



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 18 JULY 2023

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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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 Husnood	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK	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-Daareewoo, 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
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Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 23 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 18 July 2023

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) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Private Recruitment Agencies Bill (No. XII of 2023). (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)

B. Attorney General

Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

The Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (National Wholesale Market) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 101 of 2023)

C. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 99 of 2023)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Importation and Sale of Second-hand Motor Vehicles) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 100 of 2023)

D. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2022.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/1076 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, and PQ B/1111 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA - ILLEGAL COMMENTS & POSTS - CHARGES -

JAN 2015 TO JULY 2023

(No. B/1073) 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 arrests effected in connection with illegal comments and posts on the social media, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of persons provisionally charged with offences in connection therewith since January 2015 to date, indicating the nature of the comments and posts thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to section 46(1) (ga) of the Information and Communication Technologies Act 2021, it is an offence if a person, and I quote –

“uses a telecommunication equipment, an information and communication service, a telecommunication service or information and communication technologies to send, transmit, transfer, post, publish, deliver, show or otherwise communicates by means of the telecommunication equipment a message which is obscene, indecent, offensive, abusive, threatening, menacing, false or misleading, which is likely to cause or causes harm to a person.”

In the light of this provision, it is an offence to use any telecommunication device to post on the social media in the form of speech, data, text, writings, images, signs, signals or code, or a combination of forms, which are obscene, indecent, offensive, abusive, threatening, menacing, false or misleading in nature and which are likely to cause harm to any person.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the types of cases include using telecommunications equipment to cause annoyance, humiliation, inconvenience, distress or anxiety to any person; to impersonate another person; and for the transmission of

messages which are of a nature likely to endanger or compromise State defence, public safety or public order.

Any person who commits an offence under the ICT Act, shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding one million rupees and to penal servitude for a term not exceeding 10 years. Provisional charges are usually determined following the outcome of Police investigations.

In the conduct of the enquiries, the Police take into consideration the language used, the age and characteristics of the alleged victim, whether the message was anonymous, the extent of circulation of the message, the context in which the message appeared, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, social media, which comprises “Internet-based applications,” has seen an unprecedented growth during the last decade and has taken a prominent place in the lives of people, mostly because of easy accessibility to internet and smartphones. There has been a marked rise in usage of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram. Although digital technology has democratised the public sphere, unfortunately, some people are making an abuse and misuse thereof causing prejudice to other persons. In fact, today, social media platforms are increasingly being used as a means for settling scores, spreading false news and hatred speech, character assassination, extortion, illegal betting, stirring social and racial unrest, attacking the integrity of persons and fraud.

Mr Speaker, Sir, not only our country, but also other countries are struggling to find ways and means to control and minimise the misuse and abuse of social media. For instance, in the European Union, the Council of the European Union has, in July 2022, adopted the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act which aim at creating a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of users of digital services are protected, through the imposition of risk assessments and sanctions such as fines and temporary bans. In the same vein, the United Kingdom is coming up with the Online Safety Act. Some countries are also negotiating with social media agencies to open offices in their countries for a better control and moderation of contents.

Countries such as Canada and India are enacting laws to address the issue of social media threats. These measures are possible because all the social media companies have a point of presence in these countries which is not the case in Mauritius. I am also informed that countries in the region like Madagascar, Maldives and the Seychelles are in the same situation as Mauritius whereby there is no prompt response from social media companies to social media threats and this is also due to the absence of these companies locally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to be in line with international trends regarding safer digital space, in Mauritius, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act 2003 was repealed in 2021 and replaced by the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act in line with the Budapest Convention on cybercrime. This Convention is the first international treaty on crimes committed via the internet and other computer networks, dealing particularly with infringements of copyright, computer-related fraud, child pornography and violations of network security. It also contains a series of powers and procedures such as the search of computer networks and interception. Its main objective is to pursue a common criminal policy aimed at the protection of society against cybercrime, especially by adopting appropriate legislation and fostering international cooperation.

The Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021 provides, amongst others, for offences such as cyber-bullying, computer-related forgery and misuse of fake profile. Under this Act, undesirable content includes any online content that is deceptive or inaccurate, posted with intent to defame, threaten, abuse or mislead the public; threatens public health or public safety; threatens national security; and promotes racism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, the Computer Emergency Response Team Mauritius (CERT-MU) was set up in 2008 under the aegis of the National Computer Board to provide information and assistance to organisations in implementing proactive measures to reduce the risks of information security incidents as well as responding to such incidents as and when they occur. The CERT-MU, which now falls directly under the purview of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation operates the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System (MAUCORS) which is the national online system that allows the public to securely report cybercrimes occurring on social media. It is a centralised cyber incident reporting system that connects the CERT-MU, the Cybercrime Unit of the Mauritius Police Force, the Data Protection Office and the Information Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA). It provides advice in recognising and avoiding common types of cybercrime which take place on social media websites. I am informed that complaints regarding illegal and offensive contents are reported to the Police either directly or through the MAUCORS. On the basis of the information received, the Police decide whether to open case files and conduct further investigations.

In addition, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation had a meeting with representatives of Facebook in July 2021 to discuss on incident escalation and resolution. Following the meeting, a two-day sensitisation workshop was held by Facebook/Meta involving stakeholders from the public and private

sector. Following a request from Mauritius to Facebook, the latter has recruited personnel from the Mauritian diaspora to look into the content, especially in creole. A similar request has been made to TikTok recently and a reply is awaited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2015 to date, 1,308 cases of illegal comments and posts on the social media have been reported to the Police. Out of these cases, 47 persons have been provisionally charged and arrested in relation to 42 cases. The nature of these comments and posts were mostly offensive language, racial hatred, sextortion, threats, blackmailing, character assassination, fake profile, false information and endangering public order.

Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister why further to the different Police complaints filed by three journalists of Le Défi Media Group and the Managing Director of TopFM on 10 November 2022 regarding online harassment linking them to drug trafficking by people close to the MSM like the *Sun TV*, no arrests or identification of these individuals have been carried out so far?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me say that *Sun TV* is not close to the MSM!

An hon. Member: Sun! Sun!

The Prime Minister: It is not...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: You think any key is close to the Labour Party?

An hon. Member: Sun! Sun!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Anywhere you will put a key, it is close to the Labour Party?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Assirvaden!

The Prime Minister: I would say that *Sun TV News* has nothing to do with the MSM. Yes, I am informed that there was an article under caption: “urgent, very serious news” and so on.

Now, on the same day, Mr A.R.A., the Director of Public Prosecutions had phoned and insisted the Police to call at his place at Residence Trianon and register his complaint in connection with the aforementioned article. An officer from the Cybercrime Unit of the Central Criminal Investigation Department proceeded to his place and a statement was taken. I am informed that the statement relates to what was posted and as such, he requested the Police to initiate an enquiry. An enquiry on his behalf was opened in the Occurrence Book. I don't need to give all the references.

The enquiry into the matter was immediately initiated and the extract of the post was captured for the purpose of enquiry. On Sunday 26 February 2023, the Mauritius Police Force made a request to the Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius to remove a derogatory post from the Facebook page of *Sun TV News*. This complaint was escalated to Facebook on the same day for removal of the defamatory content, and further cyber patrols on other social media platforms were carried out by the Police in order to look for similar articles.

Subsequently, after three days it was observed that the Facebook page with profile named *Sun TV News* had been deactivated and the said post has been removed. The reported content is no longer available and so far the author of the article is unknown, but the enquiry is still in progress.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister, because there is a general perception, whether these provisional charges – especially when they are used against political opponents – are used as a political what we call ‘*zarm*’ or tool to squash political opponents’ activism and activities because often these charges are struck out by the court of law?

The Prime Minister: Why are you saying that these charges are struck out by the court of law? How many charges are struck out? Do you have statistics? Do you know?

Dr. Gungapersad: There are a few examples.

The Prime Minister: No, examples! But when you say most of the charges are struck out, there are cases where some people have been convicted. I have figures. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say, generally anyone who posts any comment or any of their own views on the social media, they have to assume their responsibility. Now, if they go against the law or if it is defamatory, of course, people who are subject or who are being victimised have to report the matter either to the Police or to MAUCORS through online reporting or if through cyber patrol, the Police ever come on any post that they believe is going against the law, they will take action.

Now, I have been provided with some information, that is, status of cases for period 2015-2023. So, the status of 42 cases –

- (i) where filed and no further action - 3;
- (ii) sent to DPP for advice - 7;
- (iii) caution administered - 4;

Caution administered means that they have been found to be at fault but the sentence is to give a caution.

- (iv) convicted and fined - 6;
- (v) pending trial in Court - 5, and
- (vi) still under enquiry - 17.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware of a recent post on the social media where a media reporter, one Mr A. K. R. uttered some words of vulgar nature while reporting on proceedings held at the Privy Council and whether any action is envisaged in that case? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I think all of us are aware of this post where that media reporter, Mr A. K. R. not only uttered words of vulgar nature but also made vile accusations while reporting on proceedings held at the Privy Council.

In his live intervention, posted at around 20.00 hours on Monday 10 July 2023, the media reporter, A. K. R. stated, and I quote –

“Section 64 de la Representation of the People Act, se enn argiman en substance ki Timothy Straker devan bann Law Lords inn fer. Represantan legal Suren Dayal soutenir ki sa bann reproches la li constitue bann actes de corruption, bann actes kokin, ‘kass L’.”

I cannot say that, Mr Speaker, Sir. That media reporter dared to utter ‘kass L’ after ‘actes kokin’, which is filthy and altogether shocking coming from a media person.

As regards the other part of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that an enquiry has been instituted into the matter following cyber patrol.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to the number of cases reported on MAUCORS since its creation?

The Prime Minister: So, 1,366 cases of illegal and offensive content have been reported on MAUCORS from March 2018 till date and these illegal contents are classified under the following categories –

- (i) content instructing or promoting crime or violence;
- (ii) content promoting racism, hate speech and criticism;
- (iii) sexually explicit content, and
- (iv) footage of real violence or accidents from video clips, games or films.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to the outcome of the complaint made to the Police by the Minister of Health and Wellness against a post on social media dated 27 February 2020 where foul wordings were used against him?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in this case, the accused was prosecuted and upon pleading guilty in the Court, he was fined Rs10,000, and had also to make for costs of about Rs500.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his answer, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned about CERT-MU and also 42 cases which were reported. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to whether there has been any kind of sensitisation campaign with regard to the illegal post ongoing on the social media?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police Cybercrime Unit of the Central Criminal Investigation Department, which is the main body of the Mauritius Police Force investigating into cases related to such breaches with regard to Information and Communication Technologies Act and of Cybercrime and Cybersecurity Act, also conducts regular sensitisation for the general public with regard to safety and proper use of electronic devices, the internet and social media.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we know from the hon. Prime Minister whether with regard to cybercrime, there will be another department that will be created to empower with regard to how social media is being misused and we are having so many complaints? Whether there will be an empowerment with regard to these departments.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I can say is that with the advance of technology, fortunately, I must say, we are making a lot of progress and on a number of occasions, it is very difficult to be able to trace those perpetrators because their platform is not within the control of the authorities here. As we know, the policy with regard to those platforms, they themselves leave it for free expression for anybody to publish anything on their platform, except then when it is reported to them and, even when it is reported to them, it depends on whether they decide to remove any such post. So, what we are doing is providing capacity building, giving more training to our people, and I believe that this is the measure that has to be ongoing in the light of development of technology.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister – because we are talking about freedom of expression and human rights – why, when political opponents are arrested, then, unnecessary humiliation, inhumane conditions are meted out to these political opponents? We suggest that same treatment, fair...

