



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 26 APRIL 2022

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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
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
Hon. Darsanand Balgobin	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage

Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal

Minister of Public Service, Administrative
and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 05 of 2022

Sitting of Tuesday 26 April 2022

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

- (a) The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for the year ended 30 June 2020.
- (b) The Civil Status (Fees for Marriages) (Amendment) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 92 of 2022)

B. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

The Finance and Audit (Rodrigues Subsidy Account) (Amendment) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 93 of 2022)

C. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Annual Report of the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency for the Financial Year 2019-2020.

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

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (NCRD) for the period July 2017 to June 2020. (In Original)

**E. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 87 of 2022)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 88 of 2022)
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 89 of 2022)
- (d) The Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 94 of 2022)

F. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The Consolidated COVID-19 (Amendment No. 9) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 90 of 2022)
- (b) The COVID-19 (Horse Race Meeting at Champs de Mars) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 91 of 2022)

G. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for the Financial Year ended 30 June 2020.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SOCIAL DISTURBANCES – GRIEVANCES – ACTIONS TAKEN

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the social disturbances which occurred over the last week, he will state the urgent and immediate actions Government has taken to address the grievances of the population.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition is insinuating that Government has been insensitive to the grievances of the population. Nothing can be further from the truth. Never before 2014 has any Government done concretely so much to fight poverty and improve the standard of living of the population, particularly the most vulnerable. Fairness, equity, and inclusiveness have remained the guiding principles of all our actions.

Let me mention some of the measures taken by the Government since December 2014 –

- (i) increase in Basic Retirement Pension from Rs3,623 to Rs9,000;
- (ii) increase in other Basic Pensions, including Invalidity Pension;
- (iii) introduction of the Subsistence Allowance Scheme whereby a Subsistence Allowance is paid on a monthly basis to families living in absolute poverty;
- (iv) grant of full yearly salary compensations from 2015 to 2022;
- (v) payment of PRB 2016 and PRB 2021;
- (vi) free travel scheme for seniors and students maintained;
- (vii) subsidy on SC and HSC fees;
- (viii) free tertiary education in public institutions;
- (ix) subsidy on purchase of water tanks;
- (x) 6m³ of water and wastewater charges free, and
- (xi) increased subsidies on rice, flour and LPG.

The grand total of measures for period December 2014 to June 2020 amounted to Rs112 billion. This represented unprecedented additional revenue given to Mauritian households.

Mr Speaker, Sir, additionally, the following measures were introduced –

- (i) implementation of the Marshall Plan Against Poverty as from Financial Year 2016-2017;
- (ii) additional support to SRM families in the field of education to the tune of Rs250 m. every financial year;
- (iii) for the current financial year, a provision of Rs416.3 m. has been provided in the budget of the Social Integration Division;
- (iv) from December 2016 to date, funds to the tune of some Rs400 m. have been disbursed under the Child Allowance Scheme;
- (v) distribution of food packs during COVID-19 lockdown;
- (vi) introduction of Wage Assistance Scheme, Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, and Self-Employed one-off Grant. So far, under these schemes, some Rs27 billion has been disbursed;
- (vii) setting up of the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund;
- (viii) SME interest-free loan from DBM to help enterprises with turnover of up to Rs50m., and
- (ix) Rs1 m. SME COVID Special Support Scheme at an interest rate of 0.5%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that the evolution of the international situation and of the increase in prices of the different food commodities and petroleum products was under the constant observation and monitoring of the Government. Government, through the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection, was in close collaboration with all the major importers and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

I need to highlight that, up to now, the priority of priorities was to ensure continuity of supply in the face of a major disruption in the global supply chain with two major crises, that is, a food crisis and an energy crisis. That was the most undesirable situation against which Government had a responsibility to act. Four meetings have been held on 21, 22 March, 20 April and 21 April 2022 in order to ensure that future orders were placed beyond May and June 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) is a strategic commodity which is solely imported by the State Trading Corporation. Currently, the yearly requirement is around 78,000 metric tons. Domestic LPG is a product that is widely consumed by all segments of the population and has replaced traditional methods of cooking.

We have always been conscious of the need for LPG to remain affordable at all times and it is under the vision of Sir Anerood Jugnauth in 2003 that the policy to subsidise the price of LPG was introduced.

(Interruptions)

At that time, the subsidised retail price of a 12 kg cylinder was Rs224.

Mr Speaker, Sir, between February 2004 and February 2012, the subsidised retail price of a 12 kg cylinder has always fluctuated within a bracket of Rs214 to Rs300. In March 2012, it reached an unprecedented peak of Rs330 for a 12 kg cylinder. The sudden increase to Rs330 may have been dictated by market considerations and by international economic factors. However, at that time, the purchasing price of a 12 kg cylinder on the international market was less than Rs600, whereas today we are purchasing at Rs662 and consumers are buying at a retail price of Rs240.

An hon. Member: Bravo! Bravo!

The Prime Minister: When the situation started to stabilise on the international scene and the financial situation of the STC started to improve, this Government decided to bring down the price of a 12 kg cylinder to Rs270 in August 2016, Rs240 in June 2018, Rs210 in June 2019 and Rs180 in June 2020.

(Interruptions)

However, while Mauritius is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia brought about a double supply-driven shock. As a Small Island Developing State, with a small economy, far away from traditional markets, Mauritius is even more vulnerable. No one can deny that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has had a profound impact on prices of petroleum products, including LPG as a derivative of petroleum products. Russia used to export around 6.5 m. barrels of Brent per day during the pre-war situation and accounted

for 17% of natural gas production during the same period. Crude oil prices rose significantly in 2021 as demand increased faster than supply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, immediately after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the price of Brent on the international market started escalating to reach unprecedented heights in the first weeks of March 2022 resulting in the petroleum hub market becoming highly volatile and unpredictable.

If the current situation persists, it will be inevitable that on the world market the demand will remain persistently higher than the supply. Consequently, it is not excluded that countries which do not have a robust and sustained procurement and supply programme may face the risk of shortage or scarcity of petroleum products, including LPG.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a caring and responsible Government and in order to ensure continuity of supply and prevent any possible shortage while allowing the public to access LPG at an affordable price, Government has had no alternative than to intervene at the appropriate time in order to avoid future problems.

In fact, to put matters in their proper perspective, this Government has not deliberately increased the price of LPG but has simply reduced the subsidy element by a mere 9.1%. Consequently, out of a 12 kg cylinder which the STC purchases at Rs661.49, the subsidised retail price is Rs240 as opposed to Rs180.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the recent increase in the price of Mogas and Gas Oil, I am informed that the new reference price of Mogas is USD1,065.54 per metric ton while the exchange rate stood at Rs43.50 against the USD. Economically speaking, the retail price of Mogas should have been increased to Rs73.93 per litre, that is, by Rs12.63 per litre, which would have meant an increase of 20.60%. On the other hand, the new Reference Price of Gas Oil is USD138.12 and the new price should have been Rs66.90 per litre, that is, an increase of Rs21.80 per litre representing 48.34%.

However, as provided under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011, only a maximum increase of 10% is allowed. Therefore, the retail price of Mogas has been increased by Rs6.10 and Gas Oil by Rs4.50, which represent an increase of 9.95% and 9.98% respectively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the price of rice, the actual price of Long Grain White Rice commonly known as *du riz ration* is Rs10.80 per kg and absorbs a total annual subsidy of around Rs354 m. One kg of Long Grain White Rice costs the STC Rs25.80. The Government, therefore, subsidises around Rs15 per kg, which implies that a subsidy of around 58% is provided to consumers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are conscious of the increasing cost of living which is a direct result of rising international prices. Nonetheless, as a caring Government, we have, so far, ensured that the basic necessities are offered at an affordable price. In this respect, Government has maintained the price of the scheduled bread commonly referred to as *pain maison* at Rs2.60.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding flour, the maximum price of white flour sold to consumers is Rs9.70 per kg while the subsidised price at which flour is sold to bakeries is Rs6.22 per kg. Bakers have been offered flour at a cheaper rate in order to be able to maintain the price of *pain maison* at Rs2.60. The total amount of subsidy on flour is estimated at around Rs1.4 billion for the year 2022.

With regard to other essential commodities, Government has provided subsidies to the tune of Rs1.2 billion to maintain prices at affordable levels.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming again to the assertion of the Leader of the Opposition, as to the alleged inaction of Government, I wish to say that, as a result of a consultation with importers and the MCCI, the following measures have been taken and are underway –

- (i) the current price of and subsidy on food items under control is being reviewed to further protect consumers;
- (ii) the mark-up on fifteen most consumed drugs in Mauritius is being reviewed downwards in order to allow these medicines to be affordable to the public;
- (iii) a ministerial committee has been set up to look into additional measures to further support the population, and
- (iv) the subsidy is being increased on long grain white rice and flour to maintain them at their current price in spite of the massive increase in their prices worldwide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, there have recently been some sporadic incidents in certain localities. During these incidents, Police Stations and Police Vehicles have been

attacked by *Cocktail Molotovs* and certain public infrastructure has been damaged, and Police Officers also have been attacked. Moreover, stones and other projectiles have been hurled at Police Officers and 21 of them and one Firefighter have suffered serious injury. Two other persons were also injured. Three Rioters have so far been arrested.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the use of force and firearms by the Police has been in strict compliance with Standing Operating Procedures and Legal Framework in order to protect the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the history of every country in the world is studded with ups and downs, with moments of great momentum as well as with moments of strife and tension deliberately engineered by lawless and unpatriotic demolition experts recklessly bent on creating havoc and at destabilising the country and the population. Fortunately, the wisdom of the vast majority of the population contains and holds sway over them and over irresponsible persons, particularly inconsiderate politicians inciting them towards anarchy.

(Interruptions)

While it is a fact that the difficulties of the whole population, particularly of our citizens in the lowest rung of the economic ladder are real, these difficulties cannot and should not and never be expressed through violence of any kind and nature. Instead, meaningful and purposeful dialogue with all our social partners, including the National Social Inclusion Foundation which has a permanent contact with over 250 NGOs, and peaceful representations should at all times be resorted to.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I appeal to all our citizens to display their sense of responsibility and to guard themselves against demagogues bent on poisoning their minds and utilising them as their tools of destruction.

Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, given the length of the answer of the Prime Minister, I hope that you will give extra time for the questions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ukraine crisis, war, the rupee depreciation have led families, today, as we speak, having to change their eating habits, not able to buy medicines, children are going

without basic necessities. Why is it, Mr Speaker, Sir, that whatever action the Prime Minister is announcing seems like too little, too late?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not wearing blinkers and he sees what is happening throughout the world. It is not only Mauritius which is facing this double crisis. Not merely out the region, but the whole world is facing a double crisis of COVID and now of this war in Ukraine. I can cite a number of international institutions which have already made observations on many issues, but particularly, I say, on the rise of prices of basic commodities. I do not need to quote the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, but let me quote what the FAO has said in its recent report, and I quote –

“The FAO Food Price Index makes a giant leap to another all-time high in March.

The FAO Food Price Index (FFPI) averaged 159.3 points in March 2022, up 17.9 points from February to March, making a giant leap to a new highest level since its inception in 1990. The latest increase reflects new all-time highs for vegetable oils, cereals and meat sub-indices, while those of sugar and dairy products also rose significantly.”

I can go on, but I recommend that the hon. Leader of the Opposition reads this report published on 10 March 2022.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I recommend the Prime Minister to do two things

-

- (i) look at the vicious devaluation of the rupee that has been happening under his watch, and
- (ii) the Prime Minister has carefully avoided telling the population why is it that to buy petrol, which has a cascading effect on all prices, at Rs37, you tax Rs30 and you sell the petrol, the Mogas at Rs67. Whilst every other country in the world has been reducing taxes, you have been increasing taxes on petrol these last few weeks!

The Prime Minister: This is not correct, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is absolutely correct!

The Prime Minister: You want to interrupt my answer? I allowed you to put your question without being interrupted. Will you allow me to answer? Unless you do not want to hear the truth!

You are talking about depreciation of the rupee. I think a PNQ was addressed to my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development who had replied to it. But let us consider the other currencies, and their depreciation vis-à-vis the US dollar since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict –

- Australian dollar has been depreciating by 3.86%;
- New Zealand dollar, 4.67%;
- The Euro against the dollar;
- the British Pound against the dollar,
- the South African Rand.

So, I say again that it is not as if only Mauritius is being affected. The whole world is being affected. I must also say that when consider inflation, prices are going up worldwide, Mr Speaker, Sir! If we consider, let us say, the stronger economies, if I can call them so, what is forecast for 2022? Belgium, inflation rate of 8%!

Mr X. L. Duval: Exactly!

Mr Speaker: Wait!

The Prime Minister: Estonia - 11.9%; Hungary - 10.3%; Poland - 8.9%. In Africa: Botswana - 8.9%; Ghana, 16.3%; Rwanda - we are being regularly compared to Rwanda - 8.8%. And what is forecast for Mauritius? Inflation of 8.4%. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait a minute! If you want a reply; hon. Leader of the Opposition, it is not only questions that are important! The purpose of questions is to have replies!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: He wants to put questions...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: He wants to reply himself!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Give us a short reply!

The Prime Minister: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I repeat again - people have now access to information and they know what is happening worldwide. It is very unfortunate that, during our mandate which started in 2019, we are facing the COVID-19 crisis; and we are now facing this war in Ukraine, which is causing a total disruption in the supply chain of basic commodities and petroleum products.

But, then, we have, of course, to see in what way we can mitigate the effect of those rises in prices on our population.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is shocking to find that the Prime Minister does not know that inflation is already at 10.7%; the official rate published by Statistics Mauritius! It is already like this and it is, in fact, of course, because of the vicious depreciation of the rupee. The Prime Minister does not know either that VAT charged on petrol has increased by Rs3 since election on every litre whilst every other country is reducing.

Can I ask the Prime Minister whether this is not the truth that billions and billions of rupees have been dilapidated by this Government –

- on BAI, Rs20 billion;
- on Betamax, Rs6 billion;
- on the Stadium that nobody uses, Rs5 billion;
- on Safe City, Rs18 billion,
- on the mismanagement of Air Mauritius, Rs23 billion!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You have to put the question!

Mr X. L. Duval: On Liverpool, Rs400 m.!

Mr Speaker: You have to put your question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: On Splash Gate, Rs318 m.! On Molnupiravir, Rs70m...

Mr Speaker: I am stopping you there; it is too long a long list! You put your question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I am going to ask the Prime Minister now whether it is not time for him to abandon these white elephant projects –

- The National Identity Card, Rs230 m.,
- the e-Passport, Rs500 m.,
- even the renovation of the State House, Rs234 m.!

I am sure the President will not mind if it is postponed and the money put to support families in Mauritius!

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition can mention any list he wants. I can answer to him on every project that this Government has undertaken! Every project! He has the cheek to talk about the Côte d’Or Stadium! That was started before Mauritius faced the COVID-19 pandemic!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Ha ha ha!

Mr Speaker: Now, this is unbecoming! This sign of laughter!

The Prime Minister: What is ha ha ha?

Mr Speaker: Listen to your reply!

The Prime Minister: Ha ha ha! You ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: *Tansion twa!*

Mr Bérenger: *Ena inpe manier!*

Mr Speaker: *Twa ki bisin ena manier! Twa ki bisin ena manier!* You should show manners, you do not have the floor!

An hon. Member: We are not threatened by...

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Indian Ocean Island Games were held, this is the same 'ha ha ha' Member who came and watched the different sporting events at the Côte d'Or Stadium and applauded our sportsmen! And I can go on for the other projects also.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition is talking in such a way as if we should stop everything. Life should stop now because we are facing double crisis, prices are increasing! We should stop all projects! The development programme of Government should stop. And then, there have been projects which have started even much before! Contracts have been awarded. Now, what do we do? He is talking about all those projects. We just give a notice to those contractors that we are going to stop those projects? How many billions of rupees do we have to pay in damages, Mr Speaker, Sir? This is not merely the irresponsible reaction of the Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: He has no idea about the legal issues that will arise if we stop certain projects that are ongoing. We shall be in breach of contract. We shall be taken to Court and Government will have to pay billions of rupees in terms of damages. So, he should stop that kind of demagoguery!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very happy today that the Prime Minister is assuming full responsibility for the full list of dilapidation of funds that I have just announced. I am so happy about it!

Mr Speaker, Sir, now I want to ask the Prime Minister the CSG has started to be charged on the population in Mauritius since September 2020, the old-age pensioners have not seen a cent of increase in their pensions. So, I am going to ask the Prime Minister to do the decent thing immediately and increase pensions for old-age pensioners, handicapped, and all that sort of people!

The Prime Minister: First of all,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: First of all...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Rs3,000 to ti pe donne!*

The Prime Minister: First of all, I take exception to the demagogical comments of the Leader of the Opposition who says that we are squandering public funds. Secondly, he is the last one to be giving us lessons on pension. He is the last one...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: ...because he was in a previous Government, and he knows what increases were given to old age people for their Basic Retirement Pension. It is this Government which has substantially increased the old-age pension!

Mr X. L. Duval: Let me remind the Prime Minister that the 2014 Manifesto was written by Nando Bodha and myself, and he did not even care about the pension increase, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: It was us who did it!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the private sector...

(Interruptions)

Come on! I know it hurts!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I know it hurts! I know it hurts!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order on both sides of the House! Order! Both sides of the House, order!
There is only one Chair!

Mr X. L. Duval: I know the truth hurts, Mr Speaker, Sir. I can feel that they are hurting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming now to salary compensation, even Business Mauritius, up in their tower, have realised that the situation is dramatic for families and they are suggesting that employers give food vouchers. But we do not want people to beg their employers! We want Government to come with a decent salary compensation immediately, Mr Speaker, Sir! Immediately! No begging!

The Prime Minister: What is it? You have made a statement! The Leader of Opposition is continuing with his demagogy.

Mr X. L. Duval: Immediate salary compensation!

The Prime Minister: Wait, wait! You put a question, now let me answer!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now, Leader of the Opposition, time is over, I am allowing you extra time, but you do not know how to manage your time!

(Interruptions)

Allow the reply!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to refer back to one comment which the Leader of the Opposition has made with regard to the price of Mogas and Gas Oil. Is he aware that – yes, I agree there are different taxes that have been imposed on...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To lepok osi ti kumsa!*

Mr Speaker: There will be no extra time!

The Prime Minister: With regard to these taxes, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me just briefly mention that one tax is for the contribution to the Road Development Authority, amongst others, to compensate bus companies for increases in diesel prices and increases in wages and salaries of their employees. There is another tax for contribution to Rodrigues transportation and storage, which is to subsidise the cost involved in transporting, storing, distributing petroleum products, ‘ration rice’ and flour supplied by the STC so that the retail prices in Rodrigues are kept at par with the retail prices prevailing in Mauritius. There is another tax for contribution to subsidy on LPG, flour and rice. And there is also a tax for COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to finance programmes and schemes related to COVID-19, and then, a contribution to finance the cost of COVID-19 vaccines. There is also another contribution for the construction and storage facilities of petroleum products. I shall not go into the details because we know in what situation we were, and that is why the Government has a vision to ensure that we have adequate storage capacity in order not to be short of supply. So, these are the reasons why we have maintained those contributions.

Mr Speaker: Time over by five minutes already!

(Interruptions)

Five minutes!

(Interruptions)

No! Time over! I am observing my Order Paper!

(Interruptions)

I don’t mind what you say. Time is over and there is only one Chair!

Prime Minister’s Question Time!

Ms Anquetil: B/434.

MBC – MS M. J., SENIOR NEWS EDITOR – INTERDICTION

(No. B/434) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as

to if Ms M. J., Senior News Editor, has been suspended from duty and, if so, indicate the charges levelled against her.

The Prime Minister: I am informed by the Director General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that, on 10 December 2021, a written complaint was made by a Member of the National Assembly against Ms M. J., News Editor/Senior News Editor at the MBC, for misconduct during an official event held on 09 December 2021.

Subsequently, following the advice of the Legal Adviser of the MBC, an internal inquiry was initiated on the matter, and, pending the completion of the inquiry, Ms M. J. was interdicted from duty with effect from 15 December 2021. The inquiry was conducted by the Human Resource Department of the MBC.

On completion of internal inquiry, a report was sent to the Board of the MBC on 28 February 2022, together with the charges to be retained against Ms M. J., as vetted by the Legal Counsel of the MBC.

On 03 March 2022, the Board of the MBC, pursuant to section 11 of the MBC Act, approved the setting up of a Disciplinary Committee to hear evidence, if any, against Ms M. J.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the charges have already been communicated to Ms M. J., and she was convened to appear before the Disciplinary Committee on 15 March 2022. However, at the request of her Counsel, the hearing has now been rescheduled for 29 April 2022.

It will, therefore, not be in order to disclose either the charges preferred against Ms M.J. or anything in relation to same, including potential witnesses, so as not to prejudice the conduct of the proceedings of the Disciplinary Committee prior to such hearing.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Le Premier ministre serait-il d'accord pour dire que les accusations portées contre Madame M. J. révèlent aucune faute professionnelle dans la mesure où la journaliste est la meilleure juge de ses tâches professionnelles au moment des faits et n'accepte pas de recevoir des instructions d'une tierce personne et surtout si cette tierce personne est un député ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, je ne peux pas commenter sur le fond de l'affaire. Comme je l'ai dit dans la réponse, il y a eu une enquête ; il y a le *Board* de la *MBC* qui a pris une

décision ; l'affaire a été référée à un comité disciplinaire. Donc, ce sera au comité disciplinaire de juger si ce qui a été reproché à la journaliste s'est avéré correct ou pas, et de prendre, bien sûr, ou de recommander des mesures quelconques. Donc, premièrement, je n'ai pas le dossier, et ce serait inapproprié aussi pour moi de venir donner mon opinion. Ce serait comme si que je suis déjà en train de juger l'affaire avant qu'elle ne soit jugée par le comité disciplinaire.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Depuis des années, c'est une pratique normale, lors des fonctions officielles de la *MBC*, que la *MBC* prenne des déclarations des *Deputy Prime Ministers* and des ministres uniquement. J'ai occupé le poste de *Deputy Chief Government Whip* de 2011 à 2014 et j'ai vécu cela.

M. le Premier ministre, est-ce qu'un député a le droit de dicter des ordres à la *MBC*, et si oui, est-ce que cela s'applique à tous les députés des deux côtés de la Chambre ? Merci.

The Prime Minister : Encore une fois, l'honorable membre est en train de dire certaines choses que moi je ne peux ni confirmer, ni nier. Ce n'est pas mon rôle de prendre en compte ce qui a été dit par les parties concernées et les témoins, et de venir à la Chambre donner des détails sur cette affaire. Donc, il faut que l'honorable membre puisse comprendre qu'il y a un comité qui va, bien sûr, écouter tous les témoignages, considérer toutes les preuves qu'on va mettre devant lui, et c'est ce comité qui va finalement rendre un jugement concernant ces charges qui ont été proférées contre la journaliste.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Prime Minister specify what are the charges levelled against Ms M. J.?

The Prime Minister: I have already answered, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the – let me add, so that the hon. Member will understand –Attorney General's Office has advised that the charges preferred against Ms M. J. cannot be disclosed in view of the fact that the charges are between the employer, that is, the *MBC*, and the employee, and these are subject to disciplinary proceeding. So, I go according to the advice which has been tendered to me.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House of the composition of the Disciplinary Committee that he mentioned was set up? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: The regulations of the MBC provide that independent people should be chairing the committee. I am informed that the Disciplinary Committee is composed of the following persons –

- (i) M^e Angelique A. Desvaux de Marigny as Chairperson;
- (ii) Mr Sooreklall Luchoomun, assessor and a former Director of Human Resource Management; and
- (iii) Mr Anandraj Sitana, also an assessor, a former Human Resource Manager.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Can the hon. Prime Minister at least confirm that the charges were levelled following complaints made by hon. Dhunoo, the Deputy Chief Whip?

The Prime Minister: Yes, there was a complaint made by hon. Dhunoo.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. M. le Premier ministre, ne s'agit-il pas d'un cas flagrant de harcèlement au travail et de persécution contre une journaliste employée par la télévision nationale, relevant de votre ministère et donc, en tant que Premier ministre et *Chairperson* du comité de haut niveau contre toute forme de violence contre les femmes, ne pensez-vous pas que vous devez intervenir et prévenir toute forme d'injustice contre madame M. J ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, je déplore vraiment la manière de poser cette question, et d'insinuer que le gouvernement et moi, nous sommes contre les femmes ; nous sommes en train de *condone* le harcèlement des femmes. L'honorable membre sait très bien que ce n'est pas correct. Maintenant, il y a la loi, il y a des règlements, il y a la procédure. Quelqu'un qui est accusé de certaines choses a la possibilité de se défendre devant le comité disciplinaire. Elle a retenu les services d'un juriste. Donc, ce n'est pas ni à moi ni à l'honorable membre de venir déjà prononcer un jugement. Laissons le comité disciplinaire faire son travail, et puis on verra quel va être le jugement. C'est comme si on est déjà en train de dire soit que quelqu'un est

coupable ou pas. Moi aussi je peux regarder certains faits et puis me prononcer et avoir un jugement. En tout cas, ce n'est pas comme ça que l'on procède et il y a les règlements, il y a au moins la possibilité pour que la dame puisse s'expliquer devant ce comité.

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

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. B/435, please.

**PORT LOUIS HARBOUR & FORT WILLIAM – BREAKWATER CONSTRUCTION –
ESTIMATED COSTS**

(No. B/435) 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 proposed construction of a breakwater at the Port Louis harbour and another one at Fort William, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to where matters stand, indicating the estimated costs thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority that development in the Port has at all times been undertaken on the basis of recommendations of a Port Masterplan Report which is updated around every five years. The latest Port Masterplan study was commissioned in 2016 for the harbours at Port Louis and Port Mathurin to define the land use and infrastructure requirements up to horizon 2040.

In the Port Masterplan Report 2016, it was recommended, amongst others, to implement the Island Container Terminal Project, adjacent to the existing Mauritius Container Terminal at Mer Rouge and the Fishing Port project at Fort William with both projects comprising the construction of breakwaters.

Accordingly, following an international bidding exercise, the Mauritius Ports Authority commissioned in October 2017, a Techno-Economic Feasibility study for the development of the Island Container Terminal. The consultancy contract was awarded to Messrs Royal Haskoning DHV, a Dutch firm with experience in similar studies. The Final Feasibility Study Report for the Island Container Terminal, including the breakwater structure at Port Louis Harbour was submitted to the Mauritius Ports Authority in March 2019.

The report confirmed that the Island Container Terminal project is technically and economically feasible and would protect the Mauritius Container Terminal from high waves and swells, hence would decrease the downtime at the Terminal due to bad weather conditions. The Consultants then estimated that the development of the Island Container Terminal would entail a total investment cost of USD835 m., out of which USD352 m. would be for the construction of the breakwater, dredging and land reclamation works. The remaining components of the project comprising the construction of the Container Terminal and associated facilities as well as mobilisation of container handling equipment was estimated to cost around USD483 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the significant investment required for the project, the Consultants recommended that same be implemented under a Public-Private Partnership scheme and a Transaction Advisor be appointed who would prepare options for the project financing, assist in the selection of developers and plan the project implementation.

In line with the recommendations of the Consultants and with a view to assessing the level of private sector interest in the project, in August 2019, the Mauritius Ports Authority issued an Information Memorandum to potential investors for a market consultation. At the closing date on 07 November 2019, 15 parties had responded to the request for information and expressed their interests.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Ag. Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority that following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, a decrease in container traffic volume and container vessel calls has been recorded at Port Louis Harbour due to the global economic downturn. Hence, it is considered that the implementation of the project at this stage will not attract the expected interest from potential developers. Accordingly, the Mauritius Ports Authority has deferred the implementation of the project till the recovery of the global economy and the evolution of the regional shipping activities to the pre- COVID-19 trend.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the Fishing Port project at Fort William, in the Port Masterplan Report 2016, it was recommended that a breakwater be also constructed to create a sheltered water plane for the mooring of fishing vessels as part of the project.

