives had such facilities available. This measure was partially waived allowing access to one adult visitor per detainee as from Monday 03 May 2021 and extended to two adult visitors per detainee as from Monday 04 October 2021, subject to compliance with the COVID-19 (Restriction of Access to Specified Institutions, Places and Premises) Regulations 2021.

It must be reiterated that vaccination remains an important means in restricting the spread of COVID-19 within the prison premises. To that effect, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, assisted by the Prisons Health Service staff, has carried out an intensive vaccination campaign aimed at prison staff and detainees. As at Friday 03 December 2021, 99.68% prison staff and 81.91% of detainees have received at least their first dose of COVID vaccination.

Furthermore, arrangements are being made with the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the administration of the booster dose to all prison personnel at the prison premises in the first instance. This would eventually be extended to detainees.

HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE – MEETINGS & RECOMMENDATION

(No. B/1331) 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 High-Level Committee on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence in Mauritius, he will state the –

- (a) dates of the meetings thereof, and
- (b) main recommendations thereof as at to date, if any.

Reply: I wish to emphasise, in no uncertain terms, that my Government has been very much concerned, and continues to be concerned about gender-based violence issues. In fact, we

did clearly state in our electoral manifesto of 2019 that a committee, under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, would be set up to consider a holistic approach when dealing with cases of gender-based violence. We followed up this statement by formally announcing in our Government Programme 2020-2024 that a High-Level Committee, to be chaired by myself, will formulate and work on a new strategy to eliminate gender-based violence, and that the legal framework will be strengthened, and a new national sensitization campaign will be implemented.

In November 2019, the High-Level Committee on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence was set up with the following mandate –

- (i) to assess the current state of affairs with regard to the elimination of gender-based violence in terms of legislative framework and its enforcement, policies, procedures and awareness/sensitization campaigns undertaken, and
- (ii) to identify problem areas and formulate a new strategy to eliminate gender-based violence.

With regard to part (a) of the question, 3 meetings of the High-Level Committee were held during the year 2020, as follows –

- (i) on Wednesday 19 February 2020;
- (ii) on Thursday 17 September 2020, and
- (iii) on Thursday 22 October 2020.

The hon. Member is referred to the reply to PQ B/460 in August 2020 wherein I took the commitment that, before the end of 2020, the High-Level Committee would come up with a Strategic Framework and a National Action Plan to fight the scourge of gender-based violence in Mauritius. I am pleased to mention that we have honoured this commitment, and that we have already started, in consonance with the Strategic Framework, to set the Action Plan in motion.

The High-Level Committee, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme and an international Consultant, completed its National Strategy and Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence which was launched on 25 November 2020, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

With regard to part (b) of the question, in order to address the multifaceted aspects of gender-based violence, four sub-strategies have been developed that are aligned to the National Strategy. These are –

- (i) change societal norms and beliefs that are against principles of gender equality and equity;
- (ii) priority support services for survivors while holding perpetrators accountable;
- (iii) identify and redress discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender- based violence, and
- (iv) coordinated monitoring and evaluation.

The National Strategy and Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence as well as the different recommendations under each sub-strategy are available for consultation on the website of my Office. One of the main recommendations of the National Strategy and Action Plan provides for a robust three-tiered mechanism, as follows –

- (i) the High-Level Committee at the apex and under my Chair, so as to enable me to personally monitor the implementation of the strategies on a regular basis;
- (ii) the National Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, reports on the implementation of the strategies to the High-Level Committee, and
- (iii) 4 Technical Working Groups, to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the 4 sub-strategies, report to the National Steering Committee.

The National Steering Committee and the 4 Technical Working Groups have had several meetings over the period January to September 2021. The last meeting of the High-Level Committee, which I chaired, was held on Tuesday 12 October 2021. My Government took cognizance of the status of the implementation of the recommendations of the National Strategy and Action Plan.

The High-Level Committee has also launched a mobile application for victims of gender-based violence, called *LESPWAR* in November 2020. With this mobile application, my Government endeavours to be, not just one call away from the victims, but one button, one click at the service of victims of gender-based violence. When the victims press on the panic button, Police are able to automatically locate them through GPS and provide assistance to them within a span of a few minutes. The mobile application was also selected as Champion at the World Summit on the Information Society Awards 2021, which is one of the most prestigious International IT awards.

The Government is leaving no stone unturned in our crusade against gender-based violence, which is one of the centuries-old social maladies and social evils. Indeed, the Government is having not only a holistic approach to tackle gender-based violence but also a systemic approach so as to ensure that there are the right people at the right place for the right actions in accordance with the recommendations of the National Strategy and Action Plan.

MAURITIUS PORTS AUTHORITY – SEAFARERS – TRAINING

(No. B/1332) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) 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 Mauritius Ports Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the assessment made of the number of seafarers that will be required over each of the next ten years, indicating the number thereof –

- (a) trained as at to date, and
- (b) employed as merchant seamen in each of the past five years.

Reply: The Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has informed that its Marine Department operates on a 24/7 basis, providing essential marine services for the berthing and unberthing of vessels calling at Port Louis for port operations.

The Marine Department operates a fleet of floating craft which is manned by competent marine personnel.

Presently, the Operations Unit of the Marine Department is made up of a total workforce of some 121 employees, including Seafarers in the grade of Pilots, Skippers, Marine Engineering Officers, Senior Technician Tug Services and Seamen, amongst others. These categories of employees require specific maritime qualifications and experience at sea.

It is an acknowledged fact that there is a scarcity of seafarers worldwide and Mauritius is no exception.

Whilst the Mauritius Ports Authority has been successful in attracting seafarers in the grades of Pilots, Marine Engineering Officers, amongst others, by offering attractive packages

and having recourse to employment of expatriates on contract, it has, on the other hand, been experiencing difficulties in the recruitment of Seamen over the past decade.

Presently, the organisation structure at the Marine Operations Unit provides for an establishment of 60 Seamen who are required to work on a shift system on a 24/7 basis. Over the last 5 years, 11 Seamen have retired on grounds of age and 18 have been promoted. Over the same period, the Mauritius Ports Authority has been able to attract and recruit some 16 fully qualified Seamen. Currently, 30 vacancies exist in the grade, which have not been filled given the shortage of qualified Seamen on the labour market.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has also informed that for the next 10 years, 15 Seamen are projected to retire. Therefore, in view of the ageing workforce at the Marine Operations Unit and the difficulties being encountered in the recruitment of qualified Seamen, the Mauritius Ports Authority has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd to implement a Seafarer Training Programme. According to this MoU, the Corporation was required to provide sea-service to the Trainees.