Mr Speaker: You already stated your question.

Dr. Gungapersad: Okay.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, it does not concern political people; it concerns everybody, anybody. I have a list of cases here, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the hon. Member asked from 2015 to date. There are people who are not connected – I believe who are not known politicians, I would say –, and who have been subjected to all sorts of accusations and allegations. They have reported cases to the Police, on MAUCORS, and enquiry has been initiated in all these cases. As I said, ultimately, if the offenders are able to be identified and if there is a case, then, they will be taken before a court of law.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply earlier, the Prime Minister mentioned the increasing misuse of social media. Can the hon. Prime Minister thus provide us information on where exactly a complaint regarding illegal posts or comments can be registered?

The Prime Minister: First of all, complaints can be registered directly to the Police or it can be registered on MAUCORS. As I said, it is an online facility for anyone, without having to come physically to the authority to report a case, of course, by providing all the necessary information. It can also be reported to ICTA. ICTA also has a way of providing all the information to the Police eventually for investigation.

Mr Assirvaden: Le Premier ministre peut-il dire à la Chambre s'il a soulevé la question avec le commissaire de police, concernant la question de l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad, quand les trois journalistes de Radio Plus et Top FM ont donné leurs dépositions? Cela fait presque une année et rien n'a été fait. Dans le cas du Premier ministre, qui a donné une déposition, le lendemain, une internaute a été arrêtée pour une blague. Est-ce que cette question a été soulevée avec le commissaire de police concernant cette politique de deux poids, deux mesures ? Le Premier ministre, le lendemain et...

Mr Speaker: Okay !

Mr Assirvaden: ...et les journalistes, une année après.

Mr Speaker: You already stated. You already stated!

The Prime Minister: M. le président, je crois que l'honorable membre n'écoute pas quand je réponds à une question. Son collègue, l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad, a posé la question sur cette publication concernant *Sun TV*, et j'ai pris le temps de la Chambre pour donner les détails sur ce que la police a fait. Il n'écoute pas, et il vient dire toutes sortes de choses. *So, I will refer him to the answer that I have given previously to hon. Dr. Gungapersad.*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to whether any female MPs have ever had recourse to MAUCORS, CERT-MU or Cybercrime, where some of them gave some information? Has there been any arrest with regard to those kinds of online posts, and where matters stand with regard to that? Is there any *deux poids, deux mesures* where MPs get favourable treatment? Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House?

The Prime Minister: I cannot recall anyone here having been arrested, but anyone is free to, of course, make a complaint if he feels that he has been subjected to any offence which has been committed by anybody.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister did make reference to the Online Safety Bill, which is the subject of much debate in the UK and is quite controversial. Am I to understand, from what the hon. Prime Minister has said, that Government intends to come with legislation which is going to be more stringent or will Government carry on with existing legislation?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I mentioned in my answer is what is being done in other countries, like in the UK. They are coming up with new legislation.

That does not mean to say that we are going to follow exactly what others are doing. We will, of course, be inspired, drawing lessons from the problems that they are facing, from the same situation that has arisen. Of course, we will see in the future whether we can be inspired by those legislations. Government will decide on this issue in due course.

Mr Speaker: Time over! The Table has been advised that PQ B/1080 has been withdrawn.

MAURITIUS & RÉUNION ISLANDS – DRUG TRAFFICKING BY SEA – 2020 TO 2023

(No. B/1080) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to drugs, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information since 2020 to date, as to the amount seized during the trafficking thereof by sea between Mauritius and Réunion Island.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell! B/1083! Minister of Education!

GRANT-AIDED COLLEGES - GRANT FORMULA - REVIEW

(No. B/1083) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to grant-aided colleges, she will state if consideration will be given for a review of the grants formula established by Private Secondary Education Authority therefor 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, the grant formula is reviewed at regular intervals of three years. The last review exercise, which covered period 2020 to 2023, has been implemented since 01 November 2020 and will lapse in December 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, accordingly, a Technical Working Group has been set up under the Chair of the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry and comprising representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Office of the Public Sector Governance, the Private Secondary Education Authority, to review the grant formula in respect of the period 2024 to 2026.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Federation of Union of Managers was informed accordingly and they have been invited to submit their proposals which have been received by the Technical Working Group. The Technical Working Group is expected to submit its report by the end of September 2023.

Dr. Boolell: Can the Vice-Prime Minister state how many times the Technical Group has met?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been set up for some time now. In February 2023, the Technical Working Group was set up and they have been examining the proposals made, I suppose, on a fortnightly basis. But I do not have the exact figure.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Madam. I know you have not said the date, but when do you think the Committee will submit its report?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I have just mentioned, September 2023.

Dr. Boolell: Okay, thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CASINOS DE MAURICE – PRIVATISATION – BIDS PROPOSAL & MONEY INJECTED – 2020 TO 2023

(No. B/1084) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the proposed privatisation of the *Casinos de Maurice*, he will for the benefit of the House obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to where matters stand, indicating in each case the –

- (a) names of the bidding companies therefor, if any, and their respective bid proposal, and
- (b) amount of money injected by Government thereinto in Financial Years 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en 2021, le gouvernement a mis en place un comité de pilotage chargé de gérer l'ensemble de l'opération relative à la cession des actifs non stratégiques identifiés, y compris les casinos sous le contrôle de la SIC, et cela, avec l'appui de conseillers en transaction ayant l'expérience et l'expertise pertinentes.

Dans le cas des casinos de Maurice, un conseiller en transactions, *KPMG Advisory Services Ltd*, a été désigné le 04 avril 2022. Une déclaration d'intérêt pour les

soumissionnaires potentiels a été publiée au cours de la première semaine de juillet 2022. À la date de clôture, le 29 juillet 2022, 16 entités avaient manifesté leur intérêt.