Following an open advertised bidding exercise, on 29 October 2018, the Mauritius Ports Authority retained the services of Messrs CWP Engineering FZ LLC to undertake the

consultancy services comprising the technical feasibility, planning, design, preparation of tender documents and supervision of works for the proposed Fishing Port.

The Consultants started activities in November 2018 and undertook various field visits for data collection and submitted their inception report in December 2018. In the light of their assessment, the Consultants recommended that fresh bathymetric surveys and geotechnical investigations be carried out to firm up their preliminary planning and designs. It was further recommended that a physical modelling exercise be undertaken in a specialised hydraulic laboratory. Unfortunately, the field activities as well as the physical modelling exercise were heavily impacted by travel restrictions and lockdowns both locally and overseas, which impacted on the smooth implementation of the consultancy services for the project.

In October 2021, the Consultants finalised the detailed design as well as bidding documents and accordingly recommended a development layout which comprises –

- (i) land reclamation of about 10 hectares;
- (ii) construction of breakwater of about 900 metres long;
- (iii) construction of a 50 metres long service quay and associated dredging works, and
- (iv) fishing quays totalling 300 metres long to be developed by the private sector.

The estimated cost for the project was Rs1.75 billion, out of which the breakwater was estimated at Rs1 billion. However, in the light of the global economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unfavourable business environment, the Mauritius Ports Authority has decided to postpone the implementation of the Fishing Port project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Acting Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority that the Authority is proceeding with the commissioning of a new Port Masterplan study. The study will consider the constraints faced by the Port at this stage due to external factors affecting the global and regional maritime sector and re-actualise the infrastructural needs to cater for the short, medium and long-terms port activities at Port Louis Harbour and to make recommendations accordingly.

Thank you.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House, with regard to the absence of breakwater right now, the cost and losses being incurred by the Mauritius Ports Authority due to increase in swell conditions leading to a very high downtime? Is there a comprehensive study that has been done by the Mauritius Ports Authority to do that balancing exercise that we cannot now proceed with the implementation of construction of those breakwaters?

The Prime Minister: I must admit that, unfortunately, the recent weather conditions which have prevailed, I am informed, have impacted negatively on the downtime of number of vessels. Now, whether we have done a study in order to see what has been the loss that we have incurred, the impact of the weather conditions and the wave swells and so on, on traffic, and on the other hand, the cost of these breakwaters, I do not have information on that. But I do not think we need to have a Consultant to do that. I think the Mauritius Ports Authority can always have an estimate. But again, let me refer to today's PNQ of the hon. Leader of the Opposition who was saying that there is a list of so many projects that should not go forward because we are spending billions of rupees.

(Interruptions)

I have mentioned how many billions of rupees these breakwaters will cost. But then, let me clarify that this was just a side comment, but I think your question, of course, has to be taken very seriously. In the light of the impact on traffic, we should obviously see whether we have to go forward with such a project.

I have stated accordingly that the MPA is going to review the Masterplan because we are in a new situation right now. I think everybody acknowledges that. We have been going through the COVID situation which has impacted heavily on shipping traffic and now with this war in Ukraine. I have figures, but I do not want to take the time of the House to mention in what way there has been a decrease in container traffic to Mauritius. So, this has to be looked into very carefully and we need to be advised by those experts who will tell us what is recommended in the short, medium and long-terms. Then, it will be for Government and the Mauritius Ports Authority to take a decision.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House the amount paid to the Consultant by the Mauritius Ports Authority for the Island Container Terminal and the Breakwater project?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have this information. I undertake, at a later stage, to provide this information to the House.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House how was Royal Haskoning DHV appointed as Consultant for the Masterplan?

The Prime Minister: The Mauritius Ports Authority had conducted an expression of interest exercise in March 2014, following which 26 firms responded to the expression of interest. Following the evaluation of those 26 responses, 9 firms were shortlisted to participate in the request for proposal exercise. The request for proposal for the Port Masterplan study was issued to the 9 shortlisted firms in January 2015. At the closing date in January 2015, only 7 bidders responded to the RFP, namely –

- (i) HPC Hamburg Port Consulting GmbH;
- (ii) Royal Haskoning DHV Netherland B.V.;
- (iii) Ramboll UK Ltd.;
- (iv) ICF International Inc.;
- (v) Aurecon AMEI Ltd.;
- (vi) Louis Berger Group/Luxconsult (Mauritius) Ltd., and
- (vii) Worleyparsons RSA Ltd.

Following the evaluation, the contract was awarded to Royal Haskoning DHV in August 2015 for a contract price of 489,500 euros plus Rs4,036,000 including VAT.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House that this new Port Masterplan will have high on its agenda the protection of the Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary, which is listed as a Ramsar wetland site? Will it be high on the agenda of this new Port Masterplan?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Port Masterplan is normally updated every five years and it has been so in the past also. But I am sure that, in recommending the

improvement of the Port infrastructure, the environmental aspect is always taken into consideration. You can rest assured that this will obviously be taken into consideration.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there has been any change in cargo and container traffic following the outbreak of COVID-19?

The Prime Minister: I have the figures. In fact, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the total cargo traffic handled at Port Louis harbour registered a decrease from 8.52 million tons in 2019 to 7.6 million tons in 2021, representing a decrease of 10.7%. The total container traffic, comprising both captive and transshipment containers, decreased from 469,011 TEUs in 2019 to 436,398 TEUs in 2021, again representing a decrease of 6.9%. And total captive container traffic decreased from 276,147 in 2019 to 226,355 in 2021, that is, a decrease of 18%. This decrease in the captive traffic is mainly explained by the significant decrease in laden import and export of containers. However, for transshipment traffic, it has sustained an increase of 8.9% from 192,864 in 2019 to 210,043 in 2021.

Mr Speaker: Time over! Next question, hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. B/451!

Mr Speaker: Before any reply, let me announce that PQs B/441, B/444, B/446, B/439, B/440, B/443, B/450 and B/437 have been withdrawn.

Minister of Health!

MEDICAL CANNABIS - MAURITIUS - USE

(No. B/451) **Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medical cannabis, he will state where matters stand as to the consideration for the use thereof in Mauritius.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, a Technical Committee was set up for the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking pertaining to

cannabis in September 2020. The Committee was chaired by Professor T. Bahorun, Executive Director, Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC).

The report of the Technical Committee was finalised and approved in November 2021. Subsequently, a Steering Committee was set up under the chair of the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry, to look into the implementation of the recommendations contained therein.

As at date, the Steering Committee has held seven meetings with a view to addressing the implementation of the twelve recommendations contained in the report of the Technical Committee on medicinal cannabis. In this connection, the Steering Committee has considered the following –

(a) Setting up of a Therapeutic Committee on medicinal cannabis.

A Therapeutic Committee on medicinal cannabis will be set up at regional level under the chair of the Regional Health Director, which will endorse all prescriptions relating to medicinal cannabis from both public and private Specialists. The use of medicinal cannabis will be started on a pilot basis at Victoria Hospital, in the first instance.

(b) Prescription of medicinal cannabis.

Both public and private medical Specialists will be licensed to prescribe medicinal cannabis, subject to approval by the Therapeutic Committee on medicinal cannabis.

(c) Training of Specialists.

Both public and private medical Specialists will have to be trained for prescribing medicinal cannabis. The possibility of having recourse to suitable international institutions to provide the online training was explored. A first team of Specialists of my Ministry who are closely involved at the level of the Steering Committee will be trained in the first instance. They will follow the UK Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society (MCCS) online training programme.

In parallel, a request had also been made to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to seek appropriate technical expertise to train the Specialists in Mauritius to enable them to acquire the relevant knowledge on the use of medicinal cannabis.

An Expression of Interest has been launched on 09 February 2022 for training of Specialists, both in the public and private sector, for them to be licensed for prescribing

medicinal cannabis. From the public sector, we have received an interest from seventy-two Specialists and from the private sector, the list of names has yet to be submitted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in parallel, the report of the Technical Committee on medicinal cannabis was uploaded on the website of my Ministry. The views of the public were sought thereon through a Press communiqué which was issued on 17 January 2022.

Views have been received from five (5) sources. These have been examined by the Technical Committee and a number of the proposals made, had already been duly considered by the Steering Committee, including –

- enlarging the medical indications for treatment with medicinal cannabis;
- consideration of use of cannabis-based medication from various approved bodies, and
- availability of medicinal cannabis in public hospitals for private patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the introduction of medicinal cannabis will necessitate legal amendments to be brought to the Dangerous Drugs Act, which are currently under consideration and will be amended in the Finance Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, My Ministry is fully committed to implementing the recommendations contained in the report of the Technical Committee on medicinal cannabis and it is worth highlighting that only plant-derived Cannabidiol, Tetrahydrocannabidiol and combination of Cannabidiol and Tetrahydrocannabidiol will be used for medical purposes in Mauritius. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Mayotte: The FDA approval of a drug, that is, the data on the drug's effect which approves the process that takes place within the structure framework that includes, for example, the analysis of the target conditions and available treatment, assessment of benefits and risks from clinical data, and strategies for managing risks, this is what we call the FDA. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether, his Ministry will only procure FDA approved medical cannabis?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the FDA approved drugs, I am also informed that the Steering Committee on medical cannabis has also agreed to consider cannabis-based medication approved by the following agencies –

- European Medicines Agency;
- Health Canada;
- Therapeutic Goods Agency of Australia, and
- South African Health Products Regulatory Agency.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether, there has been proposal for the production of cannabis locally?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the local production of cannabis has been taken by different stakeholders namely, the Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture. This entity, the Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture, has in fact proposed to set up a National Steering Committee comprising stakeholders from both private and public sectors for the local production of industrial cannabis. The idea is to develop this potentially new economic avenue for the agricultural and pharmaceutical industries. The Steering Committee on medical cannabis is in favour of collaborative work with the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Can the hon. Minister inform the House on the proposed prescription validity of medical cannabis?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this medication will be as per Section 18(4) of the Dangerous Drugs Act of 2000. The prescription limit for Scheduled 2 drug items is 10 days. However, the Technical Committee on Medical Cannabis has recommended to amend the DDA by increasing prescription limits from 10 days to 14 days because medical cannabis products comes in packages of 14 and 28 day supply. So, the House will note that in other countries the prescription limit is 28 or 30 days for medical cannabis. In Mauritius, we are adopting, in the first instance, for a more cautious approach.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is some concern among clinicians with regard to the implementation of prescribing cannabis. Will the hon. Minister see with his relevant Technical Committee that the list of medical conditions and symptoms for conditions that are to be prescribed cannabis be circulated to avoid the abuse, knowing quite well that even the treatment with medical cannabis has led to substance abuse and addictive conditions?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Technical Committee, as a recommendation, I will just inform the House that there are only a few conditions that have been given approval for the use of medical cannabis, namely the spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis, nausea, vomiting side effects associated with chemotherapy, chronic neuropathic pain unresponsive to conventional treatment and treatment resistant symptoms in palliative care oncology. So, these are the indications where this medication can be prescribed in the first instance.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Ms Anquetil: B/452, please.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SHOW – DUBAI

(No. B/452) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the International Women Entrepreneurs Show mission in Dubai held in October 2021, she will state the –

- (a) composition of the delegation of her Ministry which attended same, and
- (b) outcome of the mission.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the International Women Entrepreneur Show was organised by the International Women Entrepreneur Society (IWES) from 19 to 20 October 2021 in Dubai. I was accompanied by a delegation comprising Mr N. L, Acting Deputy Permanent Secretary of my Ministry, Mrs F. MC, Chairperson of the National Women Entrepreneur Council and Mr N. S, Adviser on Project Matters at the level of my Ministry.

As to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the IWES is an international platform that promotes business activities of its members around the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is a strong network of women entrepreneurs of the UAE that meets, exchanges ideas, and come up with new strategies and partnerships among other women entrepreneurs. The IWES is an annual event, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I was invited as a Keynote Speaker to address the audience of women entrepreneurs of the UAE for the 2021 edition. My intervention was based essentially on the ease of doing business in Mauritius. This was a side event to the Dubai Expo 2020, and was an excellent opportunity for Mauritius to be in the lime-light and have a more focused international visibility through the event *per se* and also through the various media coverages.

The aim of my visit, however, was mainly to lay the foundation for a wider networking and cooperation between women entrepreneurs of Mauritius and those of the UAE, and to invite women entrepreneurs from those sides to invest, work and live in Mauritius.

A follow up was ensured with the IWES and one main outcome was the organisation of the Women Entrepreneurs Inter-Regional Business Exchange Meeting, UAE – Mauritius, which was held on 10 March 2022. This Inter-Regional Business Exchange was carried out online. The event was attended by some 60 participants from Dubai and Mauritius.

Women entrepreneurs from the National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWEC), the *Association des Femmes Chefs D'Entreprise (AFMCE)*, SME Chambers, We Empower, participated in this event; likewise women entrepreneurs from various business fields like jewellery, wellness, management lawyers and investment companies, representatives working in Dubai, UAE and the Middle East actively participated in the event. The Director of Industry from the Economic Development Board made a presentation on Investment Opportunities in Mauritius during that business exchange.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this First Women Entrepreneurs Inter-Regional Business Exchange Meeting will be followed by other regional business exchange meetings where Dubai entrepreneurs will also be invited thus building blocks for more regional to global networks. This will address an urgent need for our women entrepreneurs to go global as our market will open up for them.

As a follow-up of that Inter-Regional Forum, my Ministry has proposed that a Memorandum of Agreement be prepared and signed between the National Women Entrepreneur Council of my Ministry and the IWES to reinforce the collaboration between the UAE and Mauritius.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre, dans sa réponse, nous a dit que c'est suite à une invitation qu'elle s'est rendue à Dubaï. Est-ce qu'elle pourrait, dans un premier temps, déposer à la Chambre le carton d'invitation à cette exhibition. Et elle a même fait un discours là-bas, on aurait bien aimé qu'elle dépose l'invitation. Je voudrais demander à la ministre d'informer la Chambre le nombre de femmes entrepreneures qui faisaient partie de la délégation, surtout que cette mission a coûté la somme vertigineuse de R 677,000 aux contribuables?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the first part of the supplementary question addressed by the hon. Member, I will very happily give her a copy of invitation forwarded to me by the International Women Entrepreneur Society.

As to the second part of her supplementary question, I was accompanied by the Chairperson of the Council itself, considering that she is the one who leads the Council of women entrepreneurs. She was already the focal point representing the women entrepreneurs in Mauritius and myself, being the Minister in charge of that portfolio, so, there was no actual need for our women. It was the first invitation to that show.

An hon. Member: Outcome?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Outcome; I have lengthily canvassed on the outcome.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, can you inform the House how many women entrepreneurs got the opportunity to display and participate in the Dubai Expo?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the International Women Entrepreneur Society show of last year was not a platform for our women entrepreneurs to go and display their products because this was the first meeting that the National Women Entrepreneur Council of

Mauritius had undertaken with this International Women Entrepreneur Society. Henceforth, thanks to the good work carried out by both parties, by both stakeholders, my Ministry and my officers, there is a forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding that will then allow our women entrepreneurs to display their products on the Emirati market.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. C'est quand même choquant d'apprendre qu'aucune femme entrepreneur ne faisait partie de cette délégation. Je trouve cela franchement scandaleux et donc, finalement ce qu'on comprend, rien pour les femmes entrepreneurs. Le jackpot est juste pour la ministre!

Mr Speaker: Put your question! Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: Un *per diem* de R 131,516 pour deux jours à Dubai, franchement scandaleux ! *Amize mem !*

(Interruptions)

Six months!

(Interruptions)

Six months!

Mr Speaker: Are you putting a question?

Ms Anquetil: Yes, I am coming with a supplementary question.

Mr Speaker: Put your question directly!

Ms Anquetil: I am coming, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: If not, I will disallow the question! Put the question!

Ms Anquetil: Six months after the fourth edition of the International Women's Entrepreneur Show in Dubai, would the Minister inform the House what are the benefits for our

local women *entrepreneurs surtout qu'elles souffrent énormément ces derniers temps? Merci, M. le président.*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I deplore the manner in which the hon. Member has put a supplementary question. I understand that she is hell bent on finding shortcomings and *faire la sensation ki monn al amize*. Listen, allow me to reply!

(Interruptions)

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The work is being carried out. This was a first opportunity for us to touch base with...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now, be careful! You should allow the reply to come.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: It was a first opportunity. There was no point of...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I take note for next time!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to reply to the supplementary question which I hope the Member will be gracious enough to listen to.

This was the first opportunity for the National Women Entrepreneurs Council to get in touch with the stakeholder - the International Women Entrepreneurs Society, a very first for our women entrepreneurs in Mauritius, a very first, so as to extend their visibility on an international landscape. There would have been no point taking along our women entrepreneurs. This is the stepping stone to extending their products to a more visible international landscape. Therefore, the benefits are going to be very obvious once we have the Memorandum of Understanding, and once the work carries on the way we are doing it right now. All to the benefits of our women entrepreneurs! Thank you.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQ B/466 will be replied by the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. PQ B/470 will be replied by the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security. PQs B/462, B/508, B/471, B/480, B/487, B/507, B/500, B/517, B/478, B/523, B/509, B/510, B/516, B/483, B/499, B/520, B/485 have been withdrawn.

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

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

On resuming at 2.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Ms Bérenger!

Ms Bérenger: PQ B/453.

**SIR SEEWOSAGUR RAMGOOLAM BOTANIC GARDEN TRUST BOARD –
EXPENSES & REVENUE - 2015 TO APRIL 2022**

(No. B/453) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanic Garden, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanic Garden Trust Board, information as to the –

- (a) total yearly revenue and a breakdown of expenses incurred by the Board since 2015 to date, indicating the -
 - (i) revenue collected in terms of entry fee, and
 - (ii) estimated projected revenue in terms of entry fee payable by non-Mauritian citizens not holding a residence permit aged 5, and above, and
- (b) measures being envisaged to improve the management and maintenance thereof.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a)(i) and (a)(ii), I am tabling the information requested.

With regard to the last part of the question concerning measures being envisaged to improve the management and maintenance, I am informed that the following proposals have been made to the Board of the SSR Botanic Garden Trust to improve management and maintenance of the garden as follows –

1. renovation and regular maintenance of kiosks;
2. installation of additional signage inside and outside the garden;
3. construction of additional ticketing booth;
4. renovation of the old sugar mill model;
5. the cleaning of the ponds and the paths;
6. the upgrading of the parking;
7. upgrading of benches and the plant labels;
8. regular trimming of trees with the assistance of the National Parks and Conservation Service as well as the Forestry Service of my Ministry;
9. treatment at regular intervals by the Entomology Divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture;
10. setting up of a commercial nursery;
11. the upgrading of the hawkers' corner;
12. the upgrading and renovation of toilets;
13. regular painting of all buildings including the Chateau;
14. upgrading of the animal corner;
15. improving the landscaping of the garden;
16. provision of Wi-Fi;

17. introduction of electric vehicles for vulnerable visitors - this is an on-going project, and finally
18. the reparation of the greenhouse.

Ms J. Bérenger: Can the hon. Minister indicate the reasons why time and again, Mr S. S is maintained as CEO despite serious allegations levelled against him including allegations of corruption and sexual harassment and despite the fact that the garden itself is undisputedly being badly maintained?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would unfortunately need a specific question on the case against Mr S. S although I may add that there are certain allegations that have been made, I am aware, and I am also aware that inquiries are ongoing.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the Minister whether as Minister responsible for this – I would say garden which is still of international nature level – can the Minister inform the House whether he has effected regular visits to this garden? Whether he is satisfied by the proposals made by the Board to the effect that there are so many changes which are being done or will be done? Can the Minister inform the House whether he has effected, in the recent past, visits following complaints received?

Mr Gobin: I have been visiting regularly the garden in the context of the *Samadhi* and I have been also receiving proposals and we are working on making things look better. There is room for improvement, I agree, but it is collectively that we will achieve a better look and aspect of the garden.

Mr Speaker: Now, I am giving you the floor!

Ms J. Bérenger: L'honorable ministre n'est-il pas d'accord que toute la structure et le *business model* même du jardin doivent être revus, quitte à retenir les services de consultants spécialisés dans le domaine s'il le faut et qu'il est temps également de revoir la loi cadre concernée elle-même ?

Mr Gobin: I do not think it is a question of reviewing the law. It is a question of retaining services as suggested by the hon. Member and this is exactly what is being done. We

have the capacity in other services within Mauritius not necessarily from outside. For example, we have very qualified people in the National Parks and Conservation Service that have been brought in to help, the Forestry Service, Entomology Division; we are pulling together resources as correctly proposed by the hon. Member.

Mr Bhagwan: The Minister himself stated that there is room for improvement. Can I ask the Minister now that we have the *Samadhi* of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and recently the passing away of Sir Anerood Jugnauth former Prime Minister, does the Minister not think that it is high time for him, as Minister, not to rely on what the Board is saying, to have recourse to international consultants, *paysagistes* and other professionals at least to have a fresh look of this garden?

Mr Gobin: We have enlisted services as I have said in my earlier answer but let us not mix the part of the garden where we have the *Samadhi* and the botanical side of the garden. Experts for the *Samadhi* part is being looked into by the Committee for the construction of the *Samadhi*, for this we have the participation of the Ministry of Arts and Culture and so many other inputs coming from other services and departments.

For the botanical garden side, we are enlisting services, as I said, of personnel from National Parks and Conservation Service, Forestry Service and other departments of Government.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/494, B/461, B/496, and B/502 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

**MEDICAL ITEMS (EXPIRED) - DISPOSAL - JANUARY 2015 TO 26 APRIL
2022**

(No. B/454) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to expired medical items which had to be disposed of since January 2015 to date, he will give the list thereof, indicating the –

- (a) quantity and cost thereof, and

(b) mode of disposal thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will answer to both parliamentary questions B/454 and B/457 simultaneously as they both relate to the same subject matter, that is, pharmaceutical products.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry stands guided by the Solid Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, for the mode of disposal of expired products as pharmaceutical products are considered as hazardous wastes under the Standards for Hazardous Wastes Regulations 2001.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a total of 89 tonnes of pharmaceutical products expired since 2013 to 2020, were collected by the contractor, enlisted by the Solid Waste Management Division and stored at an Interim Facility for eventual disposal. These comprised 86.6 tonnes collected from the store of the Central Supplies Division at Pailles and the remaining 2.4 tonnes were collected from Sunray Store at Coromandel.

65 tonnes of pharmaceutical wastes were exported by the contractor in June 2020 to a licensed hazardous waste facility in Belgium for disposal. The facility has informed that the wastes were destroyed in August 2020. The remaining pharmaceutical wastes are expected to be exported by the contractor to the waste facility in Belgium by the end of June 2022 for disposal.

The estimated value for the items expired from 2013 to 2020 amounts to Rs40 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main reasons which may lead to the expiry of pharmaceutical products are –

- purchases are based on the previous year's consumption plus an increase of approximately 10% or upon approval of the Consultant in charge of the different specialities, hence the prescribing patterns cannot be exactly calculated;
- there is a change in consumption trend;
- change in prescribing patterns and protocols, and then

- late deliveries or unexpected delays in supply, leading to bridging exercises being carried out which finally result in excess stock of pharmaceutical products remaining unused.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for the other parts of both questions, I am tabling the list of medicines expired from 2013 to 2020.

As regards the list of expired drugs from 2021 to date, the list is still being compiled.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister has acknowledged that a considerable amount of medical items go waste and have to be discarded every year. Hon. Minister, is there a problem of poor planning leading to over-purchasing? And will the hon. Minister inform the House what is the total percentage of medical items that we purchase and which get expired annually – the percentage?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, first, inform the House on how the quantification of drugs to be procured is worked out in the public health sector. The procurement of pharmaceuticals is done centrally at the hospitals and in their catchment areas, that is, the Area Health Centres, the Community Health Centres and the Mediclinics. They send their annual requests and annual estimates of drugs to the Central Supplies Division. And from there, at the hospital level also, the annual requirement is worked out by the Pharmacy Store Manager and is based on consumption of the previous year, as I have already stated, plus an increase of approximately 10%. Now, what do they do with these figures? These figures are crosschecked by the Pharmacist in consultation with the Consultant in charge of different Units concerned, that is, Medical, Surgical, Gynaecology, Anaesthesiology, etc., and final estimated figures are, then, vetted by the Regional Health Director and then submitted to the Central Supplies Division for compilation. This is how this exercise of calculating what is the amount of drugs to be made available for the next year is.

Now, taking into consideration the existing stock - because still you have an existing stock - and any outstanding orders, the figures are compiled and worked out at the Central Supplies Division. Once this exercise is over, then a request for purchase of pharmaceuticals is sent to the Pharmacist of Procurement Unit at the Ministry to initiate procurement process. And,

now, once this quantification exercise is completed and budget for the purchase of pharmaceuticals is earmarked by Finance Section, then you have all the procedures for the procurement.

So, it is not a question of poor planning. Be it in the private sector, it is a question of how do you estimate the requirement that you will need for the next year. This is not an exact science where you can exactly calculate what is the amount of drugs that you have to use for the next year. So, that estimate is based upon these calculations and it is the same throughout the world. In any part of the world, you will have a percentage of waste. Now, we can decrease the quantification but, at the same time, do you know how difficult it would be to have these medicines on time for these patients? And what will happen in doing bridging exercise? You will purchase these drugs ten times higher; and that what has been in the Audit Report. What is happening, at times, the tendency is to cut down, to buy less medications; what will happen there would be a shortage of these medications and you will go and pay it on the local market ten times higher.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister just mentioned it, in his 2020-2021 Report, the Director of Audit refers to an absence of a disposal protocol for expired medical items. Hon. Minister, hasn't the time come to review the way expired pharmaceutical items, whether they are non-hazardous/non-recyclable or hazardous/non-recyclable and to provide relevant and adequate training to all those who are directly involved in the handling and disposing of these expired medical items?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per my information for disposal of drugs, there is a proper guideline; and even for drugs that are considered to be hazardous, it is already in a regulation. So, there is a proper guideline of disposal. It is the question that why drugs are being disposed after being kept for a long period of time. But all this involve different procedures together with the Ministry of Environment. So, until we do not complete all the procedures, there is a contractor who is going to dispose of these drugs, whether it will be exported because these are hazardous drugs, so, we have to follow the procedures involved. That is why it takes time - and that's what was in the Audit Report – because we have to follow these procedures. Now, are

we doing it properly? The question is: whether can we fasten the disposal of drugs? So, that has to be worked out. Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Merci. Chaque année des millions de roupies sont gaspillées quand ces médicaments périmés doivent être détruits, ce qui représente non seulement un gaspillage des fonds publics, mais qui, à la place auraient pu être utilisés à meilleur escient surtout en ces temps de grandes difficultés. Puis-je demander à l'honorable ministre comment il a l'intention de limiter ces gaspillages et améliorer la gestion des médicaments ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that every Member in this House does have a small pharmacy kit in their house, especially if they have children. And how is it possible to calculate or to know exactly the drugs that we store at home, be it elementary drugs? It is a very difficult exercise. And about what the hon. Member is saying about *gaspillage* or wasting of drugs, do we have any method of calculating exactly what would be the quantity of drugs that will be used? It is not possible, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have even referred to look for assistance from the WHO to see whether, there is another logistic where drugs can be calculated based on population, disease pattern that we have in Mauritius. It is not available. Even in advanced countries, in European countries, it is not possible to exactly estimate the quantity of drugs required. And now, to consider whether there is wastage, first, I do not agree with this. And secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe in Mauritius the percentage of drugs that is being wasted every year is less than 3%.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Merci. Le ministre peut-il nous dire quels sont les risques et les dangers sur la santé humaine des mauvaises méthodes, des méthodes inappropriées d'élimination des médicaments ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have much knowledge about the risks but I do know that medicines which are expired are not at all good for use, and that is why we have an expiry date. And we have all the procedures involved for the disposal because they are considered hazardous or toxic and we have to follow these procedures.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr David: B/455!