The objective of the Programme has been to train a pool of candidates to be eventually qualified as Able Seafarer (Deck) and Able Seafarer (Engine) for future employment in the local maritime industry.

As at date, 23 Trainee Seafarers, comprising 10 Trainees (Deck) and 13 Trainees (Engine) have followed the Training Programme and obtained their rating certificates. The Trainees Seafarer (Deck) and Trainees Seafarer (Engine) have to complete 12 months' sea-time and 6 months' sea-time, before qualifying as Able Seafarer (Deck) and Able Seafarer (Engine), respectively.

The Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd has not been in a position to provide the sea-time required to the 23 Trainees owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the organisation structure of the Marine Operations Unit caters for the post of Trainee Seaman (Deck), the 10 Trainees Seafarers (Deck) were offered employment at the Mauritius Ports Authority. With regard to the 13 Trainees Seafarer (Engine), they are not eligible for employment since the Marine Engineering Unit of the Mauritius Ports Authority requires more experienced and competent Able Seafarers (Engine), reckoning at least 3 years' sea-service at entry level.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has also informed that none of the Trainee Seafarers has been employed by the Mauritius Ports Authority as full-fledged Merchant Seaman over the last five years.

**INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY – TOP FM LTD – LICENCE
RENEWAL**

(No. B/1333) 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 Top FM Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Broadcasting Authority, information as to the date of reception of the application for the renewal of the licence thereof, indicating where matters stand.

Reply: The Acting Director of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) has informed that Top FM has applied for the renewal of its licence, by way of two letters dated Wednesday 25 August and Friday 03 September 2021, which were respectively received at the Authority on Wednesday 25 August 2021 and Monday 06 September 2021, and that its application is under process.

**FAKE MORCELLEMENT PERMITS & PIN NUMBERS – VICTIMS &
INQUIRIES**

(No. B/1357) Mr D. Ramful (First 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 case of allegation of fake *morcellement* permits and pin numbers issued by his Ministry, he will –

- (a) give a list thereof, indicating the number of victims thereof, and
- (b) state where matters stand as to the inquiries carried out thereinto, indicating if consideration will be given, in the meantime, for the regularisation of the said *morcellements*.

Reply: I will refer the hon. Member to the reply to Parliamentary Question B/841 of the Sitting of 27 July 2021, which has been placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mention was made therein that there are suspected cases of forgery in regard to 37 *Morcellement* Permits and two Letters of Intent. The identification of victims and culprits will only be possible after the completion of the ongoing investigations by the Police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

With regard to part (b), I am informed that investigations by the Police and the ICAC are ongoing.

COVID-19 - SEQUENCING & VARIANTS

(No. B/1358) **Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to genome sequencing of the COVID-19 pandemic, he will give an updated status thereof, indicating the presence of variants of concern detected therein, if any.

Reply: Sequencing for SARS-CoV-2 is done for purpose of genomic surveillance to detect any new mutation which may be of concern. It is also done to detect introduction of any variants of concern.

Two platforms are available for sequencing, namely Ion Torrent and Nanopore Technologies. 200 samples can be sequenced per month locally. PCR is regularly carried out for diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2. Omicron, like other variant of concern, can be picked up by the current PCR assay being used at Central Health Laboratory which is using E and N gene for diagnosis.

As from 29 November 2021, my Ministry has also included S-gene in our PCR assay panel to monitor S-gene target failure (SGTF). The S-gene target failure gives an indication of a variant. All samples showing S-gene target failure will then be further sequenced to know the type of variant.

I am informed that as at 02 December 2021, 959 samples were sequenced, out of which 796 were local and 163 were imported cases. From the results of the sequencing, the following variants of concern were identified –

- 13 imported cases of Alpha variant;
- 29 imported cases of Beta variant, and
- 128 cases of Delta variant, of which 39 are imported and 89 are local cases.

Moreover, 276 PCR positive specimens have been tested for S-gene target failure. Two samples which have been found to have S-gene target failure are being sequenced for confirmation of Omicron variant, results of which are awaited.

RECURRENT REVENUE – FYS 2018-2021

(No. B/1359) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Recurrent Revenue, he will give a breakdown of the quantum thereof collected since the start of this financial year and same for the corresponding periods over the past three financial years.

Reply: Je dépose, à la bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, la répartition du quantum des recettes récurrentes perçues pour la période du 01 juillet 2021 au 30 novembre 2021 ainsi que les chiffres pour les périodes correspondantes aux trois derniers exercices financiers, c'est-à-dire pour les années fiscales 2020-21, 2019-2020 et 2018-2019.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - TAXI & CONTRACT BUS OPERATORS - IMPACT

(No. B/1360) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether he will state if he is in presence of representations from associations of contract van and taxi car owners about difficulties they are facing to reimburse their loans on vehicles with leasing companies amid the prevailing COVID-19 situation and, if so, indicate the measures, if any, he proposes to take to alleviate their financial burden.

Reply: Representations have been received from the Tourist Contract Bus Owners Association and Taxi Associations with regard to their financial situation, more particularly relating to the closure of borders and/or partial opening of borders. They have also informed of the difficulties faced in meeting their loan commitments towards financial institutions and which at times was leading to the seizure of their vehicles.

Several meetings were, accordingly, held with representatives of both the Tourist Contract Bus Owners Association and Taxi Associations in order to take cognizance of their plight and so as to identify mitigating measures pending the full recovery of the tourism sector.

Government, being not insensitive to the difficult financial situation of these operators, has already put in place several measures to mitigate the negative impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on transport operators which include contract bus and taxi operators.

An Inter-Ministerial Committee was set up to look into the difficulties being faced by taxi and contract bus operators, and to propose solutions thereto. The Inter-Ministerial Committee, which met on 04 October 2021, made several recommendations to Government so as to mitigate the incidence of the COVID-19 pandemic on these operators.