Par le biais d'une demande de proposition, les 16 parties susmentionnées ont été invitées à soumettre une offre indicative et sept parties ont soumis une proposition avant la date limite du 16 septembre 2022.

Sur la base des propositions reçues, le conseiller en transactions a présélectionné quatre des sept soumissionnaires. Les quatre soumissionnaires présélectionnés ont été invités à procéder à une vérification préalable et à soumettre leur offre ferme. Chose faite, le 12 décembre 2022 avec trois parties qui ont soumis une offre ferme.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, le nom des soumissionnaires et leur proposition d'offre ne peuvent pas être divulgués à ce stade pour éviter tout risque de collusion, car le processus est toujours en cours.

De plus, j'ai été informé par la *SIC* que toutes les parties prenantes sont régies par un accord de confidentialité. Suite à l'analyse des offres reçues, j'ai été informé que les trois soumissionnaires ont été invités par le *Transaction Advisor* le 12 janvier 2023 à revoir leurs offres.

En contrepartie, les soumissionnaires, par le biais du *Transaction Advisor*, ont également fait des propositions pour rendre le secteur plus attrayant. J'ai été informé par la *SIC* que les propositions sont actuellement à l'étude.

M. le président, pour ce qui est de la partie (b) de la question, j'ai été informé que le gouvernement n'a pas injecté de fonds directement dans les casinos. Toutefois, il convient de rappeler qu'au cours des trois derniers exercices financiers, les activités des casinos, comme toutes les autres entreprises du secteur de l'hôtellerie et des loisirs, ont été gravement affectées par les mesures sanitaires strictes et la fermeture des frontières liées à la pandémie de la Covid-19.

À ce titre, les casinos ont bénéficié, comme toutes les autres entreprises, du programme gouvernemental de *Wage Assistance Scheme* comme suit –

- i. 58,8 millions de roupies pour l'exercice clos au 31 décembre 2020, et
- ii. 106,7 millions de roupies pour l'exercice clos au 31 décembre 2021.

Merci, M. président.

Mr R. Duval: Merci, M. le ministre. Concernant la tentative ratée du rachat des casinos par les firmes étrangères, le ministre peut-il indiquer à la Chambre la somme payée par la *SIC* à la firme *KPMG*?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je n'ai pas en ma possession ce montant et je dois toute façon demander la légalité concernant la divulgation avant de soumettre mais s'il y a une possibilité, je soumettrai à la Chambre.

Mr R. Duval: Du fait que le gouvernement n'investit plus dans ce secteur et qui met en péril l'avenir de quelques 700 employés, le ministre peut-il nous éclaircir quelles sont les mesures prises actuellement par son ministère pour assurer l'équilibre financier des casinos à fin de préserver des emplois ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, pour assurer la pérennisation de ce secteur d'activité, l'objectif pour nous est de trouver soit un repreneur soit un partenaire stratégique car la *SIC* n'a pas toutes les expertises requises pour gérer les casinos de Maurice d'où la nécessité pour nous de travailler avec la *SIC* et aussi le *Transaction Advisor* pour trouver le meilleur partenaire pour reprendre soit complètement soit en partie les activités des casinos pour assurer encore une fois la pérennisation et aussi l'emploi de ces quelques 700 employés.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

ROYAL ROAD, ROSE HILL – PAVEMENT CONSTRUCTION – COST

(No. B/1085) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of pavement along Royal Road in Rose Hill, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to when works will start, indicating the total cost thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the RDA that the A1 Road at Rose Hill, commonly known as Royal Road, as mentioned in the question itself, is already endowed with amenities such as pavement, drains and handrails on both sides of the road for safety of the pedestrians. Hence, the question of construction of pavement along Royal Road, Rose Hill does not arise. Thank you.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe the hon. Minister is not aware, he has not been there to find out the real state of the pavement along Royal Road, Rose Hill. It is in a very bad state.

Mr Speaker: Now, put your question!

Mr Nagalingum: So, I ask the hon. Minister to find out with the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill so that he may be aware of the situation of the pavement in Rose Hill.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we all read the question. This is not what is written here. What the hon. Member is saying pertains to upgrading of the existing infrastructures and not construction. So, let me tell him through you, that weekly inspections are carried out by the Officers of the RDA and there is absolutely no reason that I doubt of their competencies.

Regarding the status of the pavement along the classified road and based on resources available and scope of work, routine and periodical maintenance are carried out either by in-house or outsourced to framework contractors of the RDA. Those works include repairs of damaged slab, upgrading of existing footpath and construction of new pavement. It is an ongoing process not only in Rose-Hill but throughout the island. For instance, along A1 Road, replacement of damaged slab and other ancillary works have already started, been implemented, starting from Gamma Civic at Coromandel towards KFC at Rose Hill; repair of pavements, slabs along the remaining stretch from KFC up to St Jean is scheduled for implementation in the forthcoming weeks. So, this is an ongoing process.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, I re-ask the hon. Minister to find out because what I am saying is exactly...

Mr Speaker: Put a question!

Mr Nagalingum: I am putting the question.

Mr Speaker: This is Question Time; put a question!

Mr Nagalingum: You will find out that the pavement, some shop owners have slippery tiles, some are uneven, and some do not have any pavement at all. So, we have to do it once again. It is not a question of repairs. It is a question of doing it...

Mr Speaker: No, put the question! You are making a statement.

Mr Toussaint: *Pena kestion!*

Mr Speaker: I can understand your situation, but, this time, in Parliament, it is Question Time. Question the Minister! Please, try! Try!

Mr Nagalingum: Just try to find out in good faith hon. Minister to see the state of the pavement...

Mr Speaker: No. Again, come on! I stop you there because you have no question. Prepare your questions well!

Mr Toussaint: *Pena kestion!*

Mr Speaker: This is a time for you to put questions!

Mr Nagalingum: Because the hon. Minister does not even know the state of the road there.