DOCKS LOUNGE - NOISE POLLUTION - COMPLAINTS

(No. B/455) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to noise pollution caused by night activities of Docks Lounge located near the Caudan Waterfront, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tourism Authority, information as to –

- (a) the number of complaints received from inhabitants living in the vicinity thereof, and
- (b) if the licence of the Docks Lounge has been suspended and, if so, since when and the duration thereof and, if not, why not.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Tourism Authority that one person claiming to live in the vicinity of Docks Lounge located near Caudan Waterfront and purporting to represent a number of other inhabitants of that locality, has addressed several complaints to the Tourism Authority.

With regard to part (b), I am informed by the Tourism Authority that the licence of Misraim Company Limited operating a restaurant under the trade name, the Docks Lounge Restaurant, was suspended from 21 October 2021 to 30 November 2021.

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. Entre le 18 septembre 2021 et le 18 octobre 2021, sur un mois complet, les habitants de la localité des Salines et notamment les responsables de la pagode Kwan Tee ont adressé à ma connaissance parce que je les ai vu passer - pas moins de 10 lettres ou *e-mail* de plaintes de pollution sonore au Premier ministre, au Premier ministre adjoint, au ministre de l'Environnement, au Commissaire de police et à la *Tourism Authority*. Ils expriment notamment leurs souffrances. Puis-je demander au Premier ministre adjoint, combien de descentes de police il y a eu au *Docks Lounge* et combien de contraventions ont été servies à

cet établissement par la Police de l'Environnement et la police du port depuis le début des plaintes ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Firstly, let me repeat what I said. I have asked that the information be verified and according to my information, there is only one person who has addressed complaints to the Tourism Authority in regard to this matter. That person purports to represent other inhabitants but no other inhabitant has written to the Tourism Authority.

Now, as regards *le nombre de descentes, etc., je n'ai pas ces informations sous la main. Évidemment, s'il y avait une question s'y référant, je pourrais obtenir et fournir tous les renseignements à l'Assemblée.*

Mr Osman Mahomed: As a matter of general principle, the licence is granted by the Tourism Authority but noise pollution control is under the Ministry of Environment, if I'm right. How does it work? Because at many other places, I think the case of Ebène, where there is a very high level of noise at night, nearby residential area and people keep complaining and so far, nothing has been done.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Now, I am sure the hon. gentleman who is no unexperienced parliamentarian, might care to put a relevant question concerning Ebène to my colleague, the Minister of Environment. This question concerns Caudan Waterfront and the Ministry of Tourism. All I can say is that I understand from the Tourism Authority that when they do get such complaints, they refer the matter to the *Police de l'Environnement* and when considering to take action, they stand informed, *inter alia*, by information provided by the *Police de l'Environnement*.

Mr David: Le Premier ministre adjoint a répété effectivement qu'il y a une personne qui, je le précise a été désignée par un ensemble d'habitants comme étant le porte-parole et il a écrit noir sur blanc à plusieurs reprises. Au cours de l'un de ses courriers, on voit une vingtaine de noms de famille avec les adresses et numéros de téléphone qui peuvent être contactés à tout moment. Au-delà de la souffrance et de l'épuisement exprimé par les habitants, ces derniers ont la perception - je dis bien la perception - d'une impunité des exploitants du Docks Lounge et si je me réfère à ce seul courrier du 18 octobre 2021, ils ont écrit -

"We wonder, since the restaurant is operating a discotheque illegally until early hours, if ever it gets a certain kind of protection from the authority."

Et je dois dire, M. le président, que la perception de ces habitants a été accentuée depuis que le principal locataire du *Docks Lounge* a annoncé publiquement - nous l'avons tous vu - lors d'une conférence de presse le 10 février 2022, son adhésion au Mouvement Socialiste Militant. Puis-je demander au Premier ministre adjoint la garantie devant notre Assemblée nationale qu'il n'y aura aucune ingérence et aucune protection politique dans le traitement de cette affaire ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Bien évidemment, M. le président. Je vous offre tout de suite une telle garantie.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: B/456!

DRUG ADDICTS - CODEINE PHOSPHATE - ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

(No. B/456) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the treatment of drug addicts, he will state the proposed alternative medicine to be provided to patients who were being treated with codeine phosphate.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking 2018 had, amongst its recommendations, proposed that the codeine phosphate programme be stopped since it is not evidence based in the treatment of People Who Use Drugs.

I am informed that codeine-based treatment is not recommended in international guidelines/researches for community-based opioid detoxification, for example –

- (a) the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidelines, United Kingdom;
- (b) the Department of Health Guidelines, United Kingdom;
- (c) the Maudsley Guidelines, UK;

- (d) the World Health Organisation;
- (e) the LEEDS study, and
- (f) the Metanalysis by Carney *et al*, 2020.

So, all these institutions do not advise the use of codeine phosphate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the above context, my Ministry informed Non-Governmental Organisations concerned that the codeine phosphate programme is being stopped and advised them to redirect their beneficiaries, if any, to Addiction Units and Methadone Day Care Centres.

Currently, Medical Health Officers attend to patients at Non-Governmental Organisations in order to assess them, tailor treatment with respect to their needs and offer counselling to the patients and their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the alternative medicines available for opioid detoxification in place of codeine phosphate are methadone, buprenorphine (suboxone) and naltrexone which are evidence-based and recommended by international organisations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) involves the substitution of injecting opioid drugs with oral medication that effectively minimises craving and withdrawal symptoms, thereby enabling People Who Inject Drugs to stop injecting drugs. In Mauritius, it is the Methadone Substitution Therapy (MST).

Heroin detoxification is carried out using reduced doses of Suboxone over a 2-week period to help people with heroin dependence achieve a drug free lifestyle.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over and above the treatments provided, psychosocial care is provided to complement the pharmacological management offered by specialist doctors and their multi-disciplinary team, guided by evidence-based treatment and international best practices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry is fully committed to ensure that adequate treatment is offered to patients to suit their individual needs and to rehabilitate them. Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. My question pertains to young people newly addicted to heroin. The NGOs had a treatment programme for them to which they were quite receptive. Now that the use of codeine sulphate has been ceased, has the Ministry noticed an increase in the permanent addiction to heroin among the young people community? Being given their reluctance to use the substitution drugs that the Minister has mentioned mainly on concerns of side effects – fertility ones, being a related one?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I have to point out that those who wish to stop drugs and whenever they do embark on programme of detoxification with codeine phosphate, this is not recommended. In fact, most of those who do use codeine phosphate, in the long run, they do not rehabilitate. They finally keep on the same track of using drugs.

So, let me inform the House that the phasing out of codeine phosphate to other substitution methods and treatments especially methadone, have been worked out by the Government Medical Officers in close collaboration with drug victims undergoing such treatment. You have to, obviously, offer other treatment for them.

It is a fact that – hon. Member, you are correct to say – there are certain resistance to change that has been noted on behalf of certain, should I say, isolated patients on treatment and in some cases from organisations mandated to accompany patients in their treatment process. So, it is exactly in such circumstances that NGOs which are financed by NSIF have an essential role to play because they have to accommodate these patients so that these patients are offered other treatments as well as psychosocial treatment.

Mr Osman Mahomed: In his original reply, the hon. Minister has mentioned that patients are being redirected to Addiction Units. My understanding is that there is a problem of waiting time over there; it goes into months. Can the hon. Minister confirm that this is so and what is being done to alleviate this problem?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, there is a waiting time and the Ministry is doing everything to try to decrease that waiting time. Now, because of all the confinements, we were not able to admit patients during that time. There is a backlog and I am sure that in the coming months we will be over with this backlog and those who are interested to embark on such

detoxification programme, it will not take much time. At the same time, the Ministry is also planning to open another centre for female detox and that will be in the near future; in the coming months.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I welcome the construction and the setting up of this female unit. But even among the male community, can the Ministry consider having more such addiction units being given the high number of people on drugs these days?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, we are even working on our existing facilities on how we can increase the capacity of intakes of those who are willing to go in a programme of detoxification.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister, who is very versatile in this particular aspect, will know that methadone is for substitute therapy and Suboxone is for detox. Will his Ministry liaise with the Harm Reduction Unit to consider what is now being done in certain parts of Europe, of a maintenance dose using both Suboxone and methadone in attempt to decrease the number of drug addicts that have to attend treatment centres?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a project that is being worked out. At the same time, we have to see that there is no diversion. So, this is the main issue of diversion and methadone is a product that you cannot give it on a home-based therapy. It has to be used within 24 hours. We are working on that different facility to offer treatment but at the same time we have to be very careful with the diversion that may happen with offering the other drug that the hon. Member mentioned.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: In relation to the waiting time, for people not to become worse in terms of addiction, does it make sense for the Ministry to contemplate the use of Suboxone as an outpatient treatment for those who are on heroin?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, initiating someone on Suboxone will require active medical surveillance because the quantity, that is, the dose that you have to introduce and taper that dose, it will require attention first. Or else, it will not work because it will depend on what is

the requirement of someone; some individuals may require higher dose, others may require a lower dose. So, because of that close monitoring and if ever you take the drug beyond that required dose and at the same time you inject drug, it will end up into a very serious issue.

DRUGS - DISPOSAL

(No. B/457) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to disposed drugs, he will

–

- (a) state the amount thereof since 2020 to date, indicating the reasons and frequency thereof, and
- (b) give the list thereof, indicating
 - (i) where same were stored, and
 - (ii) the value thereof.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/454)

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Gungapersad: PQ B/458.

MORCELLEMENT MON PLAISIR, FOND DU SAC – FLOOD – DRAIN PROJECT

(No. B/458) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the flooding that occurred at Morcellement Mon Plaisir, in Fond Du Sac, on 02 April 2022 at about 20.10 hours, he will state if –

- (a) one of the causes thereof was that the flood mitigation drainage project at Fond Du Sac was left incomplete over an extent of approximately 260 meters, and
- (b) an evaluation has been carried out to gauge the material losses incurred by the victims thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Member, if he is not aware, that in 2012/2013 when his party was in Government, the construction of the drain – hear what I say, I need to say what I need to say – at Fond du Sac was in the list of priorities. A meeting was even held by the then two Senior Ministers with the inhabitants of Fond du Sac and other stakeholders in the Sir Harilal Vaghjee Hall to inform them of the design of the drain to be constructed and the number of private lands to be acquired. But as usual, Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing happened, they only sell dreams.

It is now this Government which does not only announce the implementation of projects – they can say *assez* louder – but is committed and is undertaking such projects, including the construction of the drain project in Fond du Sac. We are doing what the hon. Member's Government could not do.

In fact, the National Development Unit of my Ministry, on 30 April 2019, following a procurement exercise, awarded a contract for an amount of Rs104 m. to Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. for the construction of a drain at Fond du Sac. Works have started on 23 May 2019 and the scope thereof include –

- (a) construction of 2 metres high floodwall over a length of 700 metres;
- (b) construction and upgrading of a swale of a depth of 3 metres and wide by 18 metres over a stretch of 1.3 kilometres;
- (c) construction of masonry lined drain over 400 metres;
- (d) construction of a flood retardation basin of a capacity of 83,000 square metres upstream of the cut off drain with flow regulation structure at outlet, and
- (e) construction of culverts over cut off drain across sugarcane fields/private lands, Forbach Road and Fond du Sac main road – B11 Road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at date, 93% of the works have been completed. There has been delay in the completion of the project mainly due to –

- (i) the lockdown owing to COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021;
- (ii) bad weather;

- (iii) relocation of services, and
- (iv) more importantly, acquisition of privately owned lands.

I should, here, Mr Speaker, Sir, thank my two colleagues, the hon. Dr. Ramdhany and Minister Teeluck to be personally involved in the helping and the PPS to taking the lead on such a project and making it happen.

(Interruptions)

With regard to part (a) of the question, indeed, a stretch of some 250 metres - and I am happy my good friend Aadil Ameer Meea is very attentive to what I am saying and repeating after me...

(Interruptions)

He is learning.

Indeed, a stretch of some 250 metres of masonry drain remains to be completed. And, here, the hon. Member should be aware about the reasons for this outstanding work because this is where they go to *belo roti* while my friends were actually doing the job.

In fact, the project itself required the acquisition of some 86 plots of private land and Government faced numerous challenges in the acquisition exercise. As at date, 74 plots have already been acquired and this is where the major part of the drain has already been completed. I am informed that with respect to the remaining 12 plots, the owners are still objecting to the acquisition, and this concerns the 250 metres of drain. I am advised that the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is in the process of acquiring these lands compulsorily.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the heavy rainfall event of 02 April 2022, 160 millimetres of rain were recorded in the north leading to the flooding on the stretch that remains to be completed in the future. Two houses were flooded and two boundary walls of a total of 66 metres collapsed.

On 08 April 2022, the private land owners concerned were informed by the NDU of the temporary excavation works to be undertaken with a view to mitigating further flooding in the surroundings, to which they objected, Mr Speaker, Sir. They agreed to only clearing works being

carried out. Same was completed on 15 April 2022. On 20 April 2022, these land owners objected to any excavation works to be undertaken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sorry to say that this smells the bad faith and politically motivated move to incite people not to let Government carry out works on this remaining stretch. Here, I wish to lay emphasis on the effort Government is making to ensure the safety of our fellow citizens by constructing drains where needed. I am, therefore, making an appeal to the collaboration of our citizens for their support in ensuring our safety. Once the compulsory acquisition is completed, which is a matter of days now – and I again thank hon. Teeluck and hon. Ramdhany for their support – it will take a few weeks for the project at Fond du Sac to be completed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, the NDU is only an implementing organisation. It is not mandated to carry out evaluation of material losses. I would advise the hon. gentleman to address this issue to the authority concerned.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, this was one opportunity for this Minister to rise and to answer the question as a patriot, as an hon. Minister of this republic but I am not impressed at all by his gimmicks and he lives up to expectations and if we have to *belo roti* for this nation, we will do it because we care for our nation! Again and again, we will do it!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Listen! Hon. Member, you are...

Dr. Gungapersad: He has imputed...

Mr Speaker: ...that was his reply! Please!

Dr. Gungapersad: I will send regards.

Mr Speaker: Please! I am on my feet! You listen! You put the question, the Minister replies! That was a reply, now you put your supplementary question which is a question not a debate!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you. Hon. Minister, there is a letter by these families – I am not talking as a politician – these families wrote a letter on 10 April and in this letter addressed to the Prime Minister, I am referring to paragraph seven. Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir: “At present, measures promised by MPs have not shown any progress and taking into consideration consistent and persisting heavy rainfall events across the region, we request all relevant authorities to expedite this urgent matter.”

Hon. Minister, the traumatised residents of *Morcellement* Mon Plaisir and vicinity would like to know in simple terms when the outstanding works will be completed so that they can feel safe and secure in their homes.

Mr Hurreeram: Already replied, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: Next supplementary, you have said that NDU will not be able to compensate or to carry out to gauge the losses, may I request this hon. Minister whether he can consider the request of these families – there are 13 families – whether funds from the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund could be used to compensate them for the losses?

Mr Hurreeram: That does not fall under my mandate, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you very much and they are listening to what you have said.

Mr Hurreeram: I hope they do.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Ameer Meea: B/459.

ABDOOL RAMAN ABDOOL GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – INFRASTRUCTURAL WORKS – COMPLETION DATE

(No. B/459) **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 infrastructural works being carried out at the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School, she will state where matters stand, indicating the expected completion date thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated in my reply to a Parliamentary Question B/366 on the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School, the infrastructural works thereof consisted of two phases.

Phase one of the project has been completed. Phase two of the project consisting of the demolition of the remaining old buildings and construction of classrooms and administration blocks as well as the setting up of play fields is still to be pursued.

I am informed that for this phase, two bidding exercises had been carried out at the level of the Central Procurement Board. No bids were received for the first line. Following the second bidding exercise, the CPB submitted its recommendations to my Ministry in October 2020. The Ministry issued a notification of award to the bidders and initiated action for the award to the selected bidder, namely Super Construction Co. Ltd.

However, the latter submitted a request for an increase in the contract price stating that there is a rise in costs, freight costs and other direct charges. The request could not be acceded to as it was not in line with the provisions of the billing document which does not provide for price adjustments at the time of awarding the contract.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development has been requested to review and prepare fresh bidding documents. I am informed that the bidding documents are being finalised.

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very sad that up to now the works have not been started for the second phase of the project. The first phase was in 2017 and referring to the same PQ that the hon. Minister just referred to, that is PQ B/366, where she stated that works will start in December 2019 and completion date was scheduled for July 2021. May I ask the hon. Minister what was the contract amount when the contract was awarded and what amount is the contractor now requesting?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the contract amount was Rs55,268,888. I understand that he had asked for an increase, but the request could not be acceded to because it was not in line with the provisions of the bidding documents. So, that is why it was not acceded

to. But, now that we have already asked the MNI to prepare the documents for the new bidding exercise, I am told that it is being finalised. I do agree with you that it has taken a long time and I am also very unhappy about this particular issue. But, as I have just stated, there were problems initially and I remember in the initial phase, the Contractor had passed away and we had to wait a long time to get someone to complete the work. So, I totally agree with you that we should have completed this work long time back. But, as I have just explained, there were certain issues that cropped up that have delayed the process.

Mr Ameer Meea: Can I ask the hon. Minister, what is the specific problem with this school, with these contracts? Because normally when there is a public tender, a public bid, you have several companies which bid for the contract. Why is it that in this case, you have only one company which had made a bid?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. There were a number of companies that had made bids. We have five companies. You want me to name them? There were five companies which bid for that and we have noted that we could not move onto the next because the validity period had lapsed.

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you please inform the House after the bid was launched on 25 April 2019 for the project, which was non-responsive, why did it take 14 months for a new bid to be launched?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will just give the dates, Mr Speaker, Sir. The bid was launched in 2019; there were no successful bidders for that. So, finally, it was relaunched in October 2020 and letters of notification were dated 10 November 2020. So, we had to go to the State Law Office, get information and advice on the way forward, and finally we were asked to relaunch the bids and MNI has been working on the bid documents. I cannot explain the long delay in the preparation of the papers, but I have been told that the papers are getting finalised and the bids will soon be launched.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MIDLANDS VILLAGE HALL - EXTENSION

(No. B/460) 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 extension of the Village Hall of Midlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Grand Port, information as to where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the District Council of Grand Port that an amount of Rs400,000 has been earmarked in this Financial Year under the LDP Project for the construction and upgrading of amenities for the proposed extension of the Midlands Village Hall.

The project consists of the construction of a kitchenette and a bidding exercise was launched on 14 December 2021. However, no bid was received. The District Council of Grand Port invited bids anew on 9 February 2022 and no responsive bid was received.

I am informed that a fresh tender exercise will be invited by 27 April 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, I have received a request from the hon. Member with regard to the proposed extension of the Midlands Village Hall by 100 square metres and same could be considered in the next financial year, depending on the availability of funds.

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Vice-Prime Minister for the reply. Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House whether the proposed structure, as being said in his reply, on the engineering side, will be able to cater for future developments, such as a foot-five on the concrete slab which will be a first in a Multipurpose Hall in Mauritius?

Dr. Husnoo: I think we will have to take that into consideration. It is a good idea, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we will have to take that into consideration in our specifications, if you want to put on the floor.

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am given to understand that the Grand Port District Council has been given Rs400,000 for that project in the last financial year and in those two tender exercises, the tendered amount has been over Rs1 m. Now, can we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether, for the next budget exercise, sufficient funds will be given to the

Grand Port District Council under the Local Development Fund in order to carry on with the construction of that Village Hall?

Dr. Husnoo: There are two projects there. The first one was the building of the kitchenette for Rs400,000 and, as I mentioned earlier, there was no responsive bid for this project. And, if we do not get any bid, I think we are going to try to do it in-house, that is, what we are planning for the kitchenette.

As for the extension, which the hon. Member just asked, for 100 metres square, we will have to include it in the budget for next year.

Mr Dhunoo: Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House whether the proposed construction of the kitchenette will be started before the end of this Financial Year because the launching of the next bidding will be done shortly?

Dr. Husnoo: We will try. As I mentioned now, we are trying to do it in-house and will try to get to start it before the end of this Financial Year.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SURINAM - FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND

(No. B/461) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Football Playground Project at Surinam, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LA CIGOGNE & LA MARGUERITE SHELTERS - NON-SUBMISSION OF ACCOUNTS

(No. B/462) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to La Cigogne and La Marguerite Shelters managed by the Children's Foundation, she will state the actions taken, if any, by her Ministry for non-submission of the respective accounts thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MOGAS & GAS OIL - PRICE INCREASE

(No. B/463) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to petroleum products, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the reasons for the recent increase in the price of Mogas and Gasoil on the local market.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This attack caused a major disruption in the world supply of petroleum products as Russia is the third largest oil producer behind the United States and Saudi Arabia. Crude oil surged above USD100 per barrel the day Russia invaded Ukraine and the prices continued to climb as the conflict intensified. The reason for the increase in prices is the international supply driven shock which causes the barrel of crude oil to remain abnormally high. At the moment, there is little visibility on when the war will end.

In this respect, I am informed that the new reference price for Mogas is USD1,065.54 per metric ton while the exchange rate stood at Rs43.50 against the dollar. Economically speaking, the retail price of Mogas should have been increased to Rs73.93 per litre, that is, by Rs12.63 per litre which would have meant an increase of 20.60%.

On the other hand, the new reference price of Gasoil is USD138.12 per barrel and the new price should have been Rs66.90 per litre, that is, an increase of Rs21.80 per litre representing 48.34%.

However, as provided under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011, only a maximum increase of 10% is allowed. Therefore, the retail price of Mogas has been increased by Rs6.10 and Gasoil by Rs4.50, which represent an increase of 9.95% and 9.98%, respectively.

Mr Wochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the Minister aware...

Mr Speaker: No, I gave him the floor. I gave you the floor! You carry on!

Mr Ramful: Okay.

Mr Speaker: You carry on!

Mr Ramful: Okay.

Mr Speaker: Do not distribute the floor!

Mr Ramful: Do not share! Since February, the price of one barrel of Brent oil has fallen from 130USD to 100USD until yesterday, which amounts to a decrease of 30USD per barrel. In a spirit of alleviating the burden of consumers, will the hon. Minister call upon the STC to review the price of Mogas and gas oil immediately instead of waiting for the price review mechanism to take a decision in July?

Mr Calichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know where he got that figure from. I will tell you the evolution of the price of Brent on the international market from 01 December 2021 to 21 April 2022 and I am saying on an average monthly –

- December 2021, the price of Brent was 74.96;
- January 2022, 87.219;
- February 2022, 98.185;
- March 2022, 118.810,
- April 2022, 104.728.

So, it is on the upward trend.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the Minister aware that the import cost of petroleum products has been continuously increasing during the last few years and today the total amount of excise duty and VAT only on Mogas is Rs20.99? On gas oil, it is Rs11.16. And whether the Minister in collaboration with his colleague, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will introduce any concrete policy or take any decision in the days to come as a matter of urgency to reduce the rising price of Mogas and gas oil?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a matter for policy decision. As explained in the PNQ in the morning, the Prime Minister explained the different contributions and their purpose. So, I do not intend to go through these contributions and levies again. I am sure the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is taking good note and we will look into the matter if needed.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Quirin: B/464!

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - *KREOL MORISIEN* - EDUCATORS

(No. B/464) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the *Kreol Morisien*, she will state the number of teachers available for the teaching thereof in primary schools, indicating –

- (a) the number of in-service General Purpose Educators seconded for duty therefor since 2012 to date, indicating the conditions of employment thereof;
- (b) the number of Educators therefor recruited since 2013 to date, indicating the conditions of employment thereof, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the granting of the status of *Kreol Morisien* Educator to the General Purpose Educators seconded for duty therefor since 2012 to date and, if not, why not.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, following the decision to introduce *Kreol Morisien* (KM) in Grade 1 as an optional subject in primary school curriculum, an Expression of Interest was launched amongst substantive Primary School Educators (General Purpose) and Deputy Headmasters in post to teach *Kreol Morisien*. It was never a question of them being seconded for duty as these Primary School Educators and Deputy Headmasters were already on the establishment of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there were some 40 in-service Primary School Educators who opted for the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* in 2012. The number of Primary School Educators teaching *Kreol Morisien* rose to 80 in 2015, and there are now 57 of them still teaching KM. These Primary School Educators retained all their terms and conditions of service, including seniority placing and promotional prospects. They followed a training course in KM at the Mauritius Institute of Education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, additional teaching resources were required with the growing number of pupils opting for *Kreol Morisien* and to that effect, 115 Primary School Educators to specifically teach *Kreol Morisien* were appointed in 2015 after successful completion of two years' training course at the MIE. As at date, there are 166 Primary School Educators in post and the services of a new batch of 22 Trainee Primary School Educators have been enlisted on 13 April 2022. Arrangements are being made for these Trainee Primary School Educators to follow a training course at the MIE.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in so far as part (c) of the question is concerned, all Primary School Educators have the same conditions of service and status as they all fall under the grade of Primary School Educator. They are all governed by the same scheme of service.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, plusieurs de ces *General Purpose Educators* m'ont exprimé leurs craintes à l'effet qu'après plus que 10 ans au service du *Kreol Morisien*, qu'ils soient appelé à reprendre leurs anciennes fonctions. La ministre, peut-elle rassurer ces *General Purpose Educators* qui enseignent actuellement le *Kreol Morisien* par rapport à leur appréhension ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, they will all remain as Educators for *Kreol Morisien* as long as they wish to do so. There is no intention on part of the Ministry to revert them back to their original position. In any way, they will continue to benefit from the same conditions of service, same status and all their promotional prospects will be maintained.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, la ministre peut-elle nous indiquer le nombre d'écoles primaires où l'enseignement du *Kreol Morisien* n'est pas dispensé et peut-on connaître la raison et pourrait-elle déposer une liste de ces écoles ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have 181 schools offering KM; 135 Government Primary Schools and 46 R.C.A. Schools.

Mr Speaker: Next question! You still have one?

Mr Quirin: *One.* Dans l'éventualité qu'il y ait un exercice de promotion au niveau justement de l'enseignement du *Kreol Morisien*, l'honorable ministre peut-elle nous dire si, encore une fois, les *General Purpose Educators* auront la possibilité de postuler eux aussi ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Certainement, M. le président, puisque c'est basé sur la séniorité et ces enseignants auront la possibilité d'être promus dépendants de leur temps de service, etc.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Nagalingum: B/465!

PROCUREMENT – MINISTERS & PUBLIC OFFICERS - ROLES, POWERS & RESPONSIBILITIES

(No. B/465) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to procurement, he will state if consideration will be given for the issue of guidelines on the clear demarcation of the roles, powers and responsibilities of Ministers and Public Officers.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la *Public Procurement Act* ne prévoit pas de fonctions, de pouvoirs ou de responsabilités spécifiques pour les ministres en matière de marchés publics d'un organisme public. Ainsi, la question de la démarcation des fonctions, pouvoirs et responsabilités des ministres et des fonctionnaires ne se pose pas.

En fait, selon la *Public Procurement Act*, c'est le Directeur général, en tant que responsable administratif d'un organisme public, qui est responsable des questions de marchés publics.

En outre, la section 50(1) de la loi garantit également que les fonctions de passation de marchés sont exercées par des personnes formées et compétentes en matière de passation de

marchés, par exemple, les agents du cadre de passation de marchés et d'approvisionnement. Ils exercent leurs fonctions conformément aux directives établies par le *Procurement Policy Office*. Merci.

Mr Nagalingum: Can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in the process of procurement, ministers are entitled to have access to files and give their recommendation and directives prior of award of contracts? That is my first supplementary.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de le dire. Rien dans la loi ne prévoit que les ministres peuvent dicter ou entrer dans un processus de *procurement*. Donc, il n'y a rien dans la loi.

Mr Nagalingum: We have witnessed from the PAC Report very recently that officers have received clear instructions from ministers as regard to procurement and award of contract. Can the Minister tell us if that is true?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, je regarde la loi, je regarde ce qui est écrit dans la loi. Donc, s'il y a un officier qui vient dire qu'il a reçu des instructions, il n'a qu'à respecter la loi. La loi garantit sa fonction ; il n'a qu'à respecter les provisions de la loi. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: You still have a question?