The following measures have been implemented –

- i. A Rs10,000 one-off allowance under the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund has been granted to Individual contract bus operators involved in the tourism sector as well as taxi based at Hotels and at the Airport, subject to them being registered with the Mauritius Revenue Authority under the *Contribution Sociale Generalisée* and being eligible to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme.
- ii. The licence of contract bus operators involved in the conveyance of tourists has been varied to authorise them to carry employees. This measure, which was to end on 31 December 2021, has been extended for a further period ending 30 June 2022 in order to allow these operators to have more work opportunities.
- iii. The validity of the licences held by contract bus operators involved in the tourism sector has been extended for one year and the Public Service Vehicle licence fees, amounting to Rs5,000, for these operators has been waived for this present financial year so as to remove the financial burden linked to the renewal of their licence.
- iv. As regards taxi operators, the replacement age of their vehicles which was 10 years for taxis based at Airport and Hotels and 12 years in respect of locality-based taxis

has been extended to 16 years so as to alleviate the financial burden linked to the acquisition of a new vehicle.

With regard to the difficulties of these operators to honour their financial commitments, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry interceded with the Development Bank of Mauritius in order for the latter to implement remedial measures to ease the plight of the contract bus and taxi operators.

I am advised that the Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) Ltd met with contract bus operators in order to inform them of the various facilities and specific schemes provided by the Bank. In addition, a dedicated Desk has been set up in order to process the applications of concerned contract bus and taxi operators. The DBM Ltd also held discussions with some leasing companies to consider the possibility of providing them with the requisite comfort as regards the payment of their lease rental which are in arrears so that the leasing companies do not dispose the leased vehicles without the consent of DBM Ltd as long as the latter pays the lease rentals.

Moreover, taxi and contract bus operators are also eligible to several loan schemes provided by DBM Ltd such as the “COVID-19 Working Capital Loan Scheme” which caters for financial assistance of up to Rs3 m. in respect of the repayment of leasing facilities.

The Industrial Finance Corporation of Mauritius (IFCM Ltd), which has been set up by Government, has devised a dedicated scheme for the tourist contract bus operators in view of the fact that these operators rely on the use of their vehicles to sustain their livelihoods.

This scheme would apply solely to operators whose activities have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and who were properly servicing their lease prior to March 2020. The duration of the lease and the interest rate would be determined based on a Report to be issued by a qualified motor surveyor on the state of the vehicle, its present value and lifetime.

This assistance would be conditional upon leasing companies refusing to reschedule existing leasing facilities and evidence being produced to that effect. The assistance would be, as follows –

- i. financial support would be given to “COVID-19 Affected” operators provided they were not carrying pre-COVID arrears, that is, they should have a clean record at least up to March 2020;
- ii. the tenure and amount of IFCM’s lease financing would be based on the economic life and valuation of a vehicle as certified by a qualified Motor Surveyor’s Technical and Valuation Report;
- iii. the proposed interest rate would be 3% per annum;
- iv. the applicant would be required to submit a copy of his bank statements for the 12-months period prior to COVID, that is, from March 2019 to March 2020 for further analysis of conduct of account by the IFCM Ltd;
- v. the applicant should produce a leasing company’s Clearance Certificate on the applicant’s good conduct of account, the outstanding balance on the lease and a copy of his tax returns filed with the MRA along with the application, and
- vi. the applicant should indicate if he had previously benefitted from any financial support from any semi-Government institution such as the DBM Ltd or the MRA.

The IFCM Ltd would settle the agreed amount directly with the leasing company against a discharge letter. In addition to the above, the IFCM Ltd would request the lessee to sign a lease agreement. In this respect, the IFCM Ltd has contacted the Registrar to explore the possibility of reducing the costs relating to the registration of lease agreement and the registration duty on the transfer of ownership.

I am informed that the IFCM Ltd had a working session, on 25 October 2021, with the Tourist Contract Bus Owners Association which caters for individual contract bus operators who hold a PSVL and who are involved in the conveyance of tourists to inform them of this Scheme.

The above proposed scheme would ease the financial burden of these operators as their leases would be transferred from their leasing companies to IFCM Ltd and the Scheme is being framed in such a manner so as to provide them with a respite amidst the present difficult situation.

**PFIZER COVID-19 VACCINE – DOSES RECEIVED & VACCINATION
CAMPAIGN**

(No. B/1361) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, he will state the –

- (a) number of doses received in Mauritius since January 2021 to date, indicating the number of persons administered therewith as –
 - (i) first dose;
 - (ii) second dose; and
 - (iii) booster dose, and
- (b) delivery schedule of the doses to be received in Mauritius during the coming months.

Reply: In reply to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has received donations of 183,690 doses of Pfizer vaccines from the Government of the United States of America and facilitated through the dose sharing mechanism of the COVAX Facility as follows –

- (i) 1st consignment of 76,050 doses of Pfizer vaccines was received on 28 September 2021, and
- (ii) 2nd consignment of 107,640 doses of Pfizer vaccines was received on 15 November 2021.

In reply to parts (a) (i) and (ii) of the question, following recommendations of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Committee, the COVID-19 vaccination campaign for those aged 15 to 17 years with the Pfizer vaccines started on 28 September 2021. Priority was given to pupils of secondary institutions, in a first instance. The campaign was, thereafter, extended, as from 18 November 2021, to adolescents aged 15 to 17 who do not attend any educational institution.

As at 03 December 2021, 33,912 students in the age group of 15-17 have already been administered the 1st dose of the Pfizer vaccines and 28,502 have been fully vaccinated.

In reply to part (a) (iii) of the question, I wish to inform the House that in accordance with our vaccination strategy, priority of consideration for booster dose is being given to –

- the frontliners such as health personnel, both from the public and private sectors, medical and dental practitioners and personnel of pharmacies;
- patients with comorbidities, such as cancer patients, dialysis patients, patients having undergone renal transplant, patients with severe respiratory diseases, immunosuppressant patients and trisomy patients, and
- pregnant women.

The booster dose is being administered as from September 2021 and as at 05 December 2021, 115,096 persons have already received their booster dose.

In reply to part (b) of the question, the COVAX Facility has informed that Mauritius will be receiving 203,580 doses of Pfizer as donation, expected in December 2021.