Mr Speaker: No! Okay. Next question! Hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Toussaint: *Poz kestion!*

CEB FIBERNET CO LTD – GENERAL MANAGER & BOARD MEMBERS

(No. B/1086) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to CEB Fibernet Co Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the names of the –

- (a) General Manager, and
- (b) members of the Board of Directors thereof.

An hon. Member: *Toussaint get enn ti kou...*

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Electricity Board...

Mr Nagalingum: *Pa fer remark!*

Mr Toussaint: *To p koz ar mwa la?*

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Nagalingum: *Pa fer remark!*

Mr Speaker: Order! This is gross misconduct!

An. hon. Member: *Contan riye dimoun!*

Mr Toussaint: *Ki to problem ar mwa?*

Mr Nagalingum: *Mo pena problem!*

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Toussaint: *Get to zafer!*

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

Mr Nagalingum: *Li p dir get mo zafer!*

Mr Speaker: It's too early for you to go out! It's too early! Bear with us! Bear with us! Quiet!

Mr Toussaint: *Kas poz!* Relax!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Electricity Board that the post of General Manager of the CEB Fibernet Company Ltd is currently vacant. Mr V. Ramgolan, Business Development Executive has been assigned the duties of Officer-in-Charge of the company to oversee its operation since 30 June 2021.

With regard to the Board of Directors of CEB Fibernet Company Ltd, Mr Amoordalingum Pather is the Chairperson. Mr Rajnish Hawabhay and Mr Chavansingh Dabeedin are the Directors.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, ça fait presque deux ans que le CEB Fibernet n'a pas de *General Manager* alors que le gouvernement a investi plus de R 850 millions dans cette subsidiaire du CEB. Le ministre trouve-t-il normal que le CEB Fibernet n'a pas de directeur général, de *General Manager* à plein temps alors que presque un milliard de roupies a été investi dans cette compagnie?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my main reply, I have stated that we have an Officer-In-Charge and he is doing the work.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, l'insolence et la légèreté du ministre concernant l'argent public...

Mr Speaker: You cannot... No, you cannot...

Mr Assirvaden: ... est inquiétant!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Remove that word '*insolence*' or whatever you said!

Mr Assirvaden: Okay, I remove. Depuis l'arrivée du ministre, M. le président, en tant que ministre de l'Énergie, il a démoli tout ce que son prédécesseur, l'honorable Collendavelloo...

Mr Speaker: No! No! You have no question!

Mr Assirvaden: Il a démoli...

Mr Speaker: You have no question!

Mr Assirvaden: Mais laissez-moi...

Mr Speaker: You have no question!

Mr Assirvaden: R 850 millions...

Mr Speaker: Put question!

Mr Assirvaden: *Okay, I put question.* Est-ce que le ministre peut dire à la Chambre aujourd'hui...

Mr Speaker: This is a question!

Mr Assirvaden: ...est-ce qu'il compte nommer un directeur général à plein temps car R 850 millions ont été investies dans cette compagnie ?

Mr Speaker: Okay. You already put your question! Let the hon. Minister reply!

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, je constate que c'est lui l'insolent en fin de compte.

(Interruptions)

We will do so when the need arises, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: So, to avoid any... Hon. Minister...

Mr Lesjongard: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Assirvaden: Il n'a pas répondu !

Mr Lesjongard: J'ai répondu, il aurait dû écouter.

Mr Speaker: So, next question!

GRA - HORSE RACING - STAKES MONEY

(No. B/1087) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to stakes money for horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if the Horse Racing Division of the Authority has been made aware of the substantial reduction thereof and, if so, the actions, if any, being taken in relation thereto.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour sa question. J'ai été informé par la *Horse Racing Division* de la *Gambling Regulatory Authority* que, par une lettre datée du 15 juin 2023, accompagné d'un courriel daté du 28 juin 2023,

l'organisateur des courses hippiques, *People's Turf PLC*, a notifié à la *Horse Racing Division* qu'il procédait à une réduction des mises d'argent avec effet immédiat.

Les principales raisons invoquées dans la lettre pour justifier cette réduction sont que l'industrie des courses hippiques souffre d'un manque de revenus dû à une diminution massive des recettes des paris et à une baisse drastique des redevances respectives.

M. le président, j'ai également été informé que le paiement des mises d'argent relève de la seule responsabilité de l'organisateur des courses de chevaux et que ni la *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act* ni les *Rules of Racing* de la *Horse Racing Division* ne prévoient de réglementer le montant des mises à payer par l'organisateur des courses de chevaux.

De plus, en vertu de la règle 61 des *Rules of Racing*, les conditions de chaque réunion de courses, y compris le montant des mises à payer par l'organisateur de courses de chevaux pour une course donnée, doivent être publiées au moins cinq jours avant le début de la réunion de courses. En conséquence, la *Horse Racing Division* a publié un communiqué le 3 juillet 2023 pour informer toutes les parties prenantes concernées des nouvelles mises offertes par l'organisateur de courses de chevaux.