Mr Nagalingum: Is the hon. Minister saying that they have not respected the law because the PAC report clearly stated that officers have received instructions from the Ministers?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est très simple, je viens de répéter ce qui est dans la loi ; ils sont garantis par ces provisions de la loi. Si jamais il y a eu interférence, ils n'ont qu'à écrire au Premier ministre, à leurs supérieurs, écrire à l'ICAC pour dire qu'ils ont reçu des pressions. C'est aussi simple que ça. C'est écrit dans la loi et je pense que jusqu'à présent on est un pays qui est gouverné par la loi. Donc, les officiers, les fonctionnaires, si jamais ils ont reçu ce genre de pression, ils n'ont qu'à le faire. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed, we move to the next question.

Mr Wochit: B/466.

PUBLIC BODIES & GOVERNMENT-OWNED ENTITIES - ELECTRIC VEHICLES

(No. B/466) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the public bodies and Government-owned entities, he will state if Government will consider making it mandatory for them to make acquisition only of electric run vehicles and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy) :
M. le président, dans le discours du Budget 2021/2022, j'ai annoncé qu'un nouveau pôle économique, à savoir l'industrie de l'énergie verte, serait développé pour promouvoir une croissance forte et incluse à Maurice. En outre, l'objectif de ce gouvernement en termes de production d'électricité à partir de sources renouvelables a été fixé à 60% du mix énergétique total d'ici 2030.

Le gouvernement a récemment adopté le rapport commandé par le ministère de l'Énergie et des services publics sur la feuille de route décennale pour l'intégration des véhicules électriques. Ce rapport a également identifié un certain nombre d'obstacles à l'adoption des voitures électriques, notamment –

- (i) le prix d'achat d'une voiture électrique plus élevé que celui d'une voiture conventionnelle ;
- (ii) l'offre limitée de véhicules électriques sur le marché local ;
- (iii) la distance de conduite limitée en raison des batteries électriques actuelles, et
- (iv) la disponibilité des stations de recharge dans le pays.

Compte tenu des contraintes identifiées, le ministère des Transports terrestres examine actuellement les différentes options envisageables. Mon ministère prendra dûment en considération toute recommandation faite à ce sujet. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Woochit: Is the hon. Minister aware that it is the right time to introduce maximum electric vehicle as petrol and diesel costs are very high in Mauritius and it is also a fact that there are nearly 2% electric vehicles that are presently used in the Ministries, and if so, what action is being taken by the Government to increase the number of electric vehicles in the country?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je l'ai souligné dans ma réponse, le ministère des Transports publics est en train de travailler sur le sujet et il va nous faire des recommandations au ministère des Finances et suite à ces recommandations, on suivra la politique qui sera la plus appropriée.

Mr Woochit: In a move to reduce the carbon footprint and to reduce the dependence on coal-based in line with the COP26 commitment, whether he has notified or has issued any revised guideline to the Ministry of Finance or any budgetary initiative for promoting the electric vehicles for the next financial year?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai appris qu'au niveau du ministère des Transports publics, il y a un comité qui travaille sur ce sujet, et qu'en temps et lieu, il va nous faire des recommandations pour le prochain budget.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Woochit: Is the Government aware that electric vehicle owners have expressed their concern over significant number of charging stations, especially along the national high-ways, and if so, what steps are being taken by the Government to increase the number of charging stations?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, nous sommes au courant de ces contraintes parmi d'autres contraintes concernant le prix de ces voitures électriques, concernant l'offre limitée des voitures électriques, etc. Mais nous sommes en train de travailler sur ce concept, sur cette politique, et comme je l'ai dit, le ministère des Transports

publics va venir avec des propositions concrètes pour, je pense, le prochain budget, et nous ferons le nécessaire si c'est approprié. Merci!

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Abbas Mamode: B/467.

FISHERS - RETIREMENT SCHEME - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/467) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed allocation of 500 fishermen cards and the implementation of a retirement scheme for fishers, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the announcement in the Budget Speech 2021/2022 for the provision of 500 additional fisher cards, my Ministry has proceeded with the betterment of the policy regarding the conditions for the registration of artisanal fishers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the enhanced policy approved by Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from 2010 to 2014, it is good to note when others were in power, the fisher community was the least of their concern and it is good to note that not a single fisher card was issued although there were so many pending applications. In the year 2015, under the Primeministership of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, this Ministry came up with a database of applicants, including those who had applied since 2009. For the period 2015 to 2019, 131 applicants followed the General Fisher Course and were issued fisher cards accordingly.

As at 31 December 2021, there were still 725 applicant artisanal fishers in the database. After a monitoring exercise, out of 725 applicants, 520 have been found to be neither in gainful employment nor holder of any trade licence. They have been shortlisted and sent to the Ministry of Health and Wellness to undergo a medical examination in their respective regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that with a view to encouraging women fishers to join fishing activities, women applicants were given priority of consideration irrespective of their date of application.

As at date, out of the 520 applicants referred for medical examination, my Ministry has received a list of 271 applicant artisanal fishers who are medically fit to work at sea, as certified by a Government Medical Officer. Upon receipt of a valid Character Certificate and upon confirmation of their being fully vaccinated, my Ministry made necessary arrangements for the candidates to undergo - as in the new enhanced policy - a swimming assessment conducted by the Coastguard Training School. Thereafter, 210 candidates who have already successfully completed the swimming assessment were recommended to follow the General Fisher Course and the remaining 61 candidates will undergo the test shortly. The clearance with respect to medical fitness, Character Certificate and vaccination is still awaited to do the swimming assessment for the remaining 249 applicants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the training course is being dispensed jointly by the Fisheries Training and Extension Centre (FITEC) and the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy. The General Fisher Course which has a normal duration of five weeks has been customised to 8 days, given that the applicant fishers who are active in off lagoon fishing are conversant with the safety and security aspect of fishing activities. Moreover, applicant fishers reckoning around two years' experience in fishing activities have been exempted the practical session at sea. However, young applicants without any fishing experience would have to complete the practical sessions at sea. I also wish to inform the House that as at date, 106 applicant artisanal fishers have been registered as artisanal fisher and a relevant fisher card has been issued to each of them on 23 March 2022. 104 applicant artisanal fishers have fulfilled the criteria for the training on the General Fisher Course. The first batch has started the training on 19 April and the second batch will start on 09 May 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the second part of the question, I understand that the hon. Member is referring to the compensation paid to the registered artisanal fishers aged 65 years and above and those medically unfit irrespective of their age upon return of their fisher cards.

Again, in the Budget 2021-2022, this Government came up with a retirement plan for the payment of a compensation of Rs52,500 to registered fishers.

Furthermore, the retired fishers are allowed to transfer their fisher cards and fishing boats to their heirs, obviously to those who meet the registration criteria. As at 15 April 2022, there were 303 registered artisanal fishers aged 65 above, 265 which represents 87% have submitted their option form for the compensation of Rs52,500 against the return of their fisher cards. It is good to note that out of the 265, 50 registered artisanal fishers have applied for transfer of their cards to their heirs and 215 have submitted their forms without any request for transfer.

As at date, compensation of a total amount of – the Prime Minister during the PNQ of this morning missed this one – Rs13,650,000 has already been paid to 260 beneficiaries of the above budget measure. Payment is effected as and when option forms are submitted and for the remaining, there are five deceased cases, payment to their heirs is under process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in addition to the allocation of the 500 fisher cards as per the budgetary measure, new applications will be entertained to replace the retired ones as the retirement scheme is ongoing. As at date, 265 additional new applications can be entertained to replace the retired fishers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also inform the House that the rate of bad weather allowance has increased from Rs258 in the year 2014, as I did say it last time, to Rs475 this year. Despite the economic downturn, this Government has given due recognition to the *métier des pêcheurs*. All the above measures, including others to come, clearly show that this Government recognises the contribution of the fisher community to the national economy.

Thank you.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the Minister inform the House what assistance has been provided to registered fishers for their safety and security at sea?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 23 March 2022, 106 applicant fishers who had successfully completed the general fisher cards obtained their fisher registration cards.

Furthermore, my Ministry provided them with the following items –

- (i) icebox;
- (ii) life jackets;
- (iii) raincoats.

I wish to inform the House that all the registered fishers have previously been provided with the above items.

Furthermore, my Ministry has already initiated procurement procedures for the following equipment –

- (a) handheld marine VHF transceiver;
- (b) walkie-talkie to facilitate communication with the Fisheries Protection Service and the National Coast Guard;
- (c) waterproof multifunctional electronic strobe light for distress signals in case of emergency, and also
- (d) basic boat essential ballast safety kit among others.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House the rationale behind the condition of payment of bad weather allowance against attendance?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the bad weather allowance is paid at the rate of Rs475 from public funds for days that fishers are unable to go fishing, from the new condition, they are assigned a task work to clean the fish landing station, jetty and shoreline in their respective locality.

I am informed that previously large net fishermen were called upon to clean their respective fish landing station shoreline. However, because of an issue of insurance there was one fisherman who got injured and this practice was stopped. Now, a fisherman who happens to get injured now during the clean-up exercise is covered by an insurance and as per budgetary measure, this Ministry has contacted a group personal accident cover up and we have reinstated this scheme.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Duval!

Mr R. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state from those fishermen already allocated, how many concerned the south east region and can he table the list?

Mr Maudhoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think the hon. Member will be happy to note that since 2019, there were 20 fisher cards which were issued. 11 out of 20 came from the south east, in 2020, 8 out of 20 and in 2022, I think 61 out of 106.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

Mr Nagalingum: Regarding the quantum of the retirement scheme that was proposed in the last Budget, can the hon. Minister tell the House whether, the quantum will be increased in the next budget as Rs52,000 is inappropriate?

Mr Maudhoo: We cannot answer that for the time being, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Léopold: B/468.

RODRIGUES ISLAND – OFFICIAL VISITS – PURPOSE & OUTCOME

(No. B/468) **Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to his recent official visit to Rodrigues Island, he will state the purpose and outcome thereof.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I had two official visits to Rodrigues island; first, from 13 to 14 April and the second one from 20 to 21 April of this year.

For the visit of 13 to 14 April, I had meetings with the new Chief Commissioner, Deputy Chief Commissioner and Commissioners of Rodrigues Regional Assembly. I also had this formal focused meeting with the new Commissioner for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food production, Forestry, Plant and Animal Quarantine together with the Departmental Head of the said Commission and other senior staff.

I also had face to face meetings with onion growers in the region of Port Sud Est, Mourouk, Anse Baleine and other regions in Port Sud Est area. Focused meetings were also held with bean growers in Baie Topaze and focused meeting with livestock breeders at Malabar.

Immediate decisions were taken during the said visit for the opening of an antenna office of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) which will be shared with Small farmers Welfare Fund and the identified place is in Citronelle. I wish to highlight that the opening of an antenna office of FAREI in Rodrigues Island is provided in the Budget of this year but there has been some delay in the execution of this project.

For the official visit on 20 and 21 April, this was specifically for livestock breeders with a view to effective measures for the movement of animals from Rodrigues to Mauritius, as the House will appreciate, movement of animals was restricted due to the outbreak of the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). Fortunately, movement has resumed. However under strict conditions, movement of animals is undertaken solely by the Mauritius Meat Authority (MMA) and a consignment arrived in Mauritius on Saturday morning.

Mr Léopold: Thank you. Has the hon. Minister taken cognizance on the prevalence of FMD in Rodrigues and what is the result?

Mr Gobin: When I visited Rodrigues Island on 20 to 21 April I was accompanied by two veterinary officers from the Livestock and Veterinary Division of my Ministry. The two officers stayed for a longer period. I returned on the 21st. The purpose of the visit of the two vets was precisely to have samples taken randomly all over Rodrigues Island for the purpose of sero-surveillance.

I am informed that samples were taken from livestock, from sheep, from beef, even from chicken and all those samples have been brought to Mauritius for tests. The results, once obtained, will give us a clear picture of the situation as regards FMD and not only FMD but other diseases. The results are still awaited.

Mr Léopold: It seems that all the livestock in Rodrigues is being fully vaccinated, and I want to ask the hon. Minister why individual buyers from Mauritius are still not allowed to buy live animals from Rodrigues?

Mr Gobin: I wish to place on record our appreciation for *l'Agence Française de Développement*, Indian Ocean Commission for the vaccination programme which had to be undertaken during lockdown last year. To answer the question of the hon. Member, specifically as to when the normal movement of animals from Rodrigues and Mauritius will resume, we need to do that sero- surveillance exercise. After the sero-surveillance exercise, then decisions will be taken in the light of the results obtained.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – CASES & DEATHS

(No. B/469) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state if a reduction in the number of cases thereof and COVID-19 related deaths has been noted and, if so, give a breakdown thereof over the past three months.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there is a reduction in the total number of reported positive cases over the past months.

A decrease in the number of deaths linked with COVID-19 has also been noted. They are as follows -

January	55
February	68
March	65
April till 21 st	10

Mr R. Duval: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As we are all aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, in buses, Metro and all public transports, people are like *sardinns dan bwat* during rush hours I must admit. The protocol is no more observed in malls and shopping centres. My question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: can the hon. Minister enlighten the House as to why he is still talking about restriction as no one respects it?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the buses in Mauritius have a sitting and standing capacity and passengers as well as bus conductors have to respect that capacity.

Now, with regard to the second part of the question, about the restrictions, the measures, obviously, we have to think about what is happening, especially in other countries, in Europe about the rise in the number of cases; about what is happening when all the sanitary measures have been withdrawn. And we also have to see that in Mauritius, we are in the winter phase now and during this period you may have a number of cases. Characteristically, in Mauritius, especially about the number of people having more than 60 years, the number of comorbidities, we have to maintain the sanitary measures and the restrictions in place for some time more. We also have to see that our vaccination campaigns started very long before, and the percentage of the population having the booster dose, we have not attained that 'being fully vaccinated'. So, considering all these different aspects, the sanitary measures have to be maintained.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Duval!

Mr R. Duval: As stated by the hon. Minister, if we compare figures issued daily by GIS Mauritius, we note that the decrease of positive cases is around 0.5%. Can the Minister tell us if he really considers that this is a significant decrease, if we take into consideration that more than 900,000 people have done their second dose and more than 600,000 have done their booster dose?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to really maintain the sanitary restrictions. We have experienced what has happened last year during the months of October and November, and I believe we do not want to experience such situations again in Mauritius. So, we have to take the precautions and maintain the measures in place.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, given the fact that all the precautions have been taken and the COVID-19 pandemic is sufficiently contained in the Republic of Mauritius, would his Ministry envisage that we change the status of this outbreak to endemic in Mauritius?

Dr. Jagutpal: Obviously, given the number of cases in the Mauritian population and to change the status of a pandemic, an epidemic disease and to consider it as endemic, the experts have to give us their advice. And I believe that even if we change this status, does that mean that we have to change the status of vaccination or we have to change the status of all the sanitary measures put in place? So, changing only the name from epidemic to endemic, but maintaining all vaccinations or testing or treatments, we have to consider all that. But what is more important is the vaccination and the precautions.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Bhagwan: Thank you. The hon. Minister has insisted, *a fait le point sur la nécessité de garder* the sanitary protocols and measures. How does the Minister reconcile his statement, which he is doing regularly for the protection of the population, and the meeting which was held at the Plaine Magnien CAB? Live, we have seen on TV, where his colleagues Ministers have not respected at all the directives issued by the High Powered Committee and Government. Has the Minister discussed the matter with the Prime Minister and what action has been initiated following that meeting which was held where it was against all the sanitary norms?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the context of the meeting held in a CAB Office was very urgent because it pertained to some serious issues, especially for the rain, *inondations* and all. And, there are exceptions being given where you have to hold a meeting or anything that is of urgent matters.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You have finished hon. Minister? Next question!

(Interruptions)

WETLAND BILL – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/470) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the

proposed introduction of a Wetland Bill in the National Assembly, he will state where matters stand.

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that under the UNDP/Global Environment Facility funded project on the ‘Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Management of the Coastal Zone of the Republic of Mauritius’, Mr Peter Wulf, an Environmental Legal Consultant, was recruited by the UNDP to review the first draft Wetland Bill which had been worked out by the National Ramsar Committee.

The contract started in November 2018 and ended on February 2020. The Consultant had carried out a first mission in Mauritius in April 2019 and had several working sessions with Government departments and stakeholders to undertake a Gap Analysis and review of the legal and institutional framework.

Following the consultations, a revised and consolidated version of the draft Wetland Bill was submitted by the Consultant on 08 January 2020. The National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) submitted its views and comments on the new version of the Bill to the UNDP on 28 January 2020.

A Relaunch Workshop on ‘Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Management of Coastal Zone’ in the Republic of Mauritius was organised by the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping in collaboration with the UNDP on 08 March of this year. During the workshop it was reported that the UNDP/GEF project has been extended up to December 2022 and that another Consultant will be recruited to finalise the Wetland Bill and work out the resource mobilisation requirement for the implementation of the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, draft Regulations are also being worked out concurrently with the Wetland Bill. The final updated and revised version of the Bill is expected to be completed by December of this year.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Est-ce que peut-être l’honorable ministre pourrait déjà nous indiquer comment le projet de loi compte protéger les *wetlands* qui se situent sur les terrains privés comme ceux de Roches Noires, par exemple, qui sont actuellement menacés par un projet

de *Smart City* bien que nous connaissions tous maintenant l'importance de ces zones perméables qui abritent des écosystèmes et qui sont indispensables au bon fonctionnement de la région. Comment est-ce que le projet de loi va protéger les *wetlands* qui sont sur les terrains privés ?

Mr Gobin: We are all fully aware of the importance of our wetlands, Mr Speaker, Sir. The House will appreciate that as a country, we need to protect our wetlands. This is why we are having these extensive consultations with stakeholders on the one hand, but also experts on the other. All these will be incorporated in the Bill which is being finalised.

Ms J. Bérenger: The recent torrential rains episode of 01 April of this year in Bel Ombre is an example of how because a proposed development around wetlands has not been assessed correctly. The coastal road, already flooded, will soon be exposed to considerable flooding and become unfit and unsafe for the public use because the old and built area in Beau Champ between the public road and the sea will be built up although it contains two wetlands and a series of natural drains. Can the Minister give the guarantee that the Wetland Bill will protect the wetlands in their ecosystems and not simply keep the 30 m setback which is of no use today with the impacts of climate change?

Mr Gobin: I thank the hon. Member for the question. We will address the question holistically and look that the Wetland Bill – but, unfortunately, I do not have the information related to the specific two places mentioned by the hon. Member.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. May I ask the Minister whether, he will take into consideration proposals made by academic and NGO for the introduction of the Environmental Sensitive Areas and Wetland Bill?

Mr Gobin: I assure the hon. Member that extensive consultations have been held and still are being held. This is why the mandate of the consultancy has been extended until December of this year. So, proposals received will be taken into consideration.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/498, B/473, B/474, B/497, B/485, B/488, B/495, B/476, and B/518 have been withdrawn. Also, PQs B/477, B/493 and B/514 have been withdrawn. Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(4.19 p.m.)

PERSONAL EXPLANATION**PQ B/345 – SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION - CLARIFICATION**

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I wish to bring some clarification on the information I gave in my reply to a supplementary question to Parliamentary Question B/345 from hon. Osman Mahomed at the Sitting of last Tuesday.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Parliamentary Question related to a project being implemented by the Road Development Authority at Pointe aux Sables at an initial contract value of Rs114.5 m. As the House is aware, in accordance with the Public Procurement Act and the Regulations/Directives issued thereunder, the tender exercise for all projects estimated to cost above Rs100 m., exclusive of VAT, is carried out by the Central Procurement Board (CPB). The latter, after completion of the exercise, submits to the public body concerned, the name of the successful bidder for the project and for the subsequent award of the contract. It is only then that the public body issues the letter of award.

Accordingly, in my reply to the supplementary question, I made a general statement to the tender procedures for “those contracts”, exceeding Rs100 m., which are, in fact, examined and evaluated by the CPB which, thereafter, submits its recommendations to the Ministry for appropriate action. And this is what I meant in my reply, taking into consideration that the Parliamentary Question was on a project costing Rs114.5 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I regret if the information given in my reply could have created any misunderstanding.

I reiterate that for projects above Rs100 m., exclusive of VAT, it is the concerned public body which awards the contract, after the tender exercise has been completed by the CPB.

Thank you.

(4.21 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE NATIONAL FLAG, ARMS OF MAURITIUS, NATIONAL ANTHEM AND OTHER NATIONAL SYMBOLS OF MAURITIUS BILL

(NO. I OF 2022)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill (No. I of 2022) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a sense of pride and patriotism that I am presenting this Bill to the House today, and I am sure that Members from both sides of the House will be driven by the same *élan*. Our national symbols define our national identity as they meld our history, heritage, culture, and artistry, and give our people a sense of unity, and of belonging nationally and worldwide.

They are powerful means of instilling pride and unity in our population as they can be used to communicate the knowledge, the values, the history, the culture, and the memories of our country. Their unique and intrinsic characteristics should be unaltered, preserved, and protected.

That is the reason why the Bill we are debating today is of utmost importance to the nation as it will provide for better protection and use of our national symbols. Over and above the consolidation of the laws with regard to the National Flag, the Arms of Mauritius and the Seal of Mauritius, opportunity is being given to –

- a) give legal effect to the National Anthem of Mauritius and to the National Flower of Mauritius, the *Trochetia Boutoniana*, and
- b) declare the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco Punctatus*) as the National Bird of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at present, the National Flag of Mauritius is governed by the National Flag Act 2015, while the Interpretation and General Clauses Act only gives the definition of the “Seal of Mauritius” and the “Arms of Mauritius”. The Schedule to the Interpretation and General Clauses Act sets out the drawing of the Arms of Mauritius and, on the other hand, section 76A (1) of the Criminal Code Act requires the express authorisation of the Prime Minister for a person to use the Arms of Mauritius, that is, the Coat of Arms, and section 100(1) of the same Act makes it an offence for any person who counterfeits the Seal of Mauritius or makes use of such counterfeit seal. As such, no consolidated legislation exists to encompass all the national symbols of Mauritius. Rather the different national symbols are scattered in different legislation while some are not even regulated. For instance, there is no legal framework that protects the lyrics, the music and the melody of our National Anthem, which is the Motherland.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for consistency and uniformity, and to better protect our national symbols, the need to have one umbrella legislation was strongly felt. This is an endeavour within the broader political commitment of this Government to strive for the consolidation of national unity through the strengthening of our social fabric. Indeed, by conferring legal weight to such powerful symbolic representations, this Government intends to instil in the population a sense of belonging to these symbols whilst creating in the collective consciousness an unmistakable linkage between these symbols and our identity, both on the national and international fronts.

The Bill aims at protecting our national symbols as part of our heritage and preventing their misuse or misappropriation by others.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides that this Act shall bind the State. Therefore, no party is exempted.

Clause 11 of the Bill provides severe penalty for acts of disrespect toward the National Flag or other national symbols.

Clauses 12 to 15 prohibit, *inter alia*, the altering, improper exhibition, counterfeiting and improper use of the relevant national symbols, and prohibition to make use of the Seal of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the National Anthem, the original musical score was written in E flat Major that is, at concert pitch, for Marching/Military Band which has been played since 12 March 1968 to date by the Mauritius Police Band, and as written by the late composer, Mr Philippe Gentil, former Band Inspector of the Mauritius Police Force. A copy of the manuscript musical score duly signed by the composer is kept in the archives of the Government Information Services. Therefore, until now, the official score of the Motherland was only with the Police Band of the Mauritius Police Force, but there was no legal provision for its protection. However, the way the National Anthem should be sung, that is, the melody, is also not available in any official record.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Police Band that the last official national recording of the Motherland was in 1997 at the Serge Constantin Auditorium - that is, the former Trafalgar Hall - with the Police Band orchestra and the National choir under the charge of late Mr Landinaff, choir master at the Mauritius Police Band. While the audio part is available at the Government Information Services department, the official written music, together with the lyrics for this recording was not penned down. Therefore, in order to preserve these priceless wordings and lyrics set down at the times of independence, and whose precious melody and music have been sung by all Mauritians alike, the music melody together with the lyrical words in accordance with syllables has been written down within each movable note through the anthem showing how the Motherland should be sung and played. The melody of the Motherland will be as described in Part III of the Third Schedule to this Bill. Accordingly, with the new provisions in this Bill, no one would be allowed to alter the lyrics or the music and melody of the National Anthem. It is important to have a standard official melody line with lyrics. However, it is also vital to allow for variations in pitch and arrangements, provided the official line with lyrics is respected. Understandably, variations can be carried in the pitch for various reasons: children normally sing at a higher pitch than adults, and men sing at a lower pitch than women. Some arrangements may be for instrumental "*ensembles*" only, while other arrangements may be for small or large vocal "*ensembles*" accompanied by one instrument or an orchestra.

I, therefore, propose to bring, at Committee Stage, an amendment to clause 12, by adding a new subclause (2), to provide that it shall not be an offence where a person plays or sings the National Anthem, other than it should have been strictly played or sung, so long as it is done

with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland. This is in line with international practice, and will make it possible for our National Anthem to be correctly sung by all, according to their situation and to musicians or singers available. Similarly, Committee Stage amendments are being proposed to clause 15 of the Bill to provide that no authorisation would be required for using the National Flag or the National Anthem in connection with any public activity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to explain the main provisions of the Bill. Part II of the Bill, from clauses 4 to 9, details the national symbols of Mauritius. Part I of the First Schedule describes the Arms of Mauritius while Part II of the First Schedule provides for the colour and colour codes of the Coat of Arms. Part I of the Second Schedule describes the National Flag and the symbolic meaning of its colours, while Part II of the same schedule provides in details the colour codes, type of materials and sizes of the different types of flags. Part III of the Bill makes provisions for the protection of our national symbols.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we are all aware, the National Flag of Mauritius is always a sign of positive affirmation of loyalty and commitment, reflecting the ideals, beliefs and values of our nation amidst our rich and diverse cultural make-up. It has been a crucial element of our national identity, and it should thus be treated with highest dignity and honour. Disfiguring it, burning it or bringing it into disrespect are all acts which we should not condone.

No citizen has the right to misuse or bring to dishonour our national flag. It is with utmost pride and patriotism that we stand up whenever our national flag is flown and the Motherland is sung.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Trochetia Boutoniana* was declared the national flower of Mauritius on 12 March 1992, and we are, in this Bill, giving it its legal effect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Trochetia Boutoniana*, an endemic plant, is often, by virtue of its leathery leaves and dark red flowers, considered an ornamental plant in Mauritius and frequently used in landscaping. Previously, the plant existed in the wild only on the summit of Le Morne Brabant World Heritage Site. The flowering time of the plant is from June to October. It is named after French botanist Louis Bouton.

The Mauritian Kestrel has been carefully chosen to represent our Mauritian nation as it appropriately symbolises the successful reintroduction of an otherwise endangered species within

its natural habitat. This small falcon which was declared the national bird of Mauritius on the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius and the 30th anniversary of the accession of Mauritius to the status of Republic in March 2022, is the only bird of prey endemic to Mauritius. Mauritius kestrels can be seen in the Black River Gorges National Park and Bambou Mountains. The Mauritius Kestrel is a living success story for captive breeding in Mauritius as well as in the world. It was at the brink of extinction in the 1970s with only four birds in the wild in 1974.

The actual population in Mauritius in 2022 is estimated to be around 350. It is a symbol of beauty, of pride, of independence, of strength, of survivorship, and of determination. This graceful bird is now a flagship for conservation of species, habitats, and ecosystems, and also for Government's endeavour to protect and preserve our already fragile ecosystem. This in itself sends a powerful message of hope for our small and vulnerable nation, and of encouragement to cope with the current global turmoils. Through this message, this Government wants to urge our citizens to uphold these values during these economically difficult times so that we may, together, emerge stronger than ever therefrom.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 10 of this Bill also makes provisions for any future tangible or intangible item to be so declared as a national symbol of Mauritius, subject to the resolution of the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it was the case under the National Flag Act 2016, the written authorisation of the Prime Minister will be required prior to using the Arms of Mauritius, the National Flag, and the National Anthem for any business, trade, calling, advertising or any professional or public activity.