Moreover, my Ministry had placed an order of 999,180 doses of Pfizer vaccines and a manufacturing and supply agreement was signed to that effect. The consignment would be received in two batches 400,140 doses by Quarter 4 of 2021 and 599,040 doses by Quarter 1 of 2022.

BAIN DES DAMES – SEWERAGE PROJECT - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1362) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the implementation of the Sewerage Project in Bain des Dames in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to where matters stand.

Reply: The House was informed in April 2018, in reply to PQ B/235, that the Wastewater Management Authority (WMA) had initiated procedures for the appointment of consultancy services to update the feasibility study report, prepare detailed design and bidding documents for the Sewerage Project at Bain des Dames. The project will eliminate the use of septic tanks, cesspits and soakage pits and will comprise the construction of about 3.4 km of street sewer and a pumping station for connecting some 341 houses.

Following appropriation of funds in the Budget, the WMA had launched invitation for proposals for Consultancy Services for Detailed Design, Preparation of Bidding Documents and Supervision of Works for Lot 1: Bain des Dames and Lot 2 for Caro Lalo and Vallée des Prêtres

in February 2021. However, the exercise had to be cancelled due to modifications required to the bidding documents.

A second bidding exercise for the consultancy services was launched in October 2021 with the bid submission date set at 06 December 2021. It is expected that the award of the consultancy contract would be made during the first quarter of 2022.

The duration of the consultancy contract will be 12 months, following which the WMA will initiate necessary procedures for the selection of a Contractor in order to carry out the works.

FILM REBATE SCHEME – FILM “PRISONER OF PARADISE” - REFUND

(No. B/1364) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the film “Prisoner of Paradise”, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Economic Development Board, information as to –

- (a) the final sum of money refunded to the director/producer thereof under the Film Rebate Scheme, and
- (b) if Government/the Board guaranteed a loan of Rs90 m. at the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd to the director/producer thereof, indicating if the loan was in Mauritian Rupees or in British Pound Sterling.

Reply: Le *Film Rebate Scheme* définit le mode de remboursement des sociétés de production cinématographique éligibles.

Ainsi, une société de production cinématographique peut se voir rembourser une somme allant jusqu'à 40% de ses dépenses de production admissibles pour un long métrage ou un épisode de programme télévisé.

Cela correspond d'ailleurs au pourcentage recommandé par le *Film Rebate Committee*.

Pour bénéficier du remboursement, la société de production cinématographique doit également satisfaire aux exigences que le Comité détermine et qui sont notamment les suivantes

–

- (i) dans le cas d'un long métrage, des dépenses de production admissibles d'au moins 1 million USD ;
- (ii) dans le cas d'un épisode d'une émission de télévision dramatique, une dépense de production qualifiée d'au moins 150 000 USD, et
- (iii) un engagement à promouvoir Maurice au moment de la promotion du film.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé qu'AMG Film 1 Ltd, la société de production nationale ayant produit le long métrage '*Prisoners of Paradise*', a été remboursée d'un montant total de 66,015,476 MUR au titre du *Film Rebate Scheme*.

Cela se situe bien dans la fourchette de remboursement approuvée, telle que prescrite dans le Règlement.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, le gouvernement n'a garanti aucun prêt à la State Bank of Mauritius Ltd au réalisateur/producteur du long métrage '*Prisoners of Paradise*'.

Enfin, j'ai également été informé par l'*EDB* qu'il n'y a eu aucune garantie de leur part pour ce prêt.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD – MEMBER – POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

(No. B/1365) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Economic Development Board, he will state if he has been made aware that a board member thereof, namely, Mr K.O., is engaged in political activities contrary to the relevant sections of the Economic Development Board Act and, if so, indicate –

- (a) if he has discussed same with the Chairperson of the Board, and
- (b) actions taken accordingly, if any.

Reply: Je ne suis pas au courant de quelconque engagement dans des activités politiques par ce membre du Conseil d'administration de l'*EDB*.

Par conséquent, les parties (a) et (b) de la question ne se posent pas.

HOUSINGS UNITS - ASBESTOS - PHASING OUT/REPLACEMENT

(No. B/1367) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the housings units presently containing asbestos, he will state where matters stand as to the phasing out and replacement thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning that out of the 3,113 EDC housing units containing asbestos, some 1,303 houses had already been pulled down and new houses had been constructed in concrete by their respective owners. The status of the remaining 1,810 houses, still in existence at the time of the survey in 2020, was as follows –

- (i) Concrete extensions had been carried out to 1,551 EDC houses;
- (ii) 31 EDC houses were found to be in fair condition. These houses were occupied and were well maintained using oil and epoxy based paint;
- (iii) 93 EDC houses were in a poor state but still occupied, and
- (iv) 135 EDC houses were in a poor state but unoccupied.

The Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry is only responsible for the dismantling and carting away of cemented asbestos sheets from ex-CHA housing units upon requests from the owners or from Local Authorities for unoccupied asbestos houses. The requests for dismantling are generally made at the Citizens Advice Bureaux. Once the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning confirms ownership, my Ministry proceeds with the dismantling, which is effected only after obtaining the consent of the owners or heirs.

I wish to inform the House that, since 2015, 182 housing units containing asbestos have been dismantled by my Ministry.

The main constraints for the dismantling of the houses are as follows –

- a) Many applicants are heirs of deceased EDC house owners and without the submission affidavit(s) of succession and affidavit of consent/consent of all heirs, it becomes difficult to establish ownership of the house. Hence, these EDC houses cannot be dismantled;
- b) Owners/Occupiers are requesting for financial assistance or compensation prior to giving their consent for dismantling their EDC houses;

- c) Owners/Occupiers who have applied to dismantle their EDC houses are requesting Government to fully finance reconstruction of their house. Since there is no such policy in place, they refuse to give their consent for dismantling;
- d) In some cases, the heirs are abroad or untraceable, and
- e) Sometimes owners of unoccupied houses, who could not be traced during survey, intervene just prior to demolition of these houses and prevent dismantling.

I have also been informed by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning that a Commonwealth Expert appointed by Government to conduct an assessment of health problems related to asbestos in Mauritius concluded in January 2002 that there is no eminent danger to the residents as long as the asbestos sheets are not tampered or interfered with and advised the following measures –

- (i) using oil and epoxy based paint to prevent disintegration of the panels;
- (ii) not interfering with the asbestos panels by using drillers or saws that can provoke emanation of dust, and
- (iii) arranging for safe disposal of asbestos waste.