En outre, l'article 30 de la *GRA Act* prévoit que l'organisateur de courses de chevaux doit être une société anonyme et que, conformément à la loi et à ses conditions de licence, il doit être solvable et financièrement sain pendant toute la durée de la saison des courses. Il est donc de la seule responsabilité de l'organisateur de courses de chevaux de prendre des décisions concernant le paiement du montant des mises qui garantit la solidité financière de la société.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the second time for this season that the stake money is being drastically reduced. Does the hon. Minister find it normal that when the MTC reduced the stake money, the then GRA had requested it to revise its decision but today, when People's Turf is reducing the stake money for a second time, the Horse Racing Division is quiet and says that it is none of my business?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je réponds à la question en fonction des éléments qui me sont donnés et selon la loi – je l'ai bien dit, selon la loi. Selon le *GRA Act*, la *GRA* n'a pas le droit de demander à un organisateur des courses d'augmenter ou de diminuer les mises. Donc, si cela a été fait dans le passé, je vais vérifier et je reviendrai dessus, parce que je ne suis pas au courant des pressions faites par la *GRA* pour d'autres organisateurs de courses.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, the stake money is the main reason why people participate in horse racing. Doesn't the hon. Minister agree that if the stake money is reduced so low by People's Turf, then the trainers and owners will have to resort to illegal betting just to be able to have sufficient funds to maintain their horses?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est une question très pertinente. C'est sûr qu'il faut trouver le juste équilibre entre les mises concernant les courses mais aussi par rapport à la rentabilité de l'organisateur de courses. Je demanderai à l'honorable membre de me donner un peu de temps pour que je puisse regarder en profondeur ce secteur, parce qu'il y a eu beaucoup de questions qui sont venues sur ce dossier et j'aimerais prendre un peu plus de temps pour analyser qu'elles sont les raisons qui poussent à la diminution des mises et aussi de voir un peu concernant la rentabilité et les recettes pour l'organisateur des courses. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

PARIS 2024 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES – ATHLETES' MONTHLY ALLOWANCE

(No. B/1088) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the monthly allowance to be provided to athletes preparing for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games as announced in the 2023-2024 Budget Speech, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, let me first congratulate our Para athletes for their recent outstanding achievements at the 2023 Paris Para Athletics World Championships namely, Miss Noemi Alphonse for clinching both the silver medal in the 100m (T54) and the bronze medal in the 400m (T54) and Yovanni Philippe who not only set a new world championship record in the semi-final of the 400m T20 with a remarkable time of 47 seconds 38 but also demonstrated his exceptional skills in the final, earning a well-deserved bronze medal.

Miss Noemi Alphonse, Miss Anaïs Angéline, Mr Roberto Michel and Mr Yovanni Philippe are qualified for the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. Their success not only brings pride to our nation but also serves as an inspiration to countless others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the present Government is committed to promoting excellence in sports. For the first time ever, a sum of Rs3.6 m. has been allocated in the 2023-2024 budget to provide financial assistance to 10 elite athletes who are preparing for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic games. Thank you, hon. Minister of Finance.

These talented athletes possess immense potential but they often face financial constraints that require them to work hard during the day before attending their training sessions.

The Government's aim is to provide the necessary financial assistance ensuring that these athletes can solely focus on their training and strive for an Olympic or Paralympic podium. A technical committee has meticulously evaluated the performance and the progress margin of a list of elite athletes till 2024, resulting in the selection of 10 deserving beneficiaries including four para-athletes namely –

- Miss Noemi Alphonse;
- Miss Anaïs Angéline;
- Mr Roberto Michel, and
- Miss Brandy Perrine.

Two boxers –

- Mr Richarno Colin, and
- Mr Merven Clair.

Three Judokas –

- Mr Rémi Feuillet;
- Miss Christianne Legentil, and
- Miss Priscilla Morand.

And, one Mr Noa Bibi from athletics.

To further motivate these athletes and encourage them to compete at their fullest potential, they will receive a special monthly allowance of Rs30,000 starting from the end of July 2023. This supplementary assistance complements the existing support they already receive through the High-Level Sports Assistance Scheme and the Trust Fund for Excellence in sports. Thank you.

Ms Tour: Merci, M. le président et permettez-moi aussi de me joindre à l'honorable ministre pour féliciter nos athlètes qui ont fait briller notre quadricolore au niveau mondial. Ceci dit, dans la liste qu'a mentionnée le ministre, je note que le nom de Yovanni Philippe n'y figure pas. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire s'il compte inclure le nom de notre *recordman* mondial sur la liste de ceux qui vont bénéficier de cette allocation mensuelle ?

Mr Toussaint: Oui absolument, M. le président. Cette liste avait été préparée avant la compétition et Yovanni Philippe est une belle découverte. C'est un jeune de 21

ans qui nous a agréablement surpris et qui a tout le potentiel pour être médaillé olympique. Il y va de soi, M. le président, que nous allons trouver un budget additionnel pour inclure Yovanni dans cette liste.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**AFTER-SCHOOL SPORTS & FITNESS PROGRAMME - ACTIVITIES
PROPOSED & COACHES ENLISTED**

(No. B/1089) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to After-school Sports and Fitness Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sports Council, information as to the –

- (a) number of youth who participated therein since 2021 to date;
- (b) different sports activities proposed, and
- (c) number of coaches enlisted therefor.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Sports Council (MSC) that the After-School Sports and Fitness Programme was launched in 2017 to motivate and encourage the participation of children aged 5 years to 13 years in regular physical and sports activities.

With respect to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the MSC that the total number of youth involved in the After-School Sports and Fitness Programme for primary schools was 20,816, 16,154 and 13,525 for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

With regard to the After-School Sports and Fitness Programme for the secondary schools, I am further informed by the MSC that the total number of youth who participated therein was 1,849, 2,800 and 2,017 in 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

As for part (b) of the question, I am informed by the MSC the four activities are being carried out namely, ball games, racket games, fundamental movement skills and games and values within the school compound as from 15.30 hours to 17.00 hours for primary schools, and as from 14.30 hours to 16.00 hours for secondary schools.

Concerning part (c) of the question, I am informed by the MSC that for the year 2023, a total number of 330 coaches, including 25 for Rodrigues have enlisted for the programme.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Peut-on savoir de l'honorable ministre à quel intervalle les entraîneurs, que ce soit à plein temps ou contractuel, reçoivent leurs salaires ?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, je ne saurais vous dire par rapport à leurs allocations, mais je présume que c'est comme tout le monde, c'est peut-être à la fin du mois. Je vais vérifier.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Veuillez vérifier. Les statistiques ont démontré un pourcentage élevé d'enfants en surpoids à l'île Maurice et le taux de diabète chez l'enfant ne fait qu'augmenter. Dans ce contexte, est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire si ce programme intègre aussi les cours de nutrition, parce que le sport, c'est important, mais tout aussi important, c'est de bien savoir s'alimenter ?