I truly believe that this is the ideal time to put some order in our scattered legislative framework with regard to our national symbols, and at the same time to consolidate our laws accordingly. I am thus convinced that Members from both sides of the House would agree with me on this very important piece of legislation which will dignify our national symbols, and give them their due respect and importance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

(Applause)

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

(4.38 p.m.)

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the hon. Prime Minister with a lot of attention and I have taken note that on many occasions he has used the word 'symbol'. He has also used the word 'symbolism', and let me at the very outset say that when he has said that through this piece of legislation, it would tend to strive for consolidation of national unity, let me respectfully say that it is not sufficient to only contend oneself with symbolism and symbols in order to consolidate national unity.

The ill that this country has suffered from for many, many years is precisely that we are also used to Governments after Governments coming and concentrating efforts on symbolism when we forget that deep down there is the rot. The rot that I say without any hesitation today has endangered the very foundation of national unity. If we are to ask the question, if all these beautiful symbols will make us believe or make the people outside believe that we are a country that is united, a national country where there is national unity, then we are barking up the wrong tree.

National unity is indeed very fragile today and since the Prime Minister makes it an issue in his speech, allow me to draw the attention of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the recent events in Mauritius have shown us how fragile a society we are. Fragile because any little event of this nature, anything is a good excuse for people to come onto the net and to come and make dangerous racist, communal allegations against everyone; most importantly against those who are suffering from the economic downturn. This is how fragile national unity is and when we are to concentrate on the symbolism, it will take us nowhere.

Let me say that I was quite interested to read this piece of legislation and I have learnt a lot while reading it, and I read clause 12 that the hon. Prime Minister made reference to and that clause 12 is one of the clauses that the hon. Prime Minister said he will move for an amendment at Committee Stage. The initial clause 12, Mr Speaker, Sir, makes reference to its entitled prohibition from altering Arms of Mauritius, National Flags, National Anthem and Seal of Mauritius. The initial original clause 12 that is in this Bill today, that the Prime Minister will

move to amend later on provided for what? Provided in actual fact that anyone who altered the way in which, for instance, the National Anthem was sung would commit an offence.

So, basically, what the hon. Prime Minister and his esteemed Members of Cabinet have approved to send to this Assembly was a piece of legislation that is telling us – since it is not being amended as yet – that should any person in Mauritius of whatever age have sung the National Anthem in a manner that was not in *concordance* with what is provided for in the Schedule, we would be committing an offence and it would be punishable by Rs100,000, to an imprisonment to a term not exceeding two years. I prefer taking this on a note of humour. Most probably, somewhere, some place, the drafting of this piece of legislation that tried to put to the test Mauritian citizens, even non Mauritians as to their ability to sing the National Anthem is quite a funny attempt on the part of this Government to come with this equation to consolidate national unity. Let me put it on the account of ‘well, it was something that was missed at the time of being approved in Cabinet to be sent to Parliament’.

But now the hon. Prime Minister says he is going to move at Committee Stage for an amendment of clause 12 and what he proposes is to replace a new subclause 2 under clause 12, and I read it –

- (2) It shall not be an offence where a person plays or sings the National Anthem, other than as prescribed under this Act, so long as it is done with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland.

What does that mean exactly? It is trite law that any offence that someone is to be charged with potentially, should contain what we call certainty, clarity, and the degree with which anyone is to assess whether one has committed an offence or not, there should be objectivity therein. Is the way this is drafted, does this contain elements of objectivity?

Imagine, therefore, that someone is charged, a Police Officer arrests someone, ‘come in, you have sung this song wrongly, the National Anthem, because I am of the view that it has not been done with due respect as salutation to the Motherland’. What does that mean? Who is to decide, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is with due respect a salutation to the Motherland?

Let us think for a minute, ever since 1968, 54 years after Independence in a few months, how many people have sung the National Anthem in such a way as to lack respect as a salutation

to the Motherland? How many people whom we know of, how many instances have we known of people who have sung the National Anthem wrongly with a lack of respect? I don't know of any! Now, if the Prime Minister is aware of any of those instances, he should, I believe, communicate it to the House in order to, at least, justify the need to create a situation now, where in the event of an offence, the Magistrate of a Court is going to have to listen to how it was sung. And then, the Magistrate will have to decide whether this is sung properly or not. So, Magistrates will have to become persons who are gifted with the ability to judge whether it is being sung with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland. *Le Premier ministre nous fait chanter!*

(Interruptions)

Tu nous fais chanter! But I prefer taking it on a sense of humour because it is impossible to expect one Magistrate, as opposed to the next Magistrate, to come and have the same sense of appreciation as to which one is a better singer than the other. This is totally subjective. Yes, hon. Mohamed said it, and he is right!

So, I am trying to think, maybe the Prime Minister, through regulations, is going to try to teach us what pitch is the right pitch, and what pitch is the wrong pitch. But if he has tried to pitch something to us today, he has lamentably failed in his pitching technique. Because this is not what we do in order to bring national unity. I am sure this is not. Because if, at all, there have been offences, wrongs done by anyone in this country who sing with disrespect our National Anthem, it would have created an uproar in the country, because Mauritians, all of us, we love our Nation. All of us, we are patriots. All of us, we have learnt, from the time that we were baby in arms, what are the words to our National Anthem. And we stand - yes, Prime Minister - in respect when we hear our National Anthem. It is innate in all of us; it is in our DNA. This is what we breathe. This is what we do. This is who we are. So, who are those people who sang it wrongly with disrespect that would justify coming with this legislation at a time when there are more important things to attend in the country that is going to the dogs? People are suffering and not being able to make ends meet. We are coming up about a legislation to decide who is going to have the proper pitch and the wrong pitch, and Magistrates will decide who has a proper singing technique which is respectful or not.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us look at clause 13 of this proposed legislation. Once again, ‘Prohibition from improper exhibition of Arms of Mauritius and National Flag’. But before we go to clause 14, let me go back to clause 12 a minute. Clause 12 says –

“(1) No person shall –

- (a) alter the Arms of Mauritius, the National Flag or the Seal of Mauritius by placing thereon any letter, emblem or representation or by any other manner whatsoever;”

Once again, what is the Prime Minister saying coming with this clause is like: no one shall be able to use the flag, our National Flag, and have, for instance, an emblem in front of the flag. And it makes me think. I have seen, recently a political party that had just been created with a fist in front of the flag; the fist that represents a symbol of a fight against oppression. This is what the fist represents. Even the great Nelson Mandela also used the fist as a symbol of the fight against apartheid. And I remember the flag of South Africa with the symbolism of the fist in front there to show liberation from the chains of apartheid. So, today, the Prime Minister, in a very innocent-like manner comes to tell us that this is a piece of legislation that is there to build national unity when, at the same time, he is silent on who is being targeted. I am of the humble view that his silence speaks wonders, because it shows us that this is not innocent, indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir. What is being targeted here is one political party that has been a pain in the side of this Government, by taking measures that are not normal measures, not seen in the recent contemporary past, not seen in our political history in the past 30 years, manifestations and demonstrations. And then...

An hon. Member: This is where you failed.

Mr Mohamed: I thank the hon. Member who has just confirmed that, in fact, this part is being targeted because she said: ‘this is where we failed’. So, this is what bothered them.

(Interruptions)

No, but she said it! She said it!

Mr Speaker: Quiet, please! Let the hon. Member conclude; only three minutes!

Mr Mohamed: No, I am thankful that she said it.

Mr Speaker: Conclude! Three minutes!

Mr Mohamed: Is there a specific time allotment?

Mr Speaker: Yes, you have 15 minutes.

Mr Mohamed: Well, you should have said it earlier. Anyway! But this is what is being targeted. And then, I will go on clause 15; clause 15, which is the initial clause that has not been amended, which the hon. Prime Minister intends to amend, but the Prime Minister made no reference to it in his speech. What does it say? Clause 15 would have meant, when you read this, that all Cabinet Ministers had approved this to come to Parliament. That any citizen would have required the permission of the hon. Prime Minister, or any Prime Minister for that matter, to even raise the flag on a car or to walk in a street with the flag or to use a flag during a Press Conference or a public meeting or to have hawkers walk on the beach by using flags to sell their goods. They would require the permission of the hon. Prime Minister of Mauritius in order to use it. This is what this clause says –

“(1) No person shall, without the written authorisation of the Prime Minister –

- (a) in connection with any business, trade, calling, advertising or any professional or public activity,”

Not necessarily trade, not necessarily calling, advertising or professional matter. Any public activity would require the permission of the Prime Minister to hold up the flag; would require the permission of the Prime Minister to put it on a car, a car flag; would require the hon. Prime Minister’s permission in order to sing that National Anthem, even if it was a public activity. This is what is drafted here. Therefore, I am happy that the hon. Prime Minister has seen it fit to circulate proposed amendments at clause 15 where this matter is being addressed. But the question still remains as to how this could have been proposed at all. But then, again...

(Interruptions)

I am sorry, I am being interrupted. I can explain to her later on.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tania Diolle!

Mr Mohamed: I undertake to explain it to her later on.

Mr Speaker: Don’t interrupt the Member, he is concluding; he has only one minute!

Mr Mohamed: Yes, I am concluding.

Mr Speaker: Do not take his time!

Mr Mohamed: Yes, yes, yes! I will explain it to her later on. So, what I am trying to get out here is that - yes, I agree with the Prime Minister that it is very important to protect our National Anthem. But then again, what I am really not comfortable with, even if it existed in the 2015 legislation, is that any Prime Minister for that matter - no Prime Minister; why is it not the case in the United Kingdom?

In the United Kingdom, you do not need the permission of any Prime Minister to use your Union Jack. You do need the permission of the Prime Minister, for that matter, to even use it in advertising campaigns as long as you comply with the advertising standards, which is to use it properly. Why is it in Mauritius, we have to knock at the door the Prime Minister - whoever it is, I am not here only pinpointing at this one Prime Minister, but any Prime Minister for that matter. Why is it that they should have the power to act as though they own the country? They are the ones who will decide who is going to be given that permission and they are the ones to decide who will be refused that permission.

So, if I understand correctly, therefore, all persons, from 2015 onwards, who wanted to use this flag in any business manner, for advertising, for commercial reasons, would need the permission of the Prime Minister; former Prime Minister, future Prime Ministers and actual Prime Minister!

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Mohamed: This is what I disapprove.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Mohamed: I thank you for saying thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Teeluck!

(4.56 p.m.)

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all commend the hon. Prime Minister for coming before this Assembly with this Bill. After the introduction of The National Flag Act 2015, it was

important and legitimate that we update and consolidate this legislation with regard to our National Symbols of Mauritius, as provided under the proposed Bill but also to give legal effect to our Motherland, and to give legislative status to our National Flower and our newly declared national Kestrel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our National Anthem represents a symbol of patriotism. It represents peace, harmony and unity in our multicultural society and also with our National Flag, the Motherland undoubtedly stands as the most sacred representation of nationhood. If a National Flag is the visual representation of the identity of the people of a country, the National Anthem *est l'élément sonore de cette identité nationale d'un peuple*. A melody, coupled with lyrics so profound that each single word defines the very essence of our loyalty towards our country. A melody that unites, a melody along which we all stand in reverence, parking by the side our religious beliefs, a melody that dwarfs all race, colour, social differences. Lyrics, which, *dès notre enfance*, have inculcated a strong sense of patriotism in our hearts, and as adults, each time rekindle that flame of belonging to the nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, politics may oppose us but once our Motherland is played at the very start of each sitting of this House, each and every one stands in unison. Be it the National Flag or the National Anthem, what they remind us of is that we are all the same, born on the same soil. We can be physically different, the colour of our skin might be different, we may come from different social backgrounds, we may have different religious practices, our ancestors may have come from different continents but whatever be the factors whether physical, cultural or religious, we remain one. We are one people, we are one nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, patriotism is not just setting aside our differences and standing around our National Flag or standing alert when the Motherland is played. Patriotism is also, if not most importantly, being conscious of our duty towards our nation. As the Prime Minister stated this morning, we are one in our glory days as much as, we are one in trying times. This is what patriotism is all about.

As the Motherland goes 'around thee we gather,' united to face any challenge, united to swim through rough waters. And rough waters, Mr Speaker, Sir, the country has known, be it the *bagarre raciale in 1967* or *les émeutes de Kaya in 1999*. During these incidents, we stood together, we stood strong, we stood for the country. *Cependant*, we all know how dreadful, how

frightful, how deadly, we all know the social unrest, and the consequences on our economic such incidents have had on the country. No one wishes nor wants the country to go through such episodes again. Unless we are together, unless we rise above all considerations, particularly above political considerations, we would never have risen above these difficult times.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last two years have also been difficult for the country; first COVID, then the EU listing, and now the consequences of the war in Ukraine. These are challenging times affecting the economy, the sanitary and social livelihood of the country.

M. le président, *c'est le moment plus que jamais de raviver cette flamme de patriotisme*. We have to and we must actually stand together *dans l'intérêt de la nation, dans l'intérêt du peuple mauricien, autour du quadricolore, autour du Motherland*. Let me say it loud and clear, the time is not right for blame games and certainly not right for party politics! The time calls for everyone, whether we sit on this side or on the other side, to behave as true patriots. And very true, hon. Mohamed, we are all aware and conscious of how fragile our national unity is, and this is why we need to be careful. We need to act responsibly and acting responsibly is knowing what we say and knowing what we do, *et surtout d'être honnête envers la nation*.

Would anyone in this House deny the fact that the world is facing extreme economic situations? And that Mauritius would not be spared in the economic quagmire? How many times have hon. colleagues on the other side been vocal about the situation – a situation that not just Mauritius, but that the whole world is facing? How many times have hon. colleagues on the other side come honestly vis-à-vis *la population* and explain to the population - in your various press conferences - that there is an economic situation not just in Mauritius but across the globe? No one! *Au contraire*, like hon. Mohamed said *vous chantez la chanson de la démagogie*, and that too at the very wrong pitch!

This morning, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition came with a PNQ seeking clarifications on urgent and immediate actions Government is taking. At some point, the Leader of the Opposition enumerated a long list of projects and called the Government to put to hold the implementation of these projects.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the same time, when I go through the list of PQs put to hon. Hurreeram; when I see the list of PQs put to hon. Dr. Husnoo; when I see the list of questions put to hon. Ganoo, hon. Lesjongard; these same questions are seeking information on the status of

the respective projects in their respective constituencies awaiting completion of these same infrastructural projects. On the one hand, the Leader of the Opposition calls to stop with implementation of projects. On the other hand, these same Members of the Opposition are seeking information on when, where and how will these projects be completed. I would not refer to matters being raised during Adjournment Matters. You have to *koltar ici*; you have to *koltar laba*; you have to repair this; you have to repair that.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening to you there?

(Interruptions)

You don't have the right to reply across...

(Interruptions)

What are you talking about!

(Interruptions)

Yes, I am talking to you!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber! Withdraw from the Chamber!

An hon. Member: *Deor! Deor!*

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber!

An hon. Member: *Deor!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber, if not, I am going to name you!

You continue!

Mr Teeluck: Thank you, hon. Mohamed.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Oh come on! Come on now! We are going too far with all these things! Stop all these! You continue your speech!

Mr Teeluck: May I actually conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir. Patriotism is not just being vocal; patriotism is showing, demonstrating through words and actions that you care for the country beyond politics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will conclude by stating that this country today needs all of us to stand together; to stand together around our national flag; to stand together around our national anthem, not for our own benefits, not for the benefits of our parties, but for the benefit of our country, for the benefit of the population of this country and for the benefit of the children of this country.

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

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry!

(5.05 p.m.)

Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to extend my word of thanks and appreciation to our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for bringing to the House the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will start by quoting Henry Ward Beecher, who stated that –

“A thoughtful mind, when it sees a Nation's flag, sees not the flag only, but the Nation itself”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the national symbols of the Republic of Mauritius serves many purposes, notably as an affirmation of what we stand for as a sovereign country, as a testimony of our loyalty, fidelity and commitment to our motherland and as a window that portrays our past, present, and future to the world. And from this premise, the enactment of the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill legally empowers and provides the appropriate judicial standing to our national symbols simultaneously safeguarding them as proprietary entities of our motherland and regulating their use thereof and henceforth, within the prescribed legal requisites and in such a manner to bequeath them with the appropriate esteem and respect.

The enactment of this Bill comes at the right time to remind all of us of the unifying force that we collectively represent as a nation and furthermore, safeguards the sanctity and sacredness that our flag, symbols and ensigns, represents as the locus of our nationhood.

Mr Speaker, Sir, history carries with it one identity that never changes, and that's the narrative and story of a country and its people of the battle fought and won, of the hardships endured. That started on a bleak note decades ago, but which has risen to all of the challenges strewn all along the way.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to fly the national flag is a sign of patriotism, pride and honour. It discerns that a country has full confidence in itself and is comfortable with its history, its present and its future. This Bill gives the opportunity to declare the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*), an endemic bird unique to Mauritius, as the national bird of Mauritius. Moreover, the national flower of Mauritius shall be the *Trochetia Boutoniana*, also known as *boucle d'oreille* because of its bell-shaped look is.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill provides the opportunity to pay tribute to two gentlemen namely, late Philippe Gentil and Jean-Georges Prosper. The music of our motherland was composed by Philippe Gentil and the lyrics were written by Mr Jean-Georges Prosper. Our motherland acknowledges the qualities of its people: peace, justice, and liberty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to add that parliamentarians, as the representatives of the people and vehicles of their hope, have to ensure that its people deserve a country that aspires to peace and harmony. Our roles as parliamentarians are to take up our ranks as guardians of order.

À bon entendeur, salut!

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a final note, the generation to come will indeed perceive and imbibe the quintessence of our four colours, our star and key, and our different ensigns through the demarche of this enactment, such that due veneration and respect is given to all our symbols, faithfully and rigorously.

Last but not least, I wish once again to congratulate a patriot, a visionary man, our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for bringing to the House such an important piece of

legislation which will definitely provide for a better protection and use of our national symbols. God bless our Prime Minister, our Government, our people!

Thank you, very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

(5.14 p.m.)

Mr F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you very much. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start, by citing the cherished, respectful patriotism note and national pride of the first line of our national anthem –

“Glory to thee, motherland, o motherland of mine”.

What a meaningful emotional connection of our national anthem; the fundamental elements which bind us all as one people, one nation, and the efforts that our country requires from us all for its future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the foundation of our identity, our shared values, *la grandeur, l'honneur et l'espoir de notre république*, ‘around thee we gather’, since 1968, an everlasting history of our nation. Since then, our national flag has not changed, which is a respectable sign. Our national flag, anthem, symbols and emblems, which reflect the history, values, culture, dreams and visions of our nation, are sacred and are to be accorded due respect. Our national symbols are also our god gift for our nation and the many sacrifices of yesterday, today and tomorrow, for the freedom of our republic.

M. le président, permettez-moi, dans un élan patriotique de profiter de cette occasion pour m’exprimer à la nation Mauricienne. Aujourd’hui, nous sommes dans une situation déstabilisée et déséquilibrée par la crise économique mondiale, la pandémie covid-19, le changement climatique et la guerre en Europe. Ceci dit, l’heure est à une véritable mobilisation collective et de soutien mutuel pour éviter le pire d’un bouleversement sociétal et de construire ensemble un avenir partagé pour le meilleur pour notre république.

Après tant de sacrifice visionnaire de nos ancêtres, voilà la responsabilité de tout un chacun pour bâtir collectivement l’unité – ce mot, l’unité – et la fraternité de notre peuple, la nation, et cela de la stabilité, la vérité et à la lumière de la raison. Sans l’unité, avec comme symbole, notre drapeau quadricolore, pas de paix dans notre république, car l’heure n’est pas à la

division et l'intolérance, l'heure n'est pas à l'individualisme et de l'irresponsabilité, l'heure n'est pas à la défiguration du peuple et de la fragilisation de notre démocratie.

Vous le peuple, l'État c'est vous et le peuple c'est l'État, vous êtes appelés à ne pas tomber dans les pièges de l'immédiateté, la brutalité ou du populisme qui entraînent des désordres sociétaux contraire à la dignité de notre peuple et de la nation. Notre république a besoin de la tolérance de ses citoyens les uns envers les autres. Notre grandeur sociétale et politique se révèle quand, dans les moments difficiles, on œuvre pour les grands principes par le dialogue et en pensant au bien commun à long terme dans le grand projet de bâtir la nation Mauricienne.

La solution n'est pas dans la protestation violente et la violation des lois, mais la solution se trouve dans le dialogue et de la vérité, comme si bien dit le Premier ministre ce matin aussi bien que mon collègue l'honorable Teeluck. C'est essentiel que le mieux-être du peuple doive être au-dessus de tout et la priorité des priorités du gouvernement.

M. le président, je fais un appel au vrai sens du dialogue et du patriotisme à chacun de nous. Je compte surtout sur l'engagement citoyen de notre jeunesse ambitieuse de la république, car l'unité et la fraternité, ce sont les seuls chemins de l'avenir.

Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Rodriguan born citizen, I shared the historical and emotional moment of our republic, when our quadricoloured flag was planted, on the land of our territory Chagos Archipelago, namely on Peros Banhos, and also on Blenheim Reef and Salomon islands, during the scientific expedition. This was a defining moment of our State symbol in the claim of our sovereignty over Chagos Archipelago, that the International Court of Justice and the United Nations, have asked Britain to give up control of the islands to Mauritius. This symbolism, our quadricoloured flag, is a mark of a modern era revolution towards the completion of our decolonisation process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Rodrigues today, is proudly autonomous in our republic and this shall be portrayed as well, as the democratic mirror and inspiration for our Chagossians brothers and sisters. In the same breath, Mr Speaker sir, I bring with me today, a desk and a handheld autonomous Rodrigue's Flag together with our national flag – *'toute ma fierté et la fierté du peuple de Rodrigues'* – to send a message to our republic and to the whole world that one day, be

it in 10, 20, 30 or 40 years' time, our Chagossian brothers and sisters will also proudly settle back and raise our national flag together with the autonomous flag on Chagos Archipelago.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is part of my dream and inspiration for a colonial free domination Chagos and for our republic's future. The Attorney General and the Solicitor General, recently published a special edition of our Constitution with the new world map reproduced on its front cover to commemorate the historical judicial developments of the long struggle of Mauritius for its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago to be recognised universally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will allow myself, to go further by asking a question – whether as we are gaining sovereignty over Chagos and Rodrigues is today autonomous, should we not start thinking of a new design for our national flag that will symbolise these milestone achievements for these outer islands, as part of our republic and to represent a true reflection of a new united and modern Republic of Mauritius?

I leave it for concerned authorities along with the population views to ponder about same, as well as to the constitutional entrenchment of our national flag and symbols. We are talking about various laws, scattered laws but we need to think about the constitutional entrenchment of our national flag and symbols.

Coming back, to the purposes to this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, the national flower *Trochetia boutoniana* and the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) as our national bird, are great symbols of unity for us, as a nation and this symbolism of our country's destiny through perseverance, protection and preservation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you have taken time to admire and look at the beauty and vitality of this flower. We need to see more of this flower planted while embellishing our environment, all around the republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part III of the Bill, deals with the protection of our national symbols. It provides to avoid disrespect, inappropriate use and modification of the national emblems that do not send the wrong image of our sacred respect to our nation. In addition, I have to say our national flag must be lit at night.

One issue of concern to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that today, there is not that much daily or weekly education on our national flag and national emblem schools, as it used to be in the past.

There is not that much conduct and display of a flag raising ceremony in the morning in our schools and colleges, despite of COVID-19 situation nowadays and I remember, the time when, a Governor General made his passage in Rodrigues, as a school child, we used to line the roadways waving flags. And nowadays, I do not expect school children to do same for anyone of our leaders, but I simply meant to say that those were periods of intense and cemented patriotism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 13 (2) of the Bill, I am happy to see that the Bill protects our minors, from improper exhibition in good faith and in the course of education or social activities of our symbols and emblems. In addition to education, I believe that our Republic must also study the possibility of preparing a national pledge as is the case for Singapore, a pledge to deepen our sense of patriotism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the coat of arm of Rodrigues which is being shown, our regional flower *hibiscus lili-flora*, our regional birds *la Fauvette* and *le solitaire*, our sea, and other products of Rodrigues, our maize, fish and crafts must also be protected by law, which is not the case nowadays. Coming from Rodrigues, as a Member of OPR party, I am very proud that today, the authenticity of my beloved Rodrigues Island, is being protected in our Constitution. Credit to the vision and patriotic engagement of respected historical political figures namely late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, hon. Bérenger and my Leader Serge Clair.

However, as we are consolidating and updating the laws with regard to the national symbols of Mauritius, I believe that it is extremely important as well to protect the Regional Assembly symbols.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to recommend for the protection of the Rodrigues autonomous flag and all Regional Assembly symbols that carry our social, economic, environmental, cultural background and the pride of the Rodriguan population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also seize the opportunity to raise the issue of Central Government direction, when a dignitary of Rodrigues passes away, this has to be regulated that the National Flag together with the RRA flag to be half-masted to portray a period of grief and mourning in Rodrigues.

M. le président, comme je l'ai déjà dit, nous avons ce débat sur la protection de notre symbole national dans un moment où nous faisons face à des nombreux défis qui requièrent notre unité nationale.

Alors que nous renforçons l'unité nationale autour des symboles, notre pavillon national et régionale et comme un autonomiste loyal et engagé pour l'unité nationale, sans vouloir m'associer à quelconque connotation politique à ce débat, je dois quand même évoquer un fait divisionniste, qui est en face de nous à Rodrigues – la démarche “d'un referendum sur le future statut politique de Rodrigues”, comme énoncer dans le discours quinquennal du nouveau gouvernement régional de Rodrigues. Et la République doit noter sérieusement la complicité d'un parti politique nationale dans cette démarche.

Alors, que c'est dans un élan de fierté patriotique, d'idéologie nationalisme, et de ce que nous pouvons faire en tant que nation unie et indivisible pour bâtir et aller de l'avant, que nous réussirons l'avenir de la République ensemble.

M. le président, l'histoire nous rappellera aussi comment en parlant du symbolisme national de notre République, à Rodrigues, nous avons fait face à 'l'épisode de l'année casse pavillon - pour l'histoire - en 1969'. Les Rodriguais ne voulaient pas le lever du drapeau quadricolore, toujours avec la complicité d'un parti politique et politicien Mauricien, prévu à 14 heures le 12 Mars 1969, et finalement hissé vers les 18 heures.

Alors qu'ils n'ont pas pu arracher le drapeau de la main de la police, ils ont cassé le mât et le filin. Certains manifestants furent arrêtés et condamnés à la prison selon l'historien `Ben Gontran. J'aime bien ce bouquin. Mais à cette époque, l'amende d'une insulte à un symbole national, était dérisoire; mais avec servitude pénale.

M. le président, ce présent projet de loi prévoit selon l'article 11 (3) par rapport à une Insulte aux symboles nationaux que –

(i) Nul ne peut, par quelque moyen ou de quelque manière que ce soit, mettre en haine, ridiculiser ou déshonorer, un symbole national ou le symbole national d'un autre État,

(ii) Nul ne peut, sans autorisation légale, brûler, mutiler ou autrement détruire ou endommager les armoiries de Maurice, le drapeau national ou le sceau de Maurice,

(iii) Toute personne qui contrevient aux paragraphes (1) ou (2) commet une infraction et, est, sur déclaration de culpabilité, passible d'une amende n'excédant pas un million de roupies et de la servitude pénale.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr François: Sorry, Sir?

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr François: Yes, I am concluding. I am concluding. Let me conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say that I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill. And I have to say, these are the uniting factors that bind us all as a nation towards our common future. And I say it again, what an emotion to see the beauty of our autonomous flag with our coat of arm framed by our national quadricolour, which is a testimony of the pride of the Rodriguan people, determination and destiny in harmony and solidarity within the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, long live our Republic and I also commend the Bill to the House, and I thank you for your very kind attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(5.28 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for providing me the opportunity to intervene and to say a few things on this Bill.