**BANNED HAZARDOUS PESTICIDES – CONTROLS – PERIOD 2018 TO 07
DECEMBER 2021**

(No. B/1368) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to banned hazardous pesticides, he will state, since 2018 to date, the number of controls effected in relation to the use thereof, indicating the –

- (a) number of contraventions booked;
- (b) quantity thereof seized, and
- (c) estimated quantity thereof that illegally entered the local market.

(Withdrawn)

**CAP MALHEUREUX RELAY CENTER & OTHER SHELTERS - ONLINE
SCHOOLING**

(No. B/1369) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Cap Malheureux Relay Center and other shelters falling under the purview of her Ministry, she will state if consideration has been given for the setting up of a protocol and measures to ensure online schooling thereat and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Reply: The right to education is a basic human right and our children placed in the Residential Care Institutions because they are victims of abuse and neglect cannot and should not be deprived of this fundamental right. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed posed some serious challenges in ensuring the continuity of classes and school programmes.

I wish to inform the House that as directed by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, online and television-based classes are being implemented to palliate for missed classroom sessions in Residential Care Institutions.

As regards the Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, I am informed that the following measures are in place –

- 2 TV sets are available at the Relay Centre. The Child Caregivers and the Administrative Staff of the Relay Centre provide necessary support and ensure that all residents follow their respective online classes.
- Internet facilities are also provided to the residents whenever there is a need for research, which is done under supervision.
- The Broadcast Scheduled-Time from the site of the Ministry of Education is consulted on a daily basis to ensure that the children do not miss their classes.

As regards other shelters falling under the purview of my Ministry similar dispositions have been taken. Taking into consideration the individual setting of each Residential Care Institution, needful is being done for children to continue with their online schooling.

Children are currently following classes on television sets, laptops and personal computers. Some who require special attention are benefitting from private tutors. My Ministry is constantly monitoring the situation while ensuring that at all times the sanitary restrictions are strictly adhered to.

My Ministry and its valued collaborators are putting all means and efforts in favour of the children placed in Residential Care Institutions, as we always do, to ensure that all their rights are promoted and protected.

This Government's and my Ministry's actions remain guided by the fundamental principle of the best interests of the child, in particular, those who are vulnerable.

PURE HEAVEN SHELTER - ILL-TREATMENT CASES

(No. B/1370) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Pure Heaven Shelter located in Vacoas, she will state –

- (a) the date of coming into operation thereof;
- (b) the number of –
 - (i) persons presently sheltered thereat, and
 - (ii) staff employed thereat, indicating the qualifications held, in each case, and
- (c) if any case of alleged ill-treatment reported to the Police has been relayed to her Ministry and, if so, indicate the actions taken in relation thereto.

Reply: According to records available at the level of my Ministry, there is no shelter known as Pure Heaven Shelter. However, there is a Shelter Pure Mind Haven situated at Vacoas.

The Residential Care Institution Pure Mind Haven was registered as a place of safety under the Child Protection (Place of Safety for the Welfare and Protection of Children) Regulations 2019 on 19 March 2021 and was operational as from 25 March 2021.

There are currently 15 minors sheltered at the Pure Mind Haven, 13 girls and 2 boys. It is reported that they are faring well.

Currently, there are 14 employees working at the shelter, namely –

- a) 1 Director;
- b) 1 Finance Officer;
- c) 1 Shelter Manager;
- d) 5 Caregivers;
- e) 4 helpers;
- f) 1 cook,
- g) 1 cleaner.

I am placing a copy of the list of the names and qualifications of the employees in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards part (c), one case of alleged simple assault was reported by parents of two minors placed at the said Shelter (OB no 4338/2021 and 4339/2021) at Vacoas Police Station on 28 October 2021. Recording of statement of minors by Officers of the CDU was effected on Friday 29 October 2021 and both minors were relocated on the same day to SOS children's village as per the Ministry's Protocol for investigation. Both minors are faring well.

The enquiry of the Child Development Unit has concluded that there was a case of bullying by older children in the shelter. Enquiry at the level of the Police is ongoing.

In the meantime, the minors are benefitting from parental visits 3 times a week under the supervision of Officers of my Ministry in accordance with Court Order. A motion by parents to reintegrate the minors back to their custody is being dealt with at the level of the Port Louis District Court.

OMICRON VARIANT - PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE PLAN

(No. B/1371) **Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Omicron Variant, he will state the preparedness plan of his Ministry, if any, to deal therewith, indicating if same has been detected in Mauritius to date.

Reply: The public health sector has always remained resilient till date, adapting to the current situation. Therefore, in view of the prevailing sanitary condition in Mauritius, my Ministry worked out a COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan in collaboration with the World Health Organisation. The plan provides for measures to be taken to strengthen our capacity to track COVID-19 surges in order to effectively anticipate, timely detect and implement priority actions to deal with the emerging new variants of concern and their impact on therapeutics and disease severity.

As from 29 November 2021, my Ministry has included S-gene in our PCR assay panel to monitor S-gene target failure (SGTF). The S-gene target failure suspects the possibility of a variant. All samples showing S-gene target failure will then be further sequenced to confirm if it is a variant and its type.

I am informed that as at 02 December 2021, 276 PCR positive specimens have been tested for S-gene target failure. Two samples which have been found to have S-gene target failure are being sequenced for confirmation of Omicron variant, results of which are awaited.

**SOUTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES PASSENGERS – OCT 2021- 30 NOV 2021 -
COVID-19 POSITIVE**

(No. B/1372) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to passengers arriving from Southern African countries, he will state the number thereof since October 2021 to date, including passengers present in Southern African countries 14 days preceding their date of arrival in Mauritius, indicating the number thereof having been COVID-19 positive-tested, including the number thereof who underwent genomic sequencing and the findings thereof.

Reply: I am informed that since the opening of the borders on 01 October 2021 till 30 November 2021, 4,572 passengers from South African countries have embarked in Mauritius, out of which 6 were tested positive. Genomic sequencing is being carried out on these 6 PCR positive cases and the results are awaited.