Mr Toussaint : Je pense qu'au niveau des cours de nutrition, de comment bien manger, si je ne me trompe pas, ceci est déjà pris en charge par l'éducation nationale. Donc, je pense qu'ils ont déjà des formations à l'école. Pour compléter cela, le MSC s'occupe des activités physiques. Donc, encourager les jeunes à pratiquer une activité physique.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PETREDEC LTD – LPG RENTAL FEES – 2015 TO JULY 2023

(No. B/1090) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the storage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to a detailed yearly breakdown of the amount paid to Petredec Ltd., since 2015 to date, indicating if there has been an increase in the rental value and if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the State Trading Corporation started renting the Liquefied Petroleum Gas storage facilities from Petredec (Mauritius) Ltd. since May 2020. The rental fees paid for the period May 2020 to October 2021 was USD 27.50 per metric ton. I am tabling the yearly breakdown of the rental fees paid to Petredec (Mauritius) Ltd. from May 2020 to June 2023.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the rental fee was increased to USD 28.66 per metric ton as from November 2021, and the increase was due to inflation.

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Minister why from year 2002 to 2020, for 18 years, the total amount of rental paid for storage of cooking gas to ESCOL amounts to Rs797,315,000 while for 2022 onwards till date, for only three years, Rs750 m. was paid to Petredec. Why such a gap?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may be allowed to explain thoroughly. Prior to May 2020, the State Trading Corporation stored Liquefied Petroleum Gas only in tanks owned by two local oil companies, namely Vivo Energy Ltd and Total Mauritius Ltd. The total storage capacity was 5,495 metric tons only, which when full, represented only 27 days of stock under normal conditions, including some 420 metric tons for non-pumpable products.

During COVID-19 pandemic, the production and supply of LPG in most part of the world decreased and there was a disruption in the entire supply chain. With a view of assuring security of supply, on 17 April 2022, a decision was taken to proceed with the negotiations for the rental of the entire storage facility owned by Petredec Mauritius Ltd, which in total is of a capacity of 14,420 metric ton.

It is to be noted that this storage facility is the largest LPG storage capacity available in Mauritius representing 60 days of stock when full. So, after negotiation Petredec Ltd agreed to rent the storage tank to STC with a capacity of 14,220 tons at the rate of USD 27.50.

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, we are talking from January 2020 to December 2020, 30 m. to 184 m. for year 2022, of 500% increase. Now, hon. Minister, we paid Rs750 m. for the last 3 years...

Mr Speaker: No, put your question!

Mr Juman: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Maybe you got lost!

Mr Juman: Can I know hon. Minister, if you intend to see if STC can buy or construct its own warehouse because the asset value of Petredec Ltd. now is Rs1.1 billion and it is getting 750 m. for 3 years?

Mr Speaker: Okay, you have put your question already! You have already put your question! Let the Minister reply!

Mr Callichurn: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are envisaging it. We have already enlisted the services of a consultant who is working on the project. We are looking at either buying the existing storage facility or constructing a new one.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SME GRANTS – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/1091) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the Small and Medium Enterprises, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the SME Mauritius Ltd., information as to the amount of grants advanced thereto for the past three years, indicating the eligibility criteria to benefit therefrom.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by SME Mauritius Ltd. that in 2020-2021, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of 5 schemes covering 35 components relating to functional areas of SMEs were devised and implemented to improve the resilience and endurance of SMEs in the face of emerging and more complex environmental dynamics. The 5 schemes were as follows –

- i. the Internal Capability Development Scheme;
- ii. the Technology and Innovation Scheme;
- iii. the SME Marketing Support Scheme;
- iv. the Inclusiveness and Integration Scheme, and
- v. the SME Utility Connection Assistance Scheme.

For the Financial Year 2020-2021, 676 SMEs benefitted from the above schemes for a total amount of Rs28 m. in grants.

I am further advised that during the Financial Year 2021-2022, the same set of schemes were made available to SMEs. 818 SMEs benefitted from the schemes for a total amount of Rs45 m. in grants.

During the Financial Year 2022-2023, taking into consideration evolving trends, SME Mauritius Ltd. reviewed and revamped the existing set of schemes to respond more adequately to the requirements of the SME sector.

The schemes currently on offer at the SME Mauritius are as follows –

- i. the Business Transformation Scheme aimed at helping SMEs consolidate their internal capabilities, redesign their business models for improved agility, develop organisational and marketing strategies and improve their risk management, compliance and governance structures;
- ii. the Technology and Innovation Scheme aimed at incentivising SMEs to continuously invest in technology and automated production capabilities and adopt robotics, AI and cloud-based specialised softwares and solutions;

- iii. the Market Readiness Scheme to support SMEs in improving their market accessibility and competitiveness and respond to more stringent requirements with regard to packaging, design and market compliance;
- iv. the Greening Support Scheme to encourage SMEs to adopt renewable energy, recycling mechanisms, water treatment and anti-pollution initiatives and energy conservation solution, and
- v. the Agri-Business Scheme to incentivise SMEs in food processing, hydroponics, aquaponics and smart agriculture, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, during the Financial Year 2022-2023, 896 SMEs benefitted from the above schemes for a total amount of Rs51 m. in grants. To summarise, over the past three years, 2,384 SMEs have been supported with grants of Rs125 m. through the implementation of the different schemes.

It is also worth noting that these beneficiaries have a cumulative turnover of Rs7.9 billion and provide employment to some 10,800 people.

In terms of scheme distribution by SME classification and turnover range, on average 73% of the schemes went to Micro SMEs, 19% to Small SMEs and 8% of schemes provided went to Medium SMEs.