At the very outset, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say, the proposed amendments to be brought at Committee Stage now give us a better appreciation of what the intention of this Bill is all about, and, *de facto*, this changes the interpretation to be given to this Bill. Without those proposed amendments, Mr Speaker, Sir, it would have been a Bill that was introducing an element of rigidity with regard to the applicability of the clauses that would have placed us in an awkward position as a democratic state, whereby you have to sing the National Anthem, for example, in such a way and at such a pitch as prescribed by law, and any deviation on same will have amounted to an offence under the law. So, fortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is bringing those amendments, and I welcome same, where now amendments will be

brought to Clause 6, Clause 9, Clause 15, and I would lay emphasis on Clause 12, whereby a new sub clause (2) shall now read as follows, as mentioned by the hon. Prime Minister –

“It shall not be an offence where a person plays or sings the National Anthem, other than as prescribed under this Act, so long as it is done with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened attentively to my learned colleague, hon. Mohamed, with regard to the subjectivity of describing and applying the test with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland. And I assume that the hon. Prime Minister will provide us with more clarity on this issue later on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, why is it necessary to symbolise and protect national symbols? The aim of symbolising these national representations is to have significant items recognised for its importance to the State. As Clause 5 of this Bill rightly puts it, the National Flag shall be the symbol of the Government and the people of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. The importance is two-fold. Firstly, symbolising and protecting national symbols are necessary to combat any event that is likely to undermine national unity, respect for national sovereignty. State symbols are important to national identity and sovereignty, Mr Speaker, Sir. And secondly, it helps in asserting the authority of the State by limiting the inappropriate use of these symbols and punishing any related offences and this is catered for in this Bill.

Protection of the national symbols allows for uniformity and precision. An abuse of the symbols can be better controlled by allowing a uniform application of any related offences such as damaging or insulting the National Flag. It helps in ensuring that any national symbol is not being used in a way that could be deemed as disrespectful or offensive. These national symbols, Mr Speaker, Sir, do not only represent the general concept of one nation but also condense the knowledge, values, history and memories associated with one's nation. The importance of symbolism, Mr Speaker, Sir, should not be understated, given our history and economical evolution. Awareness of the history of our country and its protection is crucial as a foundation for all bricks of progress that will be built onto it. In order to assess the necessity of symbolising and protecting these national symbols, it is relevant to understand what each symbol represents for Mauritius and its importance to our history.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I here, pause to pay tribute to Mr Gurudutt Moher, who created our National Flag, Mr Jean-Georges Prosper for our National Anthem, and Mr Philippe Gentil, who composed our music for the National Anthem. The National Anthem, Mr Speaker, Sir, represents the tradition, history and beliefs of a nation and its people. And the National Anthem, Mr Speaker, Sir, contributes to the development of a sense of patriotism among the country's citizens and reminds them of their nation's glory, beauty and rich heritage. It helps to unite people of the same country by a single song. For instance, Mr Speaker, Sir, as Mauritius set foot in a new era of independence, "God Bless the Queen" was replaced by our own Motherland, an anthem written and composed by distinguished Mauritian citizens that I have mentioned earlier. These changes, though not tangible, were the concrete proof of a newly independent Mauritius and continue to be representative of our sovereign nation. Same for our National Flag, Mr Speaker, Sir, for our National Flower which is the symbol of Mauritius acceding to the status of Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall at this stage propose that the spirit of this Bill, in my humble opinion, should instead be embedded in our Constitution. I think, we have to go a step further like other Commonwealth countries. Kenya, for instance, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Article 9 of its Constitution has included as the national symbols their national flag, the National Anthem, their coat of arms and their public seal. Same is the case for India at Article 15(1) (a) of its Constitution. It would have been, in my humble opinion, interesting and more robust to have it in our Constitution, and I am sure we would have the required 3/4 majority in the Assembly to do so.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, our sense of patriotism and love for our motherland should make us all, here in this August Assembly, rise above party politics, by not just making speeches, to enhance and show adherence to our national symbols but also guide us and guide the decision-makers, the present Government, in their decision-making process be it political, social or economic to be made, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the best interest of our people. And God knows, Mr Speaker, Sir, that our people these days are awaiting eagerly - and not the very few of them but the many of them - for patriotic and unprecedented decisions to be taken for the betterment of our nation, and for them to have a decent life and live in peace, justice and harmony. God bless Mauritius!

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I suspend the Sitting for 45 minutes.

At 5.37 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.50 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to contribute to this Bill and I begin by congratulating the hon. Prime Minister, for coming up with what I genuinely believe is a very important piece of legislation for our Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as extensively canvassed by those who spoke before me, the main objective of the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill is here in the view to consolidate and update the existing legislations relating to the national symbols of Mauritius, which are undoubtedly associated with safeguarding the sovereignty of our Republic and its dependencies. It is, Mr Speaker, Sir, of utmost importance that the whole world not only recognises Mauritius as an independent country but also acknowledges our national symbols. The First, Second and Third Schedules of the Bill provide for comprehensive descriptions and requirements of our National Symbols.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do agree with hon. Lobine from the other side of the House that the pertinence of this Bill should neither be understated nor diluted because national symbols are the very soul of our national identity. By bringing this Bill to the House, our Prime Minister is sending a strong and a clear message that our national symbols occupy a position of honour and therefore should command universal affection, loyalty and above all unconditional respect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are here debating on national symbols in this very House which itself is a symbol of the supreme legislative body in Mauritius. On this side of the House, we honour, we value and we respect our institutions. Unfortunately, I do not believe that the same can be said for all Members sitting in this House.

The paradox, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that despite being mandated to democratically do their job in the House of Parliament under the watchful eye of our national symbols, like beautifully adorned on your chair, Mr Speaker, Sir, our national flag. Instead, very often we have witnessed

Members on the other side, choosing to belittle this temple of democracy, choosing to belittle the symbols adorning this temple of democracy at almost every sitting. They come in here brandishing *pancartes*, they hold Press conferences outside this Parliament; although sometimes one might say it is a bit of a blessing in disguise because we do not come here to entertain antics of political clowns, if I may say. Doing Press conferences outside, they are very welcome to take that kind of show outside this House.

Coming back to this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the sacred duty and prime responsibility of not only the Legislative, the Executive or the Judiciary to make sure that our national symbols are being respected. It is also the duty of the whole nation. We are very proud undoubtedly of our national symbols like the Arms of Mauritius, as described in the First Schedule of the Bill.

The national flag is of particular importance as well because it captures what we have grown up with as children. Every citizen in this Republic knows that red represents the struggle for freedom and independence; blue represents the Indian Ocean where Mauritius is situated, yellow is the new light of independence and green represents the agriculture of Mauritius and its vibrant colour throughout the year.

Coming to our national anthem, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not necessarily have to delve very deep into the lyrics of the national anthem. The title itself 'Motherland' embodies our love for our country because there is no greater love than the love for our mother, for our motherland. The wordings of our national anthem go a step further to capture the varying qualities of our people. With those 3 words always, at every occasion, ringing the loudest, the clearest and with the strongest impact and those are: in Peace, Justice and Liberty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the catalyst that drives our Prime Minister in his relentless fight for the sovereignty over the Chagos Islands – a battle, which we all acknowledge, we are all aware is gaining a lot of ground in the world today. In this fight, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are not only the citizens of our republic behind the Prime Minister. In fact, almost unanimously, an entire African country and most countries across the globe are now behind him.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we are debating on this symbolic Bill, we are not only referring to Mauritius but we are also referring to all the other islands including Diego Garcia, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tromelin, St Brandon and, obviously, the Chagos Archipelago.

This year, our Government organised a trip to the Chagos islands without British supervision for the first time in history. Our Mauritian flag was proudly hoisted for the very first time on three points of the Chagos Archipelago, namely the Peros Banhos, the Salomon Islands and Blenheim Reef. This has been a very proud moment, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, allow me to quote the Prime Minister who said –

“a very emotional moment and a very historic time for us, because we are able to rule in our own territory”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the provocative action by the British government; the removal of our national symbol, our flag, from the Chagos islands – and worse, that was being carried out a few days prior to our Independence Day – this action, Mr Speaker, Sir, can only be condemned fiercely and forcefully.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is even more shocking, more revolting and shameful, in fact, is that instead of acknowledging; instead of appreciating – and here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not necessarily asking to show appreciation to the Government or to the Prime Minister, who in fact is the one behind this historical feat, but in the very least respecting and appreciating the solemnity of such a momentous occasion. Instead, Mr Speaker, Sir, we got to witness hon. Paul Bérenger – who I notice is not here – went on qualifying this trip, and I quote, as a “bluff” – that is such a huge shame. *Fer gagn onte. Fer gagn onte sa!* Pass on the message, thank you: very unpatriotic to qualify such a historical moment as a bluff. It is bordering, if not completely displaying, colonial style arrogance like he often does.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let her talk!

Dr. Boolell: How can you treat a Member of being a colonial?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I never said the words.

Dr. Boolell: Arrogant. Colonial arrogance.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Colonial style arrogance. I did not say the word that he is...

Mr Speaker: Why are you interrupting a Member? This is parliamentary democracy...

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: You can go back and listen to it. I did not...

Mr Speaker: Freedom of expression.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Weh, dir li pa kumense!*

Mr Speaker: Decorum. Temple of democracy.

Dr. Boolell: That was not a rule of democracy, it applies to all of us.

Mr Speaker: Now allow the hon. Member to continue, please.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Shame on you!

Mr Speaker: On a point of order!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to continue. In fact, the House will recall that the hon. Prime Minister during his summing-up on the Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill reminding this House, reminding the entire nation, how the same hon. Member of the other side of the House, prior to the vote which was taken by the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, when we went to seek an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, hon. Bérenger had sarcastically said, that Mauritius would hardly obtain 10 votes. And that is what the people of this country must know, and that is what History will retain from that hon. Member. It is very much related to this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We shall neither give up nor give in when it comes to our sovereignty. Looking at the reaction from the other side, I have always been inclined, Mr Speaker, Sir, to believe that this is the unanimous feeling of patriotism in every citizen. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, the recent turmoil, the recent events, in fact, the recent wounds, I should say, being inflicted on our motherland, they beg the question whether patriotism carries the same meaning for certain people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as unfortunate and as damaging as these events have been to the country, what has been most shocking, most alarming, is how many politicians sitting on the other side of the House – most of them not present at the moment – how many of them openly supported these unpatriotic movements, supported these riots, supported the destruction of public institutions ...

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Member is casting aspersions on Members of the Opposition to come and say that they supported riots!

An hon. Member: Of course!

Mr Speaker: No! No, hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: She is saying that we are...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. Dr. Boolell, you can raise a point of order. You ask me the permission, I give you the permission, and then you talk. If not, it will not be decorum, it will not be Temple of democracy, it will not be...

Please!

Dr. Boolell: I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

I thank you, I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is out of respect that I say it.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: It is not the morning.

Dr. Boolell: No. I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister has no right to cast aspersion on Members of the Opposition. Her comments have to be fair and she has to be diligent in her speech.

An hon. Member: It is factual.

Dr. Boolell: What factual?

Another hon. Minister is saying: 'it is factual'. He is also casting aspersions.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now you are discussing.

Dr. Boolell: I am not discussing.

Mr Speaker: You are a seasoned parliamentarian.

Dr. Boolell: Yes, but it was...

Mr Speaker: I have seen you here for years, and years, and years, and you make the same mistake. I am here to give you a helping hand. You see?

Dr. Boolell: Alright. Yes. I am glad you are extending the hand of friendship.

Mr Speaker: Yes, that's it. So, do not make any debate, any discussion. Hon. Member, try to refrain from controversial issues or inferring whatever is being reproached to you. Please, continue.

Dr. Boolell: Alright.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes.

An hon. Member: Talk on the Bill!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Be li bizin koz lor bil la!*

An hon. Member: *Be Shakeel Mohamed kin koze!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now! Please, please, please!

Don't usurp my place! Okay!

Mr Ameer Meea: If you give me the permission, I will raise a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Ameer Meea: The hon. Minister stated that the Opposition was supporting riots; this is what we call imputing improper motives on the Opposition and the hon. Minister should refrain from casting aspersions on the Opposition.

Mr Speaker: Non, hon. Member, maybe you are not ...

Mr Ameer Meea: Go and check the records!

Mr Speaker: Please! Please! This is parliamentary democracy.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: She has the right to say whatever she likes!

Mr Speaker: So, are you arguing with the Chair? I am on my feet! From where do you have that courage?

Mr Ameer Meea: I have the courage!

Mr Speaker: To stand in front of me and to say things like these! Please!

(Interruptions)

No! No! I am on my feet!

An hon. Member: *To anvi al lakaz?*

Mr Speaker: You should refrain; you should abstain when I am on my feet! Now let me tell you one thing. This is parliamentary democracy, there have been speeches, there have been attacks, I can understand the Opposition will make no gift on it. No *kado* to the Government. And the Government will make no *kado* to the Opposition. I am here to judge what is outside Standing Orders. If you have a point of order, you have raised your point of order, but it is not a point of order.

Please!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to continue with my intervention on this Bill. It reminded me of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said to the Prime Minister during PNQ today, the truth is hurting quite a lot by the look of it.

Like hon. Shakeel Mohamed earlier said during his intervention on this Bill, that a Bill is not sufficient to bring unity; it requires patriotism; it requires commitment; it requires love for our motherland. The path, Mr Speaker, Sir, towards independence has not been an easy one, everybody in this House, every Mauritian citizen remembers that the path has been riddled with adversity; it has been peppered with obstacles, with vehement opposition.

And with your permission, I will jog the memory of this House that in August 1967, Mr Speaker Sir, when the Legislative Assembly voted in favour of independence, the members of one particular party, in fact, one of the oldest surviving parties in Mauritius, the members of that

party left the Chamber in protest before the vote. That party was against Mauritius becoming a sovereign nation, Mr Speaker, Sir, and history shall remember that as well.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has taken bold initiatives in favour of our territorial integrity and the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill is yet another foursquare initiative to further protect our national symbols both on the international landscape and the national one. The Bill does not target anybody and as enlightening as it has been to the House to discover hon. Shakeel Mohamed's keenness or expertise in vocal pitches, this Bill is here as a safeguard to our sovereignty and our national symbols.

I shall end by once again by thanking the hon. Prime Minister, the mover of this Bill, for being the architect of a bright future for this nation and for bringing life to those three words: in peace, justice and liberty. Long live the republic of Mauritius.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramdhany!

(7.06 p.m.)

Dr. A. Ramdhany (First Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

I start by quoting the words of King Solomon out of the proverb -

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

It is a reminder to all of us in this August Assembly that we are called upon not only to lead by example, but to lead with vision like our hon. Prime Minister and to have a long-term view of the best interests of our country. The objective of the Bill is to consolidate and update the law with regard to the national symbols of Mauritius, such as the Arms of Mauritius, the National Flag of Mauritius and the Seal of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill will also give legal effect to the National Anthem of Mauritius (Motherland), to the National Flower of Mauritius and to declare the Kestrel bird as the National Bird of Mauritius. The Bill will provide for a better protection and use of the national symbols of Mauritius and will further strengthen the Mauritian identity both nationally and internationally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is even more important in the context of the Government's effort to claim sovereignty over Chagos.

My address to the house will be threefold Mr Speaker, Sir, namely –

1. The National Symbols of Mauritius;
2. The National Anthem;
3. The Mauritius Kestrel, and Trochetia.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the Mauritian Government's first aim after attaining full internal self-government from the British in 1968, was to cultivate a sense common of identity. Our state symbols which were unveiled in 1968 became an important way to rally Mauritians from different backgrounds and communities to a common purpose.

The instilling in Mauritians of different races, creeds and classes, 'the will to be a nation', striving towards creating a Mauritian nation through a sense of belonging to our common identity. Although Mauritius only became a republic in 1992, our state symbols – the flag and anthem, were first unveiled in 1968 when Mauritius obtained independence from Britain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, National flags and anthems express symbolically the hopes and the ideals of a nation. The symbols by themselves may be meaningless as suggested by some. We respect not the flag as such or the state arms or the anthem but the sentiments and the ideas they represent. The possession of a national flag and anthem is, for a country, symbols of self-respect. Through these, a nation acquires identity and a personality of its own.

Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, symbols are a very tricky business. They can mean whatever a person wants them to mean. It is in order to prevent any too free a translation of the symbols that we have taken the precaution of providing as it is an authorised translation of the symbols which our flag and state arms carry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the flag, the state arms and the anthem are symbols of national pride. They are expressive of the spirit of dedication which inspires our people today. To fly the national flag is a sign of pride. For example, during the All African Championship 2022 Badminton Competition at Kampala Uganda, our national athletes, Mr Melvin and Miss Vilina Appiah (Constituency of number 6) felt proud to see our national flag. It is a positive affirmation of loyalty and commitment to the nation. It marks out a country that has self-confidence and is

comfortable with its place in the world, its history and its future. The colours of the national flag are of major significance in the post-independence history of our island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Anthem showcases the national culture of Mauritius and displays the delight and national fervour. In addition to the Mauritian national flag, it functions as a driver to the feeling of national pride for Mauritian citizens worldwide. The Mauritian National Anthem's name is, "Motherland", and is also known as National Anthem of Mauritius. The Mauritian national anthem lyrics were written by Jean Georges Prosper and it was put to music by Philippe Gentil. The National Anthem remains the property of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius.

The national anthem of Mauritius, like other national signs of Mauritius, embodies the custom, past history, and beliefs of Mauritius and its people. It helps evoke feelings of pride among the Mauritian individuals and reminds them of their nation's beauty and rich heritage. It is also a powerful tool to unite Mauritians. During the performance of the Mauritian national anthem, residents of Mauritius, in spite of their ethnic distinctions, rise in unison and this, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the beauty of our country and should be preserved at all costs. Sports men and women from Mauritius also experience a moment of intense pride when they are being awarded a medal at a worldwide sporting event while the Mauritius national anthem is being played in the background. It gives them a sensation of having actually made their country proud. Students who listen to the national anthem of Mauritius in school, learn to appreciate their nation and establish a spirit of unity among them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Kestrel is unique to Mauritius and is one of the nine endemic bird species still left on the island. The species was saved in-extremis with an increase from just four birds in 1974, including a single breeding female, to a peak of about 600 individuals. The Mauritian Kestrel has been named the national bird of the Republic of Mauritius.

On the other hand, the *Trochetia* was declared the National Flower on March 1992, when Mauritius achieved the status of republic. Named after the famous French botanist, Louis Bouton, it is endemic to Mauritius and is found in only one locality in the wild. It is a magnificent shrub reaching about 2-3 metres in height, with reddish-orange flowers. Adapted to dry condition, it commonly flowers from June to October.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once enacted, the National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill will further define the parameters within which to use our national symbols and to provide for matters related thereto.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill comes at a time where there has been a recent surge in the use of national flag on social media in total non-compliance of the law. A simple Google search would show the national flag with different messages and images imprinted in total disrespect of the identity of our Nation.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be crucial to ensure that there are no improper uses of the Arms of Mauritius, National Flag and National Anthem in connection with any business, trade, calling, advertising or any professional or public activity pursuant to the provisions of Section 15(1) of the Bill.

The Bill provides for severe penalties for any breaches thereof and this will act as a strong deterrent to any misuse and in turn ensure respect towards the national symbols of the Republic of Mauritius.

Let me end by saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Bill is another step in the right direction to depart from the colonial remnants since Mauritius became a Republic and is evidence of the visionary approach of the hon. Prime Minister.

In light of the recent events instigated by a few irresponsible politicians for political gains, I call upon the intelligent Mauritian population to use their independent judgment and let us face the difficult international financial challenges together as one people and as one nation in peace, justice and liberty.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(7.16 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the floor.

Let me, first of all, thank the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for bringing this Bill to the House, as previously, his father also, late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, brought the

National Flag Bill in 2015 for a better protection of the National Flag by regulating its use and giving our flag a legislative meaning which we did not have in the past. We amended and now we are coming with a new Bill to better protect our national symbols. The display of the national symbols with inappropriate specifications and any behaviour which dishonours it will be made an offence under this legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while doing some research on our flag and the national symbols, I came across some information which I would like to share to the House. The first flag that was flown in Mauritius was in 1638 and it was the red-white-blue horizontal, tricolour flag of the Dutch East India Company. When the island was colonised by the French and known as *Isle de France*, the Standard of the King of France was adopted as the official flag. Then came the French Revolution and our flag became the French tricolour. When British took control in 1810, our flag was changed to a traditional British blue ensign with a coat of arms at the centre right. The coat of arms was a shield quartered with a ship, three palm trees, a key and a white star. This coat of arms was changed in 1906 with the addition of the dodo and a deer holding the shield. And on the historic day of 12 March 1968, at noon, at Champs de Mars, the Union Jack, symbol of the British presence in Mauritius, was brought down and replaced by our four colour striped flag.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this was a unique moment, though I have not experienced it, but when I hear my forefather, my grandparents talking about it, I know the sense of belonging and a pride that they had at that time. Mr Speaker, Sir, since that time, this flag, now, is representing our country's flag. The accession of Mauritius to the status of Republic on 12 March 1992 completed the process of independence and self-determination. The flag of the Republic of Mauritius is now proudly flown at the seat of the United Nations, Commonwealth Secretariat and other international and regional institutions to which Mauritius is a member.

Mr Speaker, Sir, each of the four colours of the flag, namely the red, blue, yellow and green has been given a meaning as a legacy to our future generation. And when we talk about the red, it resents the struggle of freedom and independence that has been done by our ancestors; the blue representing the Indian Ocean in the middle of which Mauritius is situated; yellow representing the light of independence, shining over the island; and the green representing the agriculture of Mauritius and its colour throughout the twelve months of the year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our national symbols and flag in the life of a nation has got overriding importance and significance in terms of symbolism and patriotism. Why I say symbolism? Because a flag radiates a whole spectrum of ideas, philosophies and feelings in terms of a rolling point as an epitome of national identity, its vital importance to trigger a sense of patriotism belonging.

M. le président, la valeur symbolique du drapeau national est indéniable et indiscutable dans l'ère de la démocratie. Le drapeau national a pris encore plus d'ampleur en cours de la première guerre mondiale et on commença à parler de mourir pour la patrie.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, with this legislation, the Prime Minister is protecting our National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and other national symbols. Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we feel very proud that the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) is being declared as the National Bird of Mauritius, and like we say, we are giving back the right recognition to our fauna and flora which is part of the beauty of our island. As it was described by Mark Twain that -

“Mauritius was created first and then heaven, and heaven was copied after Mauritius.”

We see the beauty of our island and this is what we are all proud of when we talk about Mauritius; when we talk of Mauritius elsewhere, and everywhere we are.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth should be commended for giving the explanatory note as to the motivation and rationale behind this particular amendment. To understand better the motivation of the Government, our Prime Minister and all the Members of the Government, is that the National Flag and their symbols, the National Anthem, our National Flower, our National Bird have got a great importance and significance in terms of symbolism and patriotism. It has got a sacred aura of its own in terms of solidarity and service. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a common link between men and land, our Motherland and has got the bonding power of humanism and that transcends all barriers of blood, relations and differences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by my colleague, hon. Teeluck, now, we are going through a worse economic phase that our country has faced since independence, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Aujourd'hui, M. le président, la nation doit garder la mission patriotique qu'elle s'était investie en mars 1968, symbolisée par la couleur jaune de notre quadricolore, *which represents the new light of independence*. C'est-à-dire, M. le président, de protéger, de défendre les droits, d'éduquer, de soigner, et de créer l'environnement soutenable au développement économique du pays. Nous devons être patriotes, M. le président, en ces temps difficiles et nous devons être unis.

When you talk about a fist; when you close it together, it also means unity. It does not only mean that it is only for oppression and for fighting. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know, some Members of the Opposition only see one side of the coin. And when they talk about patriotism, one of the Members reminds me of a player of Manchester United. He is like the Harry Maguire of Manchester United who has been paid, who is the most expensive defender, but when we talk of the results, we know where Manchester United is today!

M. le Premier ministre et M. le président, je voudrais dire que nous, du côté de cette Chambre, nous avons la conviction et nous sommes certains que nous sommes bénis d'avoir Pravind Jugnauth comme Premier ministre pour diriger le pays dans un temps des plus difficiles et que le pays fait face à l'adverse économique, la pandémie et autres. Depuis qu'on est élu, on a contesté les élections, on a fait beaucoup de choses, et du côté de l'Opposition, ils sont mauvais perdants.

Mais nous, nous respectons leur droit et nous allons diriger le pays ensemble avec notre Premier ministre pour amener le pays à bon port et nous allons nous en sortir.

M. le président, je félicite le Premier ministre pour ce projet de loi. Il est temps, comme indiquent les objectifs de ce projet de loi, de protéger et de replanter son utilisation par rapport aux symboles. Comme je l'ai dit précédemment, M. le président, le Mauricien aime et il est fier de son drapeau national, et il est fier des symboles et il est fier d'être mauricien.

Mais, ce que nous voyons, il y a des gens qui prêchent le patriotisme mais ils ne le font pas, parce qu'ils ont dit que nous sommes un pays multi-ethnique, le tissu social est très fragile. Mais quand ils parlent du tissu social, il faut qu'ils le fassent. Et je dirai à ce membre spécifique, s'il a le courage - parce qu'on a vu par ses actions, ce qu'il a fait - de quitter le No. 3 et de venir comme candidat soit au No. 8 ou même au No.17 pour montrer qu'il pourra quitter là-bas.

Je dirai aussi, M. le président, comme je l'ai dit précédemment, le Mauricien, il est fier d'être un mauricien et fier du drapeau national. Et pour terminer, M. le président, je dirai 'vive notre quadricolore ! Vive Ile Maurice ! Que Dieu nous bénisse !'

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(7.27 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not perambulate and I will come straight to the Bill. I have looked at The National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols of Mauritius Bill and I will make some comments. I welcome the umbrella legislation. In fact, on this side of the House, we all welcome this umbrella legislation. The sense of patriotism and pride, of course, is not the monopoly of friends sitting on Government's bench. We share this pride and this patriotism.

I made it a point to look at previous questions put to former Prime Minister and I was not surprised when my attention was drawn to section 76A of the Criminal Code which, in fact, empowers the Prime Minister with unfettered powers. Section 15 consolidates section 76A; in fact, its unfettered powers which are being conferred on the Prime Minister. Hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah stated in her intervention that premium should be put on symbols, and she is right. I will say that we should never mess or tamper with symbols. I have seen people like a phoenix nosedive in relation to symbols.

I will refer to one particular case and there were lessons to be drawn from that particular case. I will refer to November or October 1999, when the then Governor of the Bank of Mauritius acted contrary to section 29(3) of the Bank of Mauritius Act to issue new banknotes contrary to form and design of currency notes. It provoked an uproar and led to the resignation of the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius and his Deputy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no better symbol than separation of powers and the Executive or its political arm cannot usurp the rights of the Judiciary. When an interim order is given to stay action in relation to the departure of a foreign national, the order has to be complied with, and not *manu militari* dump the person in a Police car to be taken to the airport for deportation.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Of course, it is relevant! This goes...

Mr Speaker: Is that a point of order?

The Prime Minister: Yes, a point of order. What does this issue have to do with the Bill that we are debating today? It is totally out of context. He is talking about a case where somebody has been deported. What does this have to do with the Bill? Which section of the Bill you are talking about?

Dr. Boolell: This is relevant because of the symbol.

The Prime Minister: What symbol?

Dr. Boolell: We are talking of a country which has to send the right signals and has to be the symbol of democracy, of national unity!

Mr Speaker: Okay!

Dr. Boolell: You went against...

Mr Speaker: You made your point?

Dr. Boolell: All right.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! You made your point. The Prime Minister made his point. Let me judge! I will come to that. For the time being, you continue!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. That is a good symbol, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will draw attention to areas of concern and the law, unfortunately, is an ass and needs to be amended constantly. Let me come to the specific provision of this Bill, section 12(1)(b), as hon. Mohamed has stated. It is controversial and it is shocking. The offence has no certainty and he was right to point out: no sanity, there is no objectivity. Now, it was a legitimate question that was put by hon. Mohamed in relation to the salutation to the Motherland. It means that if you sing a lyric, if the pitch is not appropriate, if the pitch is too high or too low, you may land into trouble.