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC – POST-COVID-19 HEALTH CONDITIONS & POST-
TRAUMATIC STRESS – ASSISTANCE**

(No. B/1373) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state the reported number of persons suffering from post-COVID-19 health conditions and post-traumatic stress, indicating the assistance provided thereto, if any.

(Withdrawn)

**STATE TRADING CORPORATION – MR R. D, GENERAL MANAGER –
RESIGNATION**

(No. B/1374) 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 the resignation of Mr R. D. as General

Manager of the State Trading Corporation in December 2019, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the reasons therefor, and
- (b) if Mr R. D. respected all his contractual obligations *vis-à-vis* the Corporation upon resignation and, if not, indicate who gave him dispensation therefor and the reasons thereof.

(Withdrawn)

OMICRON VARIANT – PREPAREDNESS PLAN

(No. B/1375) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Omicron Variant, he will state –

- (a) the preparedness plan of his Ministry in the face thereof, indicating if same has been detected in Mauritius to date and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (b) if his Ministry has performed sequencing Polymerase Chain Reaction tests for same and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – HOSPITAL – TREATMENT

(No. B/1376) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation, he will state if his Ministry is giving due consideration for the construction of a dedicated hospital for the treatment thereof and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

MAHEBOURG MARKET FAIR - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1377) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a market fair at Mahebourg, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Grand Port, information as to where matters stand as to the completion works thereof, indicating –

- (a) the budget allocated therefor, and
- (b) if the contract has been allocated and, if so, indicate the –
 - (i) name of the contractor;
 - (ii) scope of works, and
 - (iii) expected completion date thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**RESIDENCE ATLEE, GUSTAVE COLLINS & DERBY STREETS –
SEWERAGE WORKS**

(No. B/1378) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewerage works undertaken in the region of Gustave Collins, in Derby and Atlee streets, in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Waste Water Management Authority, information as to the work progress thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the WMA that the sewerage works in the region of Residence Atlee, Gustave Collins Street and Derby Street are being undertaken under a Contract for Rehabilitation/Provision of Sewerage Infrastructure at Residence Atlee and environs, Curepipe. The contract was awarded to Sotravic Limitée on 12 November 2020 following a bidding exercise carried out by the Central Procurement Board. The duration of the contract is 24 months with a defects liability period of 1 year after completion of works.

Works on Derby Street started on 17 May 2021 and as at date, 102.00 m of main sewer and 410.30 m of water pipe have been replaced. As regards Gustave Collins Street, works started on 01 July 2021. As at date, 208.30 m of main sewer has been replaced and five manholes constructed. As for Residence Atlee, works started on 30 August 2021. As at date, 739.20 m of lateral sewers have been replaced and 156 housing blocks reconnected.

Works are ongoing. Temporary reinstatements are being undertaken once sewerage works or house connections are completed so that least inconvenience is caused to the inhabitants. The project is on schedule.

Moreover, public relation campaigns, including meetings with the residents and management of schools in the region, are conducted. In this connection, brochures and flyers have been distributed on several occasions to the inhabitants concerned.

I am further informed that regular coordination meetings are held with the Municipal Council of Curepipe, the WMA and the Contractor to follow up on progress of works.

PONT ATLEE – RECONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1379) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the reconstruction of Pont Atlee, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the work progress thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the Atlee Bridge is located along La Brasserie Road, B 70, in the vicinity of Residence Atlee. I am informed by the Road Development Authority (RDA) that the bridge is an old composite structure, with two abutment walls together with two piers made of cut stones and with a concrete deck. The bridge has three narrow channels of one metre high and 0.6 metre wide for water passage.

In fact, during the torrential rains which occurred on 28 April 2021, the Atlee Bridge was flooded due its old state and inadequate hydraulic capacity. The flooding occurred as the three channels, I mentioned earlier, which allow for flow of water from the rivulet, were blocked by debris and vegetation carried by the rain water flow.

Accordingly, with a view to resolving the issue and to prevent any future flooding, the RDA is demolishing the old bridge and reconstructing a new one. The Land Drainage Authority has been consulted thereon to ensure that the new structure can cater for a rainfall of a return period of around 100 years. Works order for the reconstruction of the bridge has been issued by the RDA under its Framework Agreement for the following –

- (i) demolition of the existing bridge;
- (ii) relocation of underground services;

- (iii) reconstruction of a new reinforced concrete bridge of length 4 metres with 6 metres wide carriageway and a footpath of 1.3 metres wide on one side only in view of lack of space due to built-up area;
- (iv) construction of masonry retaining wingwalls;
- (v) reprofiling of the road to match new level;
- (vi) reconstruction of bus layby to match new road finish level, and
- (vii) provision of road furniture, such as traffic signs, cats eyes amongst others.

The award of the works order for the reconstruction of the bridge was made on 13 May 2021 to Gamma Construction Ltd for a total amount of Rs11.25 m.

I am further informed by the RDA that the existing bridge has been demolished and the relocation of Wastewater Management Authority services thereat have been completed. Works are ongoing for the construction of the foundations, walls and deck slab for the new bridge, which will be completed by January 2022.

CUREPIPE - NEW MARKET FAIR - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1380) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed construction of the new market fair at Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that a new market fair would be constructed at the existing site where presently Le Forum Market Fair stands at Forest Side, Curepipe. The new Market Fair which would cost around Rs300 m. would consist of about 565 stalls with the following sections amongst others –

- (a) Vegetables;
- (b) Fruits;
- (c) Flowers;

- (d) Haberdashery;
- (e) Poultry;
- (f) Handicrafts;
- (g) Mobile Canteen;
- (h) Utensils and Crockery;
- (i) Religious Items;
- (j) Cakes;
- (k) Administrative Block;
- (l) Toilet Blocks, including for disable persons, and
- (m) approx. 200 parking slots.

The Municipal Council of Curepipe has also informed that the construction of the new market fair thereat is motivated by the availability of State Land adjacent to Le Forum Market Fair as there are no traffic issues as well as the site is easily accessible. It is also in the proximity of the nearby inhabitants of 16^{eme} Mille, Midlands, Dubreuil, Bananes, La Vigie and La Brasserie, amongst others.

In this connection, a request has already been made to the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning on 22 November 2021 for the vesting of a plot of land of about 20,000 m² adjoining Le Forum Market Fair, which would allow for the expansion of the market project with the parking facilities.

The Municipal Council of Curepipe would be requesting the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development (National Infrastructure Division) to assist in the preparation of the scope of works. The proposed new market fair would also integrate future projects including a station of the Metro Express and a Park and Ride facility.

It is expected that the bidding exercise for appointing a consultant for the project would be launched in January 2022 and the expected bids for its construction could be launched in October 2022, and evaluation of the bids by the end of December in the same year by the Central Procurement Board.

HIGHLANDS & SOLFERINO - INCINERATORS

(No. B/1381) 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 incinerators installed at Highlands and Solferino, respectively, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as when same will be operational.

Reply: With a view to improving incineration facilities for bereaved families, a project for modernisation and upgrading of the existing network of incinerators was undertaken for the installation of 16 additional units around the island.

In this context, following a bidding exercise carried out through the EXIM Bank of India under the Indian Line of Credit, a contract was signed on 26 July 2019 between my Ministry and Kanta Electricals India Ltd. for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of 16 units of incinerator equipment for the sum of USD 2,256,000.

I am informed that the incinerators and other equipment have already been installed at Solferino and Highlands. Following consultations with the contractor, my Ministry has been informed that the remaining minor works will be completed by mid-December 2021 following which these incinerators will be made operational.

COVID-19 SOLIDARITY FUND – PROJECTS

(No. B/1383) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number of projects financed thereunder since March 2021 to date, and
- (b) quantum of funds disbursed therefor.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/1343)

COVID-19 PATIENTS – PRIVATE CVLINICS – TREATMENT AUTHORISATION

(No. B/1384) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 patients, he will state the medical institutions apart from Government Hospitals which are currently authorised to provide treatment thereto.

Reply: In the context of the opening of borders, my Ministry had various working sessions with private clinics to look into the possibility for these medical institutions to provide

Comment [DR1]:

treatment to COVID-19 positive patients. Various components of admission and treatment thereto were discussed, namely spacing, infrastructure, logistics, trained personnel, amongst others.

I am informed that following inspection carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of my Ministry, it was observed that Wellkin Hospital by C Care had put in place an isolation ward with all required amenities and the personnel were adequately trained to look after COVID-19 patients. Subsequently, Wellkin Hospital was authorised to start treatment of COVID-19 patients.

Other private clinics have expressed their interest to start admission and subsequent treatment of COVID-19 patients. Authorisation will be issued, subject to all criteria being satisfied, following inspection by the multi-disciplinary team.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IMPLEMENTATION & SUPPORT

(No. B/1385) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the local authorities, he will state the support given by his Ministry thereto to enable them incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into their strategies and services.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that this Government is fully committed to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which is a universal call to end poverty, protect the environment, reduce economic inequality and ensure peace and justice for all. Various programmes and projects introduced and implemented by this Government bear testimony to these achievements.

Local Authorities also contribute significantly to fulfilling our undertakings and commitment by contributing significantly to the achievement of these goals through various projects, schemes and programmes. In 2019, Government submitted a Voluntary National Review Report to the United Nations on our achievements with respect to the 17 SDGs. The report highlights numerous milestones achieved by my Ministry and Local Authorities.

My Ministry has extended its full support to facilitate execution and timely completion of projects, programmes and schemes, for the materialisation of our goals through –

- i. provision of apposite and comprehensive legal framework;
- ii. adoption of succinct policies;
- iii. provision of adequate financial resources from the Consolidated Fund, COVID-19 Fund and the National Environment and Climate Change Fund;
- iv. technical support through consultants and experts;
- v. specialised training and capacity building exercises, and
- vi. adoption of environment friendly technologies.

EDUCATION SECTOR - ASSISES DE L'ÉDUCATION

(No. B/1386) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the education sector, she will state if she proposes to organise an *Assises de l'Éducation* in consultation with the different stakeholders thereof to look into all the problems facing same amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reply: Policy matters pertaining to the education sector have been addressed holistically in the context of the educational reform agenda and we are currently pursuing the implementation thereof.

It is not proposed to organise an *Assises de l'Éducation* in the current context.

MAURITIUS INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION - MR V. C. J. - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/1387) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to Mr V. C. J., she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Institute of Education, information as to when the latter will be appointed as lecturer in Economics, following the Supreme Court Judgment finding in his favour.

Reply: I am informed that the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) advertised the post of Lecturer in Economics on 08 December 2017 along with other posts. Four candidates who were found to be eligible were convened for the interview but only three turned up. Subsequently, interview for the post of Lecturer in Economics was carried out by the Senior Appointment Committee, in accordance with section 13 of the MIE Act.

The Senior Appointment Committee recommended that the post of Lecturer in Economics be offered to Miss P. C. Dr. V. C. J was ranked third at the interview.

Dr. V. C. J applied for judicial review of the decision of the MIE to appoint Miss P. C. as Lecturer in Economics. Consequently, the Supreme Court quashed the decision of the MIE on 11 August 2021.

Following the judgment of the Supreme Court, the MIE implemented the decision and terminated the appointment Miss P. C. to the post of Lecturer in Economics as from 27 August 2021.

As for the appointment of Dr. V. C. J to the post of Lecturer of Economics at MIE, I wish to draw the attention of the House that the Supreme Court did not make any order to appoint him to that post.

Furthermore, on the strength of legal advice received at the MIE, the Council of MIE has decided not to proceed with the recruitment of the candidate who was listed second on the list but to re-advertise the post.

FISHERMEN INVESTMENT TRUST – SHIPS, ASSETS OWNED

(No. B/1388) 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 Investment Trust, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of ships and other assets owned by the Trust, indicating –

- (a) the value of the assets, and
- (b) to which organisation same have been transferred.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the FIT had invested into three fishing boats to be leased to fishers to fish in outer lagoon and around Fishing Aggregating Devices.

An amount of Rs10,350,000 was earmarked by the FIT for the construction of the 3 fishing boats, namely, FIT 1, FIT 2 and FIT 3. One boat, namely, MEXA 1, was received as donation from the Mauritius Export Association in 2009. However, after they became operational and were leased, both fishing boats, namely FIT 1 and MEXA 1, could not generate any income to the FIT as the fishers were reluctant to use them and were not prepared to pay neither any rent fee nor insurance.