The Bill makes provision for offences but should not be oppressive with excessive increase in fines. Mr Speaker, Sir, do not let me say that the application of the law will hit at the innocent who makes his own flag at home. Article 13(2) spares minor subject that he has acted in

good faith. Even like the salutation to the Motherland, we need to define the good faith. I agree that counterfeiting of National Symbols and the Seal of Mauritius is indeed a serious offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the Prime Minister to apprise the House whether a National Committee has been set up on National Symbols to advise Government or the President who may designate a National Symbol. But I concur with what has been stated earlier that section 15 remains controversial despite amendments circulated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to contain many other controversial issues, I am not saying that we have to copy what India is doing, but India has a Code of Conduct, and this is an issue that has to be taken by Government to ensure that controversial matters are taken on-board. We have, indeed, a legal and moral obligation to protect the intellectual property right of our sovereign democratic State. None other than the State of Mauritius has ownership, of course, of copyright on the National Anthem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill consolidates the relevant provisions of the law. Section 181A of the Criminal Code and the Copyright Act, which means that there should be no departure from the colour code of our National Flag.

And the message was conveyed, loud and clear, to all users, especially to the private sector and to those enterprises which manufacture the flags and the banderols; they have to be exhibited on national day or for any international sports or cultural event.

Mr Speaker, Sir, history would recall – and I tend to agree on that particular manner with what was stated by hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah – that shortly after independence, the country, as an independent sovereign State, went through a temporary, painful and difficult period. It took some time before everybody would stand still for the National Anthem or when the national flag was raised. Time is indeed a healing factor. It was then and still is. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the Father of the nation, was the healer; the title, of course, was not thrust upon him; he deservedly earned it, and everybody rallied as one people, as one nation.

We are proud of our citizenship, of our belonging to an independent nation. The relevance and importance of a rainbow nation sinks in its hands over the heart for the love of motherland. And there is nothing more pleasant to the ears and to the eyes than when the National Anthem is sung and the flag is waved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have taken our lawful place amongst the community of independent States and now a destination which is so often cited as an example of peaceful coexistence and democracy. It should not be undermined. We display our symbols with pride. Mauritius reaps the praises for its national symbols. The symbols give us our identity and cultural moorings. It is imperative that all regional and international organisations are submitted the national symbols as they are.

Mr Speaker, Sir, very often, wrong display has been the subject of annoyance and diplomatic irritancy; there is nothing more upsetting when the wrong national anthem is played and the flag is raised upside down or when it should be horizontally, it is made to be vertically.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to penalties. The penalties provided are too excessive. True it is that penalties do act as a deterrent; however, the focus should not only be on deterrence but also on education, so as to educate people on the importance and significance of national symbols of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have noticed that since COVID, all legislations passed during COVID have a Machiavellian touch with the increase in fines, and this is oppressing to people by increasing penalties. I appeal to Government to stop passing laws against the people of this country with those innumerable penalties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the symbolic meaning of the colours of the national flag – and this has been highlighted by hon. Dhunoo – under the Second Schedule of the Bill has been set out too limitatively and it may be a bar to creativity. This is even more important when taking into account that very often the colours are associated with a number of significant historical or current events. Mr Speaker, Sir, Section 11 of the Bill provides the circumstances under which the national symbols may be insulted. In fact, in India, there is a specific legislation in relation to insult to the National Anthem Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, provisions should have been made for circumstances under which the national flag can be put on half-mast.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, I have not perambulated, I have come to specific clauses of the Bill. I have spoken and I hope Government will take onboard some of the valuable suggestions the Opposition has made, but, at the same time, let me remind the Government: a symbol carries more power than any other commodity, than any other issue, than any other currency, than any other matter which is relevant to politics or to democracy. As I have said, I have seen a nation rise and fall on symbols. I have seen individuals nose-diving in relation to symbol. That is why I

say: do not send the wrong signals. The deportation of a foreign national in relation to an interim order issued by the Court was the wrong signal sent by this Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

(7.40 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was very important to bring this piece of legislation before the House; we all agree on this. We appreciate the wise words of the previous speaker except for that last comment. But when we talk of a country, when we consider the status of a country, we consider the status of a State, we automatically think of national flags, seals, anthems and national symbols; these are attributes of states and statehood. When we consider the status of states, of countries in international law, it is generally accepted that states have three main attributes -

- (i) a population;
- (ii) a Government, and
- (iii) a territory.

Why am I talking about the three attributes of statehood is because of the importance of our territory. This is the very basis of a state - to have a defined territory. And that is generally accepted and also recognised in international law. And it is important, once again, because it has been done in the past but it is important once again, to highlight that it is this Government which took territorial integrity so importantly that we have taken the dispute we have had over 50 years with the UK to the International Court of Justice, with the result that we all know.

It is this Government which is defending the territorial integrity of Mauritius. And when we look at the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill – it is important to highlight this; and we see the name of the mover of the Bill, P.K. Jugnauth, Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity. It is important for this House to reflect on this: territorial integrity. Has this portfolio ever existed before, in the history of our country? Never before; it is this Prime Minister who

took the portfolio of territorial integrity and put it straight, clear, black and white, that he will take the challenge and he is living up to the challenge.

It is with this background that this Bill comes because when we defend our territorial integrity, we defend our country; we need to defend the symbols of our country.

If we take the example of the national flower, *Trochetia Boutoniana*; it was declared the national flower and it is generally accepted by the population way back since March 1992, but has there been legal protection afforded? No! When we look at the national flag, all the arms, the seal, is there sufficient legal protection? Unfortunately, not! It is in this context that this Bill is affording now strong legal footing and strong penalties in case of violation of the prohibitions when it comes to our national flag, arms of Mauritius, the anthem and other national symbols and it is important therefore to remember that this goes along the lines of our nation, our country and our territorial integrity.

It is good that by and large there is consensus, except *il y a probablement eu une seule voix discordante*. But the less I talk about that, the better. You know there is this Chinese proverb –

« *Quand le sage pointe vers la lune, l'abrutit regarde le doigt.* »

(Interruptions)

Let us think as a nation, let us focus in these difficult times. These are the words I want to say to those who want to listen to *la voix discordante*.

When we look at clause 12, whatever can be said about it, what we want to prohibit in simple language is deliberate disrespect. Who in this country will tolerate a deliberate disrespect to our national anthem, to our national flag, to our symbols of this country? Who in this country will tolerate that? Of course, we have to provide for strong penalties and this is what we are doing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not want to say more on that. Let me, before concluding, put on record the collaboration with our partners concerning the Mauritius Kestrel project. This Bill provides this opportunity to put on record the longstanding collaboration on the Mauritius Kestrel project Government of Mauritius has had, successive Governments, with our partners

both locally and internationally. This will explain why Government has chosen the Mauritius Kestrel as the national bird.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco Punctatus*) is the last remaining bird of prey endemic to Mauritius. It was once the rarest – not one of the rarest, the rarest - raptor in the world with only four individuals left in the wild and that was in 1974. The Mauritius Kestrel was driven to near extinction by deforestation, habitat degradation, introduced mammalian predators, use of pesticides etc. In the 1980s, Government of Mauritius together with its partners, namely the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust took up the challenge to protect the Mauritius Kestrel and this is indeed a success story. One of the greatest conservation success stories not only in Mauritius but also in the world. So much that in the mid-1990s the population size of the Kestrel had reached 600 birds in the southwest of Mauritius around the Black River Gorges National Park and also in the Bambous mountain regions in the east of the island.

It is important to note that around 2013, however, a decline in population was noted, a decline down to about 350 to 400 birds. One of the major factors noted in the decline was a low productivity in the wild in the Kestrel population of Black River Gorges region. And in order to restore the population of Kestrel in that region, the National Parks and Conservation Service of my Ministry, in collaboration with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, once again and the international partner, namely Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Chester Zoo and the Zoological Society of London developed the Mauritius Kestrel Recovery Project.

Mauritius Kestrel Recovery Project aimed at restoring the population in the Black River Gorges and enhance the population in the south by releasing captive reared birds. These captive reared birds are released in the wild from installed nest boxes. The project aims to release between 10 to 15 hand reared Mauritius Kestrels in the Black River Gorges to reinforce the existing population. From December 2021 up to March 2022, birds have been released, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Kestrel, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an emblematic bird known for its independence, its strength, its survivorship and its resilience. It is a true representation of the Mauritian nation, hence the choice of the Mauritius Kestrel as the national bird of Mauritius. We have to thank all those who have helped in the Mauritius Kestrel Recovery Project.

I thank the hon. Prime Minister for bringing the Bill to the House. There will in future, we never know, be designation of other symbols and the Bill contemplates that there will be designation of national symbols but it is important to highlight that in view of the importance of designation of a national symbol, this Bill provides that it is for the President to designate a national symbol by an order, that is number one and secondly, there should be a resolution of approval by the House on a designation of a national symbol. It is important for me to highlight that in Clause 10 subsection 1.

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

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(7.53 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me thank all the hon. Members from both sides of the House who have intervened in the debate on this highly significant Bill which I have presented today.

I am glad to note that hon. Members from both sides of the House have expressed their support for this Bill which aims at consolidating the legislative framework for regulating our national symbols.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill aims, first of all, at bringing into limelight our national symbols which could otherwise go into oblivion. Secondly, it brings cohesion amongst our people who may identify with pride their intrinsic patrimony. I have also taken good note of some of the comments and the observations, and contributions made by hon. Members.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure that Members of the House will agree with me that such a piece of legislation was long overdue. Therefore, the Bill which is before the House tonight has been drafted with a view to consolidating the laws with regard to the national symbols of Mauritius such as the Arms of Mauritius, the National Flag of Mauritius, and the Seal of Mauritius. It also gives an opportunity to provide a legal framework to the National Anthem of Mauritius, the National Flower of Mauritius, the *Trochetia boutoniana*, and, of course, the Kestrel bird, *Falco punctatus*, as the National Bird of Mauritius. The Bill provides for better protection and the use of our national symbols, and also provides penalties for offences committed under this Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am satisfied that hon. Members are agreeable that there was a real need to regulate on the use of our National Symbols, which represent our unique identity as a nation.

I shall again refer to this Government's commitment towards the nation as it was this Government which brought, for the first time in the history of Mauritius, a law that would protect our National Flag, that is, the National Flag Act. The National Flag Act, which was debated in this august Assembly in 2015, had so far provided for the protection of the National Flag by regulating its use. And hon. Members will recall that, prior to the enactment of the law, there were several cases of disrespect to our National Flag which were reported and, in fact, no legal action could be initiated in these cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no such legal framework to regulate the use of other national symbols of Mauritius such as the National Anthem, the National Flower as well as the Kestrel that was declared as the National Bird on 12 March 2022. Hence, with a view to consolidating the use of the national symbols of Mauritius, this Government has come up with this Bill which is in front of the House today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, due care has been taken for the preparation of this Bill by the Attorney General's Office and same was done, I must say, in consultation with all the Ministries and Departments concerned, including the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Mauritius Police Force, the Mauritius Standards Bureau and *Conservatoire National de Musique François Mitterrand*, and I would like to seize this opportunity to convey my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed in the preparation of this Bill. As I have stated earlier, the Mauritius Police Band has been a key partner in the orchestration of the National Anthem being given that the National Anthem was composed by late Mr Philippe Gentil, former Band Inspector at the Mauritius Police Force. A copy of the manuscript musical score duly signed by the composer has been safely preserved. However, so far, there was no official written music together with the lyrics available within the Police Band. The lyrics and melody line have now been written within each movable note through the National Anthem showing how to sing the Motherland.

Mr Speaker, Sir, every Mauritian who forms part of our *nation arc-en-ciel* should be fully aware of the value and importance which the national symbols

represent for our country. The enactment of this Bill will ensure perennity of the symbols and command the respect which these symbols deserve from every citizen of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say I have heard criticism, as usual, from one Member of the Opposition as to why this legislation regarding the National Anthem is coming after half a century following our independence. Hon. Mohamed has questioned the validity of the new sub-clause 2 under clause 12 with regard to the playing and singing of the National Anthem. I would like to remind the hon. Member, who is not here today, unfortunately, to listen to the reply to his criticism, of the Judgment of the Supreme Court of India, more specifically, in the case of *Chouksey vs Union Of India* wherein the Court made the following comment, and I quote –

“It is not possible to give an exhaustive list of occasions on which the singing (as distinct from playing) of the Anthem can be permitted. But there is no objection to the singing of the Anthem accompanied by mass singing so long as it is done with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland and proper decorum is maintained.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated by hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry, we, as a nation, need to safeguard the sanctity of our National Flag and symbols if we want to inculcate the culture of respect to the nation and the sense of patriotism in our youth. The National Flag is also the unique representation around which a nation stands united.

Moreover, as I have already stated, the legislation will ensure that we have a standard official melody line with lyrics while providing for variations in pitch and arrangements, subject to the official melody line with lyrics being respected.

I have taken good note also of the comments made by hon. Lobine who has rightly stated the importance that national symbols play in cementing national unity and upholding the sovereignty of a nation. I have also noted that most Members are agreeable that national symbols should rise above party politics. These positive affirmations are a departure from the negative statements made by hon. Mohamed as regards the value that national symbols represent to a nation. And let me say one thing though I do not really want to reply to him, but he speaks in this Assembly as if he is the champion of national unity. I need only to do one thing - *de rafraîchir sa mémoire de ce qu'il avait dit pendant la campagne électorale de 2019 dans sa circonscription*. *Je prends* only one example of what he has been saying; the rubbish he has been saying about *Bakr Eid*. That is only what I am going say and I am sure he will know, and there are other

Members in this House also who will recall the communal campaign that he has been carrying on in the Constituency.

An hon. Member: *Qurbani!*

The Prime Minister: *Qurbani*, well! In fact, time has proved that what he was saying was just for politics and for trying to gain political mileage and gaining votes, making all sorts of allegations. Anyway, on such a Bill, I am not going to speak lengthily on what he has been saying.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, as a nation, are proud of our national symbols and this legal framework will remain as a legacy to future generations.

Therefore, I would like, once again, to thank all the hon. Members who have participated in the debate and I commend the Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

Committee Stage

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

**THE NATIONAL FLAG, ARMS OF MAURITIUS, NATIONAL ANTHEM AND OTHER
NATIONAL SYMBOLS OF MAURITIUS BILL**

(No. I of 2022)

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 (National Anthem of Mauritius)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 6 in accordance with the following –

“(a) in clause 6, by deleting subclause (2) and replacing it by the following subclause

–

(2) (a) The lyrics of the National Anthem shall be as described in Part I of the Third Schedule.

(b) The music of the National Anthem shall be as described in Part II of the Third Schedule.

(c) The melody of the National Anthem shall be as described in Part III of the Third Schedule.”

Amendment agreed to.

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

Clauses 7 and 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (National Bird of Mauritius)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 9 –
“(b) in clause 9, by deleting the words “(*Falcao punctatus*)” and replacing them by the words “(*Falco punctatus*)”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 10 and 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (Prohibition from altering Arms of Mauritius, National Flag, National Anthem and Seal of Mauritius)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 12–

“(c) in clause 12 –

(i) in subclause (1)(b), by deleting the word “alter” and replacing it by the words “subject to subsection (2), alter”;

- (ii) by inserting, after subclause (1), the following new subclause, the existing subclause (2) being renumbered as subclause (3) –

(2) It shall not be an offence where a person plays or sings the National Anthem, other than as prescribed under this Act, so long as it is done with due respect as a salutation to the Motherland.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 and 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15 (Prohibition from improper use of Arms of Mauritius, National Flag and National Anthem).

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 15

–

“(d) in clause 15, in subclause (1) –

- (i) by deleting paragraph (a) and replacing it by the following paragraph –

(a) in connection with any business, trade, calling, advertising or any professional or public activity, make use of the Arms of Mauritius or any image thereof;

- (ii) by inserting, after paragraph (a), the following new paragraph, the existing paragraph (b) being relettered as paragraph (c) –

(b) in connection with any business, trade, calling or advertising, make use of the National Flag or the National Anthem, or any image thereof; or”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 16 and 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Repeal)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 18

—
“(e) in clause 18, in subclause (1), by deleting the figure “2016”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 19 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 20 (Saving provision)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 20

—
“(f) in clause 20, by deleting the figure “2016”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

First Schedule and Second Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Third Schedule

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for an amendment to Third Schedule as per the following amendment –

“(g) in the Third Schedule –

- (i) in Part II, in the heading, by deleting the words “AND MELODY”;
(ii) (ii) by adding the following new Part –

PART III – MELODY OF MOTHERLAND

$\text{♩} = 72$

Glo - o - o - ry to thee, mo-ther - land O mo-ther-land of

4

mine, sweet is thy beau - ty, sweet is thy fra - grance, a -

7

round thee we ga - ther, As one peo - ple, as

10

one na - tion in peace, jus - tice and li - ber - ty, be - lo -

13

ved coun - try may God_ bless thee for e - ver and e - ver.

Amendment agreed to.

Third Schedule, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, The National Flag, Arms of Mauritius, National Anthem and Other National Symbols Of Mauritius Bill (No. 1 of 2022) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 10 May 2022 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Adjournment Matters! Please start!

MATTERS RAISED

(8.11 p.m.)

ROUTE MENAGERIE, CASSIS – BUS STOP FACILITY

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Pour ma requête de ce soir que j'adresse au ministre des Transports terrestres, je me fais le port-parole des habitants de Cassis et plus particulièrement ceux qui résident le long ou dans les alentours de la route Menagerie et qui utilisent la ligne de bus entre Résidence Vallijee et Plaine Verte en passant par la route côtière de Bain des Dames et le Caudan.

M. le président, entre l'arrêt de bus se trouvant à proximité de l'église Saint-Sacrement à Cassis et l'arrêt de Bain des Dames se trouve un seul arrêt de bus, quelque peu isolé sur la route Menagerie aux abords de la centrale de Fort Victoria. Au delà des horaires relativement irréguliers des bus, les habitants m'ont surtout prié de faire la demande pour l'aménagement d'un abris bus à l'endroit de cet arrêt isolé pour que l'attente de bus se fasse dans les meilleures conditions pour les usagers des transports en commun. Puis-je ainsi demander au ministre de prêter une écoute attentive et active à cette requête ? Merci pour les habitants de Cassis.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I will certainly attend to the request of the hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the coming days, I will get in touch with the authorities concerned; the NLTA and the TMRSU.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(08.13 p.m.)

POSTE DE FLACQ - TAXI FARES INCREASE

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request tonight is addressed to hon. Alan Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. It concerns the increase in the taxi fares. The village of Poste de Flacq, which is found in my Constituency, has been hit by such an increase, and this is affecting the inhabitants as some of them have to pay Rs30 for a trip of barely 2kms. As a caring Minister of this caring Government, may I request that a few 15-seater NTC buses are put in that village which can serve the trip Poste de Flacq to Central Flacq at a reasonable price? As he said himself, the purpose of those 15-seater buses is to serve social routes so as to minimise costs and maximise the efficiency. Thank you.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am not a caring Speaker.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, you are not a caring Speaker.

(Interruptions)

I will certainly look into the request of the hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, the 16-seaters of the NTC are proving to be very popular. Many of my colleagues, Members of this House, have asked if they can be utilised in their different Constituencies. But, of course, we have certain constraints. I have taken good note of the hon. Member's request and I will consult the NTC by tomorrow.

(8.14 p.m.)

JEAN FRANÇOIS GOWIN – GUNSHOT INJURY – TREATMENT ABROAD

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse à l'honorable ministre de la Santé et concerne le cas de Jean François Gowin qui a été blessé par balle lors des incidents à Barkly vendredi dernier. Il est actuellement en soin intensif et sa famille est angoissée à l'effet que pour le moment elle n'a aucune indication précise si la balle pourra être extraite de sa gorge par les médecins ici à Maurice ou s'il devra se déplacer à l'étranger pour que cela puisse se faire vu la gravité de sa blessure. Mes collègues, l'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan, l'honorable Karen Foo Kune-Bacha et moi-même faisons un pressant appel au ministre de la Santé afin que Jean François Gowin puisse recevoir les meilleurs soins possible et que la meilleur décision soit prise pour faciliter son rétablissement. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reassure the Member and the House, that this patient, since he has been admitted in the hospital, he is being properly taken care of. Be it the diagnosis, the test that has been done, the monitoring and the follow-up, it is being done by a group of doctors, a multidisciplinary team and there is a daily exchange of information between the parents of the patient and the doctors. Now, the outcome, we will stand guided by the doctors, their advice and obviously, any intervention that would not be able to be done in Mauritius, we will definitely make provision for this patient. So, again, let me reassure the House that this patient is being properly taken care of in the hospital.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(8.16 p.m.)

PONT FER, PHOENIX – UNDERGROUND BYPASS TUNNEL – BAD STATE

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to hon. Hurreeram, Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. Baahubali! It concerns the underground bypass tunnel located at Pont Fer, Phoenix which is used by the inhabitants to relay Valentina to Phoenix and it is in a deplorable state, dirty, unsafe, with poor lighting. If the hon. Minister could kindly look into the matter and talk to the authorities under the aegis of his Ministry for the infrastructure to be improved, basically, or change the lights over there. It is unsafe.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I thank the hon. Member for having given me advance notice. And currently, we are doing the underground bypass near Sodnac, near Hillcrest, where the new *autopont* has just been done. And I thank the hon. Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister for giving us the fund. We want to put funds here also but I hope your leader won't mind; we are spending more money. So, we will definitely look into it, but this is on the programme for us to renovate.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(8.18 p.m.)

UPPER CRÈVE COEUR ROAD – RESURFACING

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My adjournment matter is addressed to the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, hon. Hurreeram. The inhabitants of upper Crève Coeur have been complaining about the lateness in restoring the upper Crève Coeur road causing inconvenience to the inhabitants. And as a caring Minister, I am sure you will use your good office to bring a solution to those inhabitants and I shall be grateful if you could come there for a site visit as well. Thank you, very much.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I again thank the hon. Member for having given me advance notice. In fact, yes, the road is in a very bad state; there has been pipe laying going on and it has not been completed yet. We have the funds required to resurface, we are pressuring the District Council to complete some snags there and once that is done, the resurfacing will be done quite

quickly; it is just a matter of weeks. And I thank the hon. Member for giving us all the support in the constituency together with our colleague, hon. Joe Lesjongard, for their help in having the popular support in that region. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

***CITE DEBARCADERE, POINTES AUX SABLES - FOSTER CARE - CHILD - TARDY
DECLARATION***

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable *Attorney General* et l'honorable ministre du Genre et du bien-être de la famille et concerne un problème de *tardy declaration* dans le cas spécifique d'une enfant d'une dizaine d'années en *foster care* confiée à une famille de la Cité Débarcadère à Pointes aux Sables. La famille a accueilli deux enfants, un frère et sa sœur. Le garçon est déclaré officiellement à l'état civil alors que la fille ne l'est pas. La famille a de grand projets pour les enfants mais se heurte à des obstacles administratifs car la fillette n'a pas d'acte de naissance. J'en ai déjà parlé à la ministre et avant elle, à l'officier en charge du dossier à son ministère plusieurs semaines auparavant. Celui-ci m'avait assuré que le nécessaire allait être fait mais jusqu'ici rien n'a été fait. Je fais ici un pressant appel pour que diligence soit faite et que l'enfant soit déclaré à l'état civil et ne rate pas des opportunités à venir. Merci.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to the hon. Member. Yes, indeed she did draw my attention to this particular case and I can reassure her and the House that this case is being looked after. As you can appreciate, all the steps in the process of *tardy declaration* does not necessarily sit entirely at the level of only my Ministry, it goes to different Ministries: the Attorney General's Office, the Social Security, even the Ministry of Health is involved in that. But this is a case that, I can reassure the House, is being taken care of.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(8.21 p.m.)

DUBREUIL & MIDLANDS – 60+ SMALL PLANTERS - LEASES - RENEWAL

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My adjournment matter is addressed to hon. Maneesh Gobin, Attorney General and Minister

of Agro-Industry and Food Security. It concerns small planters, as described by the Small Farmers Welfare Fund Act, Planters cultivating a minimum of 10 perches and a maximum of 25 *arpents*. As you are aware, there are around 12,000 small planters in Mauritius. The Deputy Prime Minister and I have received representations from the small planters of Dubreuil and Midlands and there are about 300 planters. And as you know, they are an ageing population and most of these small planters have land on lease from the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security. As per the policy of the Ministry, the small planters' lease agreements are not being renewed as they are above 60 years. With the COVID pandemic, we need to continue to produce locally and I am making an appeal to the Minister if he could look into the matter so that not only small planters from Dubreuil and Midlands, but all small planters around the island could have their lease agreement renewed so that we can produce locally.

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising this matter. I also thank the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for raising this matter. The matter arose, I remember very clearly, some weeks back during a meeting with stakeholders at Dubreuil. I wish to reassure the hon. Member and the House that there is no set policy for automatic cancellation of lease after a certain age; it is on a case to case basis, I insist on that. Some lessees, beyond a certain age, for obvious reasons, find it difficult to continue toiling the land for health reasons, for a number of reasons. For those who can no longer carry on with their agricultural activities on land leased, we are considering it on a case to case basis either to relinquish the lease if they wish to or, on application, a transfer to the next of kin. This is being considered on a case to case basis. I know there have been some persons going around and spreading rumours that the Ministry will be cancelling leases as from a certain age. This is certainly not going to happen automatically. Cases will be examined on a case to case basis based on application either to transfer to the next of kin or to continue if they feel capable of continuing. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

(8.24 p.m.)

CLOPIDOGREL, HEART MEDICINE - PUBLIC HOSPITALS - AVAILABILITY

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): The issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and it is in relation to

an acute shortage of a particular medicine which is used for heart treatment in our public hospitals which is called Clopidogrel which is used to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Mr Speaker, Sir, not everybody has the means to buy this medicine in private pharmacies as it is costly. Therefore, as a caring MP, I am making an appeal to the hon. Minister to use his good office so as to make this medicine available as soon as possible. Thank you.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, as a caring Minister, this medication is used for patients suffering from cardiac problems and the supplier who is supposed to deliver the medication three months before has made several requests for delay supplies. So, the Ministry is having recourse to different sources to procure this medication and now I have been informed that within one week this medication will be available in all the hospital services.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(8.25 p.m.)

ROYAL ROAD, ANSE LA RAIE – BUS SHELTER – RESTORATION

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. My attention has been drawn to the fact that the bus shelter along Royal Road, Anse La Raie is in a deplorable condition. I would kindly request the hon. Minister to do the needful for it to be restored and reinstated for the security and safety of all those who use the bus shelter. Thank you.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I have taken good note, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think I did answer to the request made by a hon. Member last week or the week before. The bus shelters that we have in the country are under the control of either the TMRSU or sometimes under the control of private parties, private promoters. So, I will take up the matter with the TMRSU tomorrow, Mr Speaker, Sir, and do the needful if this bus stop is under the control of the TMRSU.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

(8.26 p.m.)

ROUTES 9 & 252 - MAHEBOURG TO CUREPIPE – COMPLAINTS

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to a much solicited Minister tonight, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Alan Ganoo. Yet again, bus passengers travelling on routes 9 and 252, that is Mahebourg to Curepipe and vice versa are not being appropriately serviced. I have repeating complaints, Mr Speaker, Sir, from passengers that the timetable for bus operators from Curepipe to Mahebourg is not being adhered to nor adequately serviced from 5.30 a.m. until up to 8 a.m. As a result, passengers have to spend long hours waiting on the bus stop or simply late at work. I would kindly request the Minister to look into the matter for a timely solution. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue, Mr Speaker, Sir. He did give me prior notice. I must say, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do have some problems with owners of private buses and I will certainly inform the NLTA of the complaint raised by the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

(8.27 p.m.)