In line with the recommendation of a Board of Survey in 2019, fishing boats MEXA 1 and FIT 1 were put for sale by tender on an 'as is where is' basis. The two boats were eventually sold for a combined sale value of Rs388,000, that is, Rs313,000 for FIT 1 and Rs75,000 for MEXA 1.

As regards the boat 'FIT 2', the parent Company (BAI) of the GRNW Boat Yard went into receivership in 2015. Only a part payment of Rs2,192,559 was made by the FIT to the boatyard and to the Marine Surveyor for the boat. Upon the advice of the Attorney General's Office, the FIT took possession of the boat 'FIT 2' in April 2021 on an 'as is and where is' basis, with no further payments to be effected. The construction of FIT 3 was cancelled. Regarding the other assets of the Trust, all have fully depreciated.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am placing a list of all serviceable assets of the Trust in the Library of the National Assembly.

Arrangements are being made for the transfer of these assets, as well as, the boat 'FIT 2', to my Ministry.

MES - PROCEDURES - CAMBRIDGE EXAMINATION FEES

(No. B/1390) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the payment of the Cambridge School Certificate and Higher School Certificate Examinations Fees, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to the prescribed procedures therefor.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that there is a standardised and established procedure for the payment of examinations fees for students sitting for Cambridge School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations.

The fees for school candidates, who are eligible for the 100% subsidy on the SC/HSC examination fees, are paid directly to Cambridge International by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES).

As regards those students who have to pay the examination fees for the SC and HSC examinations (as they do not meet the requirements for the subsidy, namely, (1) first attempt, (2) 90% attendance, and (3) attending State or registered PSS), the amount is collected by their

respective schools and remitted to MES either by Internet Banking, Cheque (Bank Office Cheque only) or Bank Transfer.

The deadline for the transmission of the examination fees by the school is 23 December 2021 while that for the transfer of entries to Cambridge International by MES is 30 December 2021. Cambridge International charges penalty fees after the given deadline.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – ITEMS & VACCINES - DONATION

(No. B/1391) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will give the list of all items, including vaccines, received as donation as at to date, indicating the donors thereof.

Reply: As the House may be aware, in order to respond to the threat of COVID-19 in Mauritius, my Ministry received donations of COVID-19 vaccines from friendly countries, namely the Government of India, the Government of the People's Republic of China, the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of South Africa and the US Government.

Moreover, my Ministry received in-kind donations of Personal Protective Equipment, surgical masks, non-sterile gloves, amongst others, from the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Africa CDC and other organisations.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the list of items and vaccines that my Ministry has received as donation from friendly countries and institutions since the beginning of this year.

OMICRON VARIANT – TURBOCHARGED BOOSTER PROGRAMME

(No. B/1393) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Omicron Variant, he will state if his Ministry is considering a turbocharged booster programme to deal therewith and, if so, indicate if the gaps between doses will be cut with the issue of fresh guidance.

Reply: I wish to inform the House, in Mauritius, booster dose is being administered as from September 2021. As 05 December 2021, 897,719 persons have already been fully vaccinated, out of which 115,096 persons have been administered their booster dose. The vaccine efficacy is 6 months.

Novel vaccines and medications are being developed by laboratories worldwide which will have improved efficacy against the emerging variants of concern, including the Omicron variant.

In fact, my Ministry has already made a request through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to the Chief Executive Officer of Moderna to provide us with the new vaccines being developed by its laboratory and which will have improved efficacy against emerging variants, including Omicron as soon as all regulatory approvals are obtained.

Therefore, the question of coming up with a turbocharged booster programme does not arise.

COVID-19 - IPP WAIVER

(No. B/1394) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state if, in the event that it does not end until everyone is safe, Government will back a waiver for the IPPs related to vaccines and import restrictions so that all countries are equipped for comprehensive vaccination.

Reply: I wish to confirm that Mauritius has already strongly supported and sponsored, as Coordinator for the African Group, a request for a waiver from certain provisions of the WTO Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement (relating to copyrights issues, industrial designs, patents and protection of undisclosed information) for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19, submitted jointly by India and South Africa.

It is understood that waiving certain provisions of the WTO TRIPS Agreement would be a major step in terms of trade policy response to the pandemic and to enhance resilience against future pandemics.

So far, the request is officially backed by 64 governments (including Malaysia, Indonesia, the least developed countries group, and the African Group) with more than 100 WTO Members supporting the proposal, overall. The US, for its part has declared that it is in favour of such a waiver and will “actively participate in text-based negotiations at the WTO” on the matter.

However, a number of countries are opposed to the waiver, such as the European Union, UK, Norway, Switzerland and Germany.

India/South Africa’s proposal has gained much momentum at the WTO and Member States have agreed to adopt a text-based process to negotiate the proposal. There was the hope to achieve an outcome at the WTO Ministerial Conference that was due from 30 November to 03 December 2021. However, this did not materialise since the Conference was postponed in view of the outbreak of the particularly transmissible strain of the COVID-19 virus, the Omicron variant.

MANUFACTURERS – BUSINESSES – MULTIPLE HURDLES

(No. B/1395) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether he will state if he is in presence of representations from manufacturers to the effect that their businesses are in peril from debt, rising costs and multiple hurdles to doing business.

Reply (The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives): I wish to inform the House that, in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, my Ministry has been keeping in close contact with stakeholders and economic operators and, as such, is fully aware and attuned to the difficulties the manufacturing sector and business, in general, are facing.

The manufacturing sector is bearing the brunt due to reliance on externally sourced raw materials and delays related to heavily disrupted supply chains. There is the issue of increases in

logistic costs, especially freight. Operators are having to increase raw material stock levels to avert out of stocks and eventually supply to customers. All these are negatively affecting input costs, cash flow and affecting the competitiveness of manufacturers on markets.

Consequently, Government has brought a series of financial solutions and schemes aimed at alleviating and mitigating risks and improving the resilience of our manufacturing sector and other sectors of the economy. The Government introduced the Wage Assistance Scheme to keep production lines busy.

Moreover, I wish to inform the House that there have been no major closures in the manufacturing sector as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.