GRANNUM, SADALLY, L'OISEAU & MANGALKHAN – ADDITIONAL BUS STOP

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre des Infrastructures, des Transports terrestres. Les habitants de Grannum, Sadally, l'Oiseau et Mangalkhan éprouvent des difficultés pour se rendre dans le centre de Vacoas, surtout en temps de pluie. J'aimerais lui demander de bien vouloir faire le nécessaire afin qu'un arrêt de bus soit rajouté sur Allée Brillant mais plutôt du côté de Sadally comme demandé par les habitants et si je peux me permettre j'aimerais lui proposer que la ligne de bus 81 soit rallongée pour aller jusqu'au bout de l'Allée Brillant au lieu de s'arrêter juste au niveau du club hippique ou alors qu'on fasse disposition pour des mini vans de 16 places de la CNT afin qu'ils puissent rejoindre le centre de Vacoas. Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member for

raising this issue. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken good note of the request she has made and I will do the needful.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(8.28 p.m.)

OXFORD STREET – ROAD - REINSTATED

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): My request is addressed to the hon. Minister Hurreeram in relation to a road on the boundaries where Ollier Street is. The place is known as Oxford lane, that road needs to be reinstated and it has been in a deplorable situation since a long time. I appeal to the Minister to look into it.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): This is on the list of PPS Tania Diolle, she is looking into it. She had a site visit there and she is doing the needful.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

(8.29 p.m.)

CUREPIPE ROAD JUNCTION – METRO EXPRESS – CONNECTION

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): As you are giving me the opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister of Light Rail, we have a big issue on the Metro Express at Curepipe road where the junction has been cut. I think there was a programme on the radio and the Metro Express Director General went there on a site visit. If you could look into the matter to see to it that they have good connection at the level of Curepipe road.

An hon. Member: *Zot mem zone dir pa fer sa !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha : Non !

(Interruptions)

Non, non, non!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: So would the Minister reply?

(Interruptions)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken good note of the request made by the hon. Member and I will certainly look into the request.

Mr Speaker: Let us call it a day.

At 8.31 p.m., the Assembly, was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 10 May 2022 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
CITIZEN ADVICE BUREAU, PLAINE MAGNIEN - QUARANTINE ACT -
BREACH OF REGULATIONS

(No. B/437) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the reported cases for breach of regulations made under Quarantine Act at the Citizen Advice Bureau of Plaine Magnien on 06 April 2022 during a meeting attended by two Honourable Ministers, another Member of the Parliament, several public officials and members of the press, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiries initiated thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

MR P. M., SENIOR ADVISOR - BOARDS - OCTOBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022

(No. B/439) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Mr P. M., Senior Advisor attached to his Office, he will state, since October 2021 to date, the number of Boards of public bodies and/or State-owned companies on which he is serving, indicating in each case the –

- (a) nomination date, and
- (b) monthly remuneration drawn.

(Withdrawn)

MR P. M. - CHAIRPERSON - AIRPORTS OF MAURITIUS

(No. B/440) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Mr P. M., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Airports of Mauritius Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) date of appointment thereof as Chairperson of the Board thereof, and
- (b) terms and conditions of appointment, including, the monthly remuneration drawn and, if he is entitled to an official car, indicating the type, date of purchase and total cost thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIUS BROADCASTING CORPORATION ACT - TELEVISION
LICENSE FEE - PROPOSED AMENDMENTS**

(No. B/441) 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 monthly television license fee of Rs150, he will state if consideration will be given for proposed amendments to be brought to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation Act to provide for the payment thereof to be optional and payable only by subscribers of the television channels thereof and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

MR S. K - DEATH - FINDINGS & STATEMENTS

(No. B/443) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the death of late Mr S. K. at Moka, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry carried out therein following the findings of the Magistrate of the District Court of Moka, indicating the number of statements recorded by the Central Crime Investigation Division, including if Mr Y. S. has been interrogated.

(Withdrawn)

**VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES - THEFT & VIOLENCE - SAFETY & SECURITY
MEASURES**

(No. B/444) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Vallée des Prêtres, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the safety and security measures being envisaged following the recent reported cases of theft and violence thereat.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIUS BROADCASTING CORPORATION - ONG AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION - CORRESPONDENCES**

(No. B/446) 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 Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will state if he has taken cognizance of the correspondences addressed to his Office by the *ONG Affirmative Action* on 20 January and 10 February 2022, respectively, and, if so, indicate the actions taken in relation thereto, if any.

(Withdrawn)

ELECTORAL LAWS - REVIEW

(No. B/450) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to electoral laws, he will state if he will consider appointing a consultative committee to look thereinto and make recommendations for the review of the –

- (a) powers of the Electoral Commissioner and Electoral Supervisory Commission;
- (b) manner in which –

- (i) members and Chairperson of the Electoral Supervisory Commission are appointed, and
- (ii) registration of electors are carried out, and
- (c) guidelines of how the Electoral Boundary Commission should carry out its function.

(Withdrawn)

NICOLAY BRIDGE - FOOTBRIDGE

(No. B/471) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of a footbridge on Nicolay Bridge, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

FEMALE WORKERS - COMPLAINTS - 2019 TO 26 APRIL 2022

(No. B/473) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the female workers, he will state the number of complaints received therefrom since 2019 to date by his Ministry for –

- (a) harassment;
- (b) discrimination, and
- (c) unequal remuneration for work of equal value.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION - ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

(No. B/474) 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, in regard to the Engineering Department of the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) since when the post of Chief Engineer is vacant, and
- (b) the name and qualifications of the Officer-in-Charge thereof, indicating if the internal auditor has reported any fraud on the sale of assets of the Corporation, namely, office furniture, against the said officer and, if so, if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**STATE & PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - SUBSTANCE ABUSE -
ARRESTS - JANUARY 2015 TO 26 APRIL 2022**

(No. B/476) 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 substance abuse in State and private secondary schools, she will state the number of students or staff having been arrested in relation thereto since January 2015 to date, indicating –

- (a) the number of cases in which disciplinary actions have been taken, and
- (b) if any of the said students and staff are undergoing medical treatment in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

RACING SEASON 2022 - GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY

(No. B/477) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the racing season 2022, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Horse Racing Division of the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if a letter of intent has been issued to the People's Turf PLC (PTC-PLC) for a license of Horse Racing Organizer and, if so, indicate the date of issue thereof, indicating the terms and conditions contained therein.

(Withdrawn)

FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE - RISK MANAGEMENT MEASURES

(No. B/478) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the six fire stations which are operating without valid Fire Certificates, as highlighted in the recent report of the Director of Audit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fire and Rescue Service, information as to if remedial measures have been initiated to implement a proper management system for fire risk management thereat.

(Withdrawn)

TERMINUS LALLMAN-UPPER CRÈVE - ROAD - UPGRADING

(No. B/480) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the upgrading of the main road at the level of terminus Lallman to Upper Crève Coeur, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CEB - GREEN ENERGY CO. LTD

(No. B/483) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Electricity Board (Green Energy) Co. Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if it is fully operational or has been scrapped.

(Withdrawn)

CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

(No. B/484) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Report, he will state if he will table copy thereof.

Reply: In our first Nationally Determined Contributions submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015, nine key adaptation sectors were identified, namely water, agriculture, tourism, coastal zone, fisheries and blue economy, infrastructure, biodiversity (both Terrestrial and Marine), Disaster Risk Reduction and Health. Climate change

being of a dynamic nature, there is as such a need to carry out vulnerability assessment regularly in all of these sectors with a view to identify adaptation measures to be implemented. This is a tedious, time consuming and costly exercise. For each sector and sub-sector, different methodologies are applied, requiring different expertise. In view of these constraints, it is very difficult to capture vulnerability assessment for all of these sectors and various sub-sectors under one programme or assistance. Hence, there is not yet one Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Report for the Republic of Mauritius.

Some projects comprise components of vulnerability assessments. Some of them have been completed; some are at implementation stage while others would start shortly.

In 2021, in the context of the review of the 2015 Nationally Determined Contributions, it was deemed important to revise the National Climate Change Adaptation Policy Framework of 2012. Accordingly, a desktop study of vulnerability assessments was carried out in August 2021 by a Consultant hired by the United Nations Development Programme under the Climate Promise Initiative. Based on the 2021 updated National Climate Change Adaptation Policy Framework, more detailed vulnerability assessments are being carried out to identify adaptation measures.

Under the Adap'Action Programme of the *Agence Française de Développement*, Mauritius has benefited from an assistance to the tune of Euro 2 m. in terms of capacity building, feasibility studies and impact assessment for climate change related projects. The project started in 2018 and comprises the following three components -

- (i) climate change vulnerability assessments for six sites, namely Port Louis (excluding the Port area), Flic-en-Flac and Tamarin, Bel Ombre and Riambel, Belle Mare, Péreybère and Grand Baie as well as Nouvelle France and recommendations on adaptation measures. Actions are underway;
- (ii) preliminary vulnerability assessment carried out for the formulation of a Land Drainage Master Plan, which is nearing completion, and
- (iii) formulation of a National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Policy Framework and Action Plan, which has been completed and is presently under implementation.

Furthermore, in 2018, following an assistance of the Green Climate Fund, through the Climate Technology Centre Network to the tune of USD 325,000, a Climate Change

Vulnerability and Adaptation Study for the Port of Port Louis was undertaken. The aim of this study, which was completed in January 2021, was to assess the Port's vulnerability with a view to enhance the Port's resilience to the adverse impacts of climate.

On 21 April 2022, a project proposal for the formulation of a National Adaptation Plan to the tune of USD 2.5 m. over a span of three years for four sectors, namely disaster risk reduction, infrastructure, coastal zone and fisheries has been submitted by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for onward transmission to the Green Climate Fund. The National Adaptation Plan would enable effective adaptation planning, leverage cross-sectoral investment opportunities for climate change adaptation and resilience and increase flow of adaptation finance for disproportionately vulnerable groups, namely local communities, fishers, farmers and at-risk infrastructure.

Additionally, in order to address the social and economic challenges of climate change on the maritime borders of Mauritius and Rodrigues, an in-depth study on the hazards of coastal erosion and marine submersion would be carried out with financial support from the *Agence Française de Développement* to the tune of Euro 1 m. This study would comprise assessment, analysis and mapping of hazards, coastal risks and exposed assets.

A project concept note for the health sector also has been finalised under the Green Climate Fund Readiness Support to the tune of USD 425,000. The assistance would comprise vulnerability assessment to develop contextual and evidence-based adaptation strategies and measures, including strengthening capacity of health care personnel to improve surveillance and early warning systems for climate-sensitive diseases.

The Climate Change Act 2020, which came into force in April 2021, recommends the formulation of a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan and all aforementioned climate change vulnerability assessments are the building blocks of this Strategy and Action Plan which has to be reviewed every five years.

MEDICAL FIELD – SPECIALISTS - VACANCIES

(No. B/485) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to vacancies in the medical field in his Ministry, he will state the existing number thereof for specialists per

specialty, indicating if same have been advertised and, if so, indicate when and where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

**NON-BIODEGRADABLE SINGLE USE PLASTIC PRODUCTS - BANNING -
MORATORIUM**

(No. B/486) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the extension of the moratorium for the banning of some non-biodegradable single use plastic products up to 14 January 2023, he will state the rationale thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON DRUGS - MEASURES

(No. B/487) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to dangerous drugs, he will state the additional measures taken by his Ministry for the control thereof in the wake of the recommendations of the latest Commission of Inquiry on Drugs.

(Withdrawn)

ANDERSON & LEES STREETS, CUREPIPE – DRAINS

(No. B/488) Mr K. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Anderson and Lees streets, in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the rehabilitation and construction of drains thereat.

(Withdrawn)

MOTORWAYS – ROUNDABOUTS – GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTIONS

(No. B/490) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the roundabouts on motorways, he will give the list thereof earmarked to be replaced by grade separated junctions, indicating in each case the –

- (a) scope of works;
- (b) estimated cost, and
- (c) expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: Government Programme 2020-2024 highlights Government's vision with respect to roundabouts. In fact, the policy is to construct more flyovers and bypasses with a view to eliminating roundabouts and junctions on Motorways, improve traffic flows thereat and enhance the security of all road users.

In this respect, the Road Development Authority (RDA) has prepared a plan for the replacement of the roundabouts and junctions in a phased manner. Several criteria are examined to determine the priorities for the replacement policy. These include the present capacity of the roundabouts compared to the number of road users travelling therethrough, safety of road users, availability of lands and costs, amongst others.

As the House is aware, some roundabouts have already been replaced, namely at Pont Fer, Jumbo and Dowlut at Phoenix. Others are under construction at Ebène, Quay D and Palmerstone at Vacoas.

In this financial year, action has been initiated for the replacement of roundabouts at Wooton, for which bids are currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board (CPB), and at Terre Rouge, for which the bidding document is presently being vetted at the CPB. Construction works for these two roundabouts will start during the next financial year. The RDA has, in addition to these two roundabouts, earmarked the construction of a flyover at Labourdonnais on Motorway M2 and proposals thereto are being made in the context of the forthcoming budgetary exercise.

With regard to parts (a), (b) and (c) of the question, I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the information in respect of the construction of the Wooton roundabout which is already at evaluation stage. For the others, except for the expected scope of works, for obvious reasons, the remaining information cannot be made available at this stage.

MAURITIUS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

(No. B/493) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to football, he will –

- (a) state if his Ministry has been officially informed by the Mauritius Football Association (MFA) that the 2021-22 season has been cancelled and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (b) obtain from the MFA, information as to when all national leagues, including the women league, for 2022-23 season will start, indicating the terms and conditions thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**PORT LOUIS MUNICIPAL CITY COUNCIL -
TRADE FEES – ATTORNEYS & BARRISTERS**

(No. B/494) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the trade fees imposable on attorneys-at-law and barristers-at-law by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the City Council, information as to when was decision therefor taken, indicating –

- (a) the rationale thereof;
- (b) if prior consultations were carried out with the Mauritius Law Society and the Mauritius Bar Association, respectively, and
- (c) the starting date of implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

ROAD DECONGESTION PROGRAMME - WOOTON ROUNDABOUT

(No. B/495) Mr K. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether in regard to the Road Decongestion Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to if the Wooton Roundabout is being considered thereunder.

(Withdrawn)

**BASIC INVALIDITY PENSIONS – APPLICATIONS – JULY 2021 TO APRIL
2022**

(No. B/496) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Basic Invalidity Pensions, she will state the number of applications received for the granting thereof, since July 2021 to date, including the number thereof received from persons suffering from physical and/or mental disability, indicating the number thereof benefitting thereunder.

(Withdrawn)

**PAMPLEMOUSSES DISTRICT COUNCIL - CAMP LABOUE FOOTBALL
PITCH PROJECT**

(No. B/497) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Camp Laboue Football Pitch Project, he will state where matters stand as to the vesting of land in the District Council of Pamplemousses for the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

OVERSEAS TREATMENT SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES - FUNDS

(No. B/498) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Overseas Treatment Scheme, he will state the number of patients having benefitted thereunder since December 2021 to date, indicating the amount of funds disbursed.

(Withdrawn)

CEB - ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION - HEAVY FUEL OIL & COAL

(No. B/499) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to electricity production, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the quantity of heavy fuel oil and coal utilised by the CEB and the Independent Power Producers on a yearly basis over the past seven years.

(Withdrawn)

MEDICINES - PARALLEL IMPORTS - AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

(No. B/500) 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 medicines, he will state when his Ministry sent the request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade for amendments to be brought to the existing legislation to authorise parallel imports thereof, indicating the contents of the said letter and table copy thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SOIL STABILISATION WORKS - B104, CHAMAREL - CASE NOYALE

(No. B/502) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to soil stabilisation works currently ongoing along road B104, Chamarel - Case Noyale, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

GASTROENTERITIS - CASES & CONTRAVENTIONS

(No. B/503) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to gastroenteritis, he will state the number of registered cases thereof attributed to food poisoning due to food mishandling and storage and environmental causes, respectively, since January 2022 to date, indicating the number of contraventions booked in each case.

Reply: As the House will be aware, gastroenteritis is an intestinal infection that causes signs and symptoms such as diarrhoea, stomach cramps, nausea or vomiting, and sometimes fever.

The most common way to develop gastroenteritis is through contact with an infected person or by consuming contaminated food or water.

Prevention is the key. The public is regularly sensitised on the importance of avoiding food and water that may be contaminated and to take precautionary measures to prevent the likelihood of infection such as -

- preserve all food items in the refrigerator at the right temperature;

- to avoid keeping food items in open areas at room temperature for long periods of time;
- regular and thorough washing of hands;
- properly wash fruits and vegetables before preparation and use;
- avoid raw or undercooked food;
- avoid close contact with infected persons;
- regular disinfection of surfaces
- boil tap water for minimum 10 minutes before drinking, and
- avoid the practice of thawing and refreezing of food items.

These precautions are regularly disseminated to the public at large, but especially after episodes of heavy rainfall and/or in the event there is an increase in the number of cases as reported by the health surveillance system put in place for different pathologies by the Public Health Unit of my Ministry.

I am informed that since January 2022 till 31 March 2022, a total of 15,068 cases of food poisoning has been reported as follows -

SN	Institution	Number
1.	Regional Hospitals	5,383
2.	Primary Health Care Centres	9,685
TOTAL		15,068

I am, further, informed that since January 2022 to date, 101 contraventions have been issued by the Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate of my Ministry under the Food Act and Food Regulations 1999.

COVID-19 – DELTA &OMICRON VARIANT – SEQUENCING

(No. B/506) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state –

- (a) the number of positive Delta variant and Omnicron variant cases recorded in public and private medical institutions on a monthly basis since 01 October 2021 to date, indicating the number of the said patients having passed away after having contracted same, and
- (b) if sequential studies are being carried out on every positive case admitted in public or private hospital with a view to identifying current or emerging new subtypes.

Reply: As the House is aware, since the detection of COVID-19 variants in Mauritius, the Central Health Laboratory of my Ministry has been carrying out sequencing on positive samples and the results thereof have always been communicated to members of the public in an open and transparent manner.

In reply to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that based upon the guidelines of the World Health Organisation, a sequencing sampling strategy has been established. Accordingly, positive PCR samples from both public and private health institutions are sequenced at the Central Health Laboratory. I am informed that since 01 October 2021 to date, 502 Delta variant cases and 991 Omnicron variant cases were detected.

On the other hand, I am informed that only the Omnicron variant B1 was detected from sequencing carried out on samples taken from COVID-19 positive patients of Rodrigues.

I, further, wish to point out that since February 2022 to date, no Delta variant has been detected from sequencing carried out.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly a copy of the results of sequencing since October 2021 to date.

Sequencing, everywhere in the world, is not intended to know the individual status of each patient with respect to variants. It is done, for public health purposes, to monitor the presence of variants in a given territory and participate in global surveillance, thanks to the provision, on a common platform, GISAID, of the results of each country, including Mauritius.

Thus, following World Health Organisation recommendations, 2% of the Mauritian population positive for SARS-CoV-2 is tested. The people tested are chosen according to a representative panel of infected patients. The choices are made according to several criteria, including fair geographical distribution, age and clinical severity. Thus, it is not recommended by the World Health Organisation to test all serious patients and all those who have died.

Mauritius follows international standards in this area. It is, therefore, impossible to say from the 416 patients who passed away since October 2021 to date, how many of them died with the Delta variant or with the Omicron variant.

On the other hand, it is possible to monitor the viral strains circulating in the country, and this is how the possible presence of emerging subtypes is identified.

In reply to part (b) of the question, at the very beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Mauritius, all S gene target failure samples were being sequenced. But since the detection of the Omicron variant B2, this is no longer the practice (no S drop for Omicron B2 contrary to Omicron B1).

I am informed that in accordance with recommendations from the World Health Organisation, samples are taken for sequencing from a panel representative of all categories of positive patients and these comprise –

- patients attending flu clinics;
- incoming passengers;
- patients admitted in hospitals, and
- deceased patients suffering from COVID-19.

LECKRAZ LANE, CONGOMAH - UPGRADING WORKS

(No. B/507) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a retaining wall at Leckraz Lane, in Congomah, and upgrading of the said lane, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

**CASINO DE MAURICE, CUREPIPE - MR D. N., HR DIRECTOR -
DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS**

(No. B/508) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Mr D. N., Human Resource Director at the Casino de Maurice, Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against him and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 1 - FLOOD-PRONE AREAS - DRAINAGE PROJECTS

(No. B/509) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the flood-prone areas identified in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, the list of drainage projects implemented since 2019 to date thereat, indicating –

- (a) in each case, the value and the name of contractor thereof;
- (b) those earmarked for implementation in the short and long term, respectively, and
- (c) where matters stand as to the implementation of the Richelieu Drain Project.

(Withdrawn)

MEDICINES - PARALLEL IMPORTS - AMENDMENT TO LEGISLATION

(No. B/510) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to medicines, he will state when his Ministry sent the request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade for amendments to be brought to the existing legislation to authorize parallel imports thereof, indicating if he is in presence of any reply thereto.

(Withdrawn)

SOCIAL REGISTER OF MAURITIUS - BENEFICIARIES - RECERTIFICATION

(No. B/514) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Recertification of Beneficiaries on the Social Register of Mauritius, she will state the total number of beneficiaries/households for the year 2022, indicating the number thereof –

- (a) having signed their social contract as at to date, indicating the duration and terms and conditions thereof, and
- (b) whose social contract –
 - (i) are pending, giving reasons therefor, and
 - (ii) have been cancelled.

(Withdrawn)

**CONSTITUENCY NO. 15 - CLEANING, EMBELLISHMENT & SOLID
WASTE MANAGEMENT**

(No. B/515) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the allocation of Rs790 m. for cleaning, embellishment and solid waste management, as announced in the last budget, he will state the –

- (a) quantum thereof used as at to date, and
- (b) list of projects earmarked and completed as at to date within Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix.

Reply: Following the 2021/2022 Budget exercise, an amount of Rs790 m. under the National Environment and Climate Change Fund had been allocated to the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management and the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change for cleaning, embellishment and solid waste management. Rs338 m. has been allocated to the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management for the acquisition of modern machinery and equipment as well as for cleaning, desilting and rehabilitation of drains, bridges and rivers. As regards the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, an amount of Rs452 m. has been allocated for

the management of solid waste, embellishment along the motorways M1 and M2, improvement, upgrading and rehabilitation of rivers, cleaning and embellishment of public sites and waste recycling.

With regard to part (a) of the question, in line with its vision for a cleaner and greener Mauritius, the Living Environment Unit of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change undertakes, *inter alia*, the cleaning and embellishment on a daily basis of various public sites and places of worship across the island. As at date, around 100 sites have been embellished while in the context of the celebration of namely, Ganesh Chaturthi and Thaiposam Cavadee at national level, rivers were cleaned based on requests received from the National Task Force. Regarding the greening and embellishment along motorways M1 and M2, a four-month contract amounting to around Rs37 m. has been awarded by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change for the greening and embellishment of the motorway from the Balisson roundabout to Nouvelle France roundabout, which forms part of the 32 segments of the Masterplan for the greening and embellishment along the motorways M1 and M2. The Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change is consulting private sector organisations to enlist their support for the implementation of the other segments.

For the management of solid waste, an amount of Rs290 m. had been earmarked for the construction of solid waste disposal facilities at Mare Chicose Landfill, including for carrying works for the vertical expansion of the landfill site over 10 years. A tender exercise had been initiated in 2021 with respect to the works for the vertical expansion and was at evaluation stage at the level of the Central Procurement Board. However, on 13 April 2022, the Central Procurement Board had recommended to bring modifications to the bidding documents and restart the tender exercise.

In respect of funds made available to the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management with respect to the acquisition of compactor/tipper lorries, same would be undertaken in two phases. Under Phase 1 of the project, 17 tipper lorries and 7 lorries with cranes were expected to be acquired. However, delays in the procurement exercise were encountered due to major shortcomings identified in the specifications. A notice for the termination of the contract was served upon Axess Ltd, the supplier, who thereafter indicated that the shortcomings would be attended to. A final commissioning exercise is being carried out

and a decision would be taken based on the outcome thereof. Moreover, under Phase 2 of the project, 59 vehicles namely, 21 compactors, 24 tipper lorries, 2 road sweepers, 2 trucks mounted with jetting unit and 10 street lighting lorries would be acquired for the estimated cost of some Rs255 m. The tenders have been finalised and are expected to be launched shortly.

With respect to drainage infrastructure, the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management has been allocated Rs30 m. for the cleaning and rehabilitation of drains, bridges and rivers. As such, the Land Drainage Authority has devised a maintenance schedule for the cleaning of drains by each local authority and this is an ongoing exercise. The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has completed the desilting works at Latanier.

With regard to part (b) of the question, cleaning and embellishment projects to the tune of around Rs7 m. have been undertaken by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change within the premises of socio-cultural organisations as well as along river banks namely, at Hollyrood, Valentina, Phoenix, Highlands, La Caverne, Cinq Arpents, Castel, Camp Fouquereaux and Saint Paul. Additionally, based on requests received, projects amounting to some Rs2 m. are forthcoming in the regions of Vacoas, La Caverne, Petit Camp, Camp Fouquereaux and Mon Desir.

According to the Land Drainage Authority, as at March 2022, cleaning works have been undertaken by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix along drains in eight flood prone areas, namely Côte D'Or main road, Morcellement Noel, Phoenix, Tout Court Road, junction at St Antoine and Terre Rouge Road, Pont Sinfah, Zinnia & Appali, Ramputh Lane and ENT Hospital. Moreover, a total of 60 other drains have been cleaned in the region of Belle Terre, Hermitage, Camp Fouquereaux, Morcellement Plaine de L'Hermitage, Phoenix, Vacoas, Hollyrood, Solferino and Valentina.

NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION – ELECTRIC BUSES – TENDER AND BIDDERS

(No. B/516) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the acquisition of electric buses, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Corporation, information as to when tender was launched therefor indicating the –

- (a) bids received and the names of the successful bidders;
- (b) warranty periods, and
- (c) maintenance plan thereof.

(Withdrawn)

ROCHES-NOIRES SMART CITY PROJECT – EIA PERMIT

(No. B/517) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Roches-Noires Smart City Project, he will state if the requirement for the issue of an Environment Impact Assessment permit for the construction thereof is being envisaged by his Ministry.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS & INDIA – COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC COOPERATION & PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

(No. B/518) 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, in regard to the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement between Mauritius and India which came into force on 01 April 2021, he will state the total value of goods and services exported and imported, respectively, by Mauritius thereunder, giving a breakdown thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 WARDS

(No. B/519) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 wards within the five regional hospitals in mainland Mauritius, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof presently operational, and
- (b) when and why some of them have been closed.

Reply: I am informed that there are presently 7 COVID-19 wards operational in the five regional hospitals around the island as follows –

- 1 COVID-19 Ward at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital;
- 1 COVID-19 Ward at SSRN Hospital;
- 2 COVID-19 Wards at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital;
- 1 COVID-19 Ward at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital,
- 2 COVID-19 Wards at Victoria Hospital.

I am further informed that –

- 2 COVID-19 Wards were operational at SSRN Hospital and 1 was closed on 08 April 2022;
- 2 COVID-19 Wards were operational at J. Nehru Hospital and 1 was closed on 09 April 2022;
- 4 COVID-19 Wards were operational at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital and 2 were closed on 11 April 2022;
- 3 COVID-19 Wards were operational at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital and 2 were closed on 11 April 2022, and
- 5 COVID-19 Wards were operational at Victoria Hospital and 3 were closed on 12 April 2022.

With the decreasing trend in the admission of COVID-19 patients and in view to maintain adequate bed occupancy for all units, the number of COVID-19 wards has been decreased proportionately in all regional hospitals.

KUALA LUMPUR - MISSION - RELOCATION - INQUIRY

(No. B/520) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the relocation of our mission in Kuala Lumpur as reported in the Report 2020-2021 of the Director of Audit, he will state if the relevant parent Ministry had authorised same and, if not, indicate –

- (a) under whose authority same was effected;
- (b) if the High Commissioner had issued a letter to the Malaysian authorities stating that the Government of Mauritius had authorised same, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the High Commissioner to be requested to step down pending the initiation and conclusion of an inquiry thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 VACCINE – FOURTH DOSE

(No. B/523) Mr D. Nagaligum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, he will state the number of persons having been administered therewith as at to date, indicating the type of vaccine administered.

(Withdrawn)