The four main sectors of activity that were supported were Manufacturing with an average of 55%, Services with 20%, Construction 15% and Agri-Agro Business with 10%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the eligibility criteria to benefit from grants, I am further advised that an SME should –

- i. be involved in any legal value creating economic activity, except pure trading enterprises;
- ii. hold a Business Registration Card;
- iii. hold a valid trade license, relevant permits and licenses;
- iv. be duly registered as an SME with the Registration Unit of my Ministry;
- v. provide financial returns whether with the MRA or the CBRD for the previous year;
- vi. be compliant with the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*;
- vii. have an annual turnover of less than Rs100 m., and
- viii. preferably, have been in operation for at least 6 months.

In addition, a minimum of 51% shareholding by a Mauritian national is required to benefit from the schemes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the value of grants depends on the turnover and number of employees of the SME. SME Mauritius Ltd. has a calculator on its website to help SMEs find the value of grants they could expect to receive by entering their turnover and number of employees. The total amount of grants within a specific scheme or across schemes were capped to a maximum of Rs200,000 till 30 June 2023 and has been reviewed to Rs250,000 as from 01 July 2023. Moreover, there are also caps on specific components to prevent any abuse.

Beneficiaries can reapply after a cooling off period of 9 months, after the date of the last disbursement if they do not reached their maximum limit for that financial year. Spouses or same Directors/Shareholders do not benefit twice in any financial year, even if their applications are filed under different entities.

It is to be noted that the ultimate decision to approve or reject any applications rests on a specifically established Grant Approval Committee (GAC) whose decision is final.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that during the present financial year, namely 2023-2024, SME Mauritius will, apart from serving its main segments, put additional emphasis and resources on the support of start-ups and social entrepreneurship programmes involving women and youth.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the scheme will be improved in the future? As we all know, SME Mauritius is doing a very good job, so, whether the scheme will be improved?

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the scheme which is presently operational is subject to constant monitoring and assessment, and in the light of changing circumstances, of course, it will be revamped and revisited.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MAURITIUS STANDARDS BUREAU – GENERAL MANAGER

(No. B/1092) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the Mauritius Standards Bureau, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the reasons for the non-renewal of the contract of Mrs D. B. as the General Manager thereof, and
- (b) when a new General Manager will be appointed therefor.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mrs D. B. was offered employment as General Manager of the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB) on a contract basis for a period of three years. Mrs D. B. assumed duty on 21 July 2020, and her contract of employment will expire on 20 July 2023.

Part (a) of the question does not arise as I am informed by the Mauritius Standards Bureau that Mrs D. B. informed the Standards Council on 29 June 2023 that she had been offered a contract of employment in another institution which she has already accepted and that she would leave the Mauritius Standards Bureau at the expire date of her present contract of employment.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Standards Council of Mauritius Standards Bureau has decided to fill the vacant post of Director.

I am further informed that the post of Director has already been advertised since 01 July 2023 and the closing date for submission of application was 14 July 2023. It is expected that the Mauritius Standards Bureau would complete the recruitment process at the earliest.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that there have been several allegations of malpractices against Mrs D. B. and same has been reported to the ICAC and a letter was copied to you? Are you aware of those malpractices at the Mauritius Standards Bureau against that lady?

Mr Speaker: Wait! It is enough! It is enough!

Mr Bholah: I have received numerous anonymous letters and I am aware that some letters have been sent to ICAC and even to the Police, but up to now, I have seen nothing on the basis of these letters.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is it the case that now the Mauritius Standards Bureau will not proceed with appointment of a new General Manager for the very simple reason that this post never existed as per the Act? There was only the post of Director.

Mr Speaker: No. What is the question?

Mr Lobine: This is what I have asked.

Mr Speaker: Put the question again!

Mr Lobine: This is what I have asked: whether the hon. Minister is aware that now the post of the new General Manager will not be...

Mr Speaker: Is that a question?

Mr Lobine: But this is the question!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: This is the question.

Mr Speaker: No!

Mr Lobine: Is he aware that as per the law, as per the Mauritius Standards Bureau Act, there was no post of General Manager; this was created for that particular lady? Now that we are not proceeding with filling of this post and proceeding with the filling of the post of Director, is he confirming to the House that this was created specifically for that lady? This is the question!

Mr Bholah: No, I am not confirming that. But you are stating the obvious in the sense that the post of Director has been advertised.

Mr Speaker: I will just remind the hon. Member as a matter of friendship; your first question was hypothetical. According to the Standing Orders, you cannot put a hypothetical question, but the second question was good. Members are reminded that they have to read their Standing Orders. This will help you to put questions. It is your duty to put questions; it is your right to put questions but the point is that many Members do not know how to put questions.

Mr Bhagwan: You have become an expert!

Mr Speaker: Next question!

BON ACCUEIL – MARKET – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1093) **Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction of a market at Bon Accueil, he will state 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 Flacq that the proposed construction of a mini-market at Bon Accueil was earmarked in Budget 2022-2023 as a project under preparation.

A plot of land to the extent of 2000 m² has been vested into the District Council of Flacq. Presently, on the said plot of land, there is an existing synthetic mini soccer pitch which should be relocated during the implementation of the project.

On 24 January 2023, bids for consultancy service for the design of the market fair at Bon Accueil were launched. However, after evaluation of the bids, it was observed that the price quoted by the bidder was 39% above the cost estimate and the Executive Committee decided not to proceed further with the bidding exercise.

A request was made to the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development on 16 May 2023 to seek the service of a technical team to design and supervise the project.

However, in a meeting on 05 July 2023 with the elected members of the Constituency, it was proposed that the Council proceed through 'design and build' instead of the service of the technical team.

On 12 July 2023, I personally chaired a meeting with 4 District Councils, including that of Flacq, to take stock of the progress in the implementation of the project in each District Council. The decision to implement the project on 'design and build' was approved. Presently, the 'design and build' documents are at preparation stage at the level of the District Council of Flacq.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, in his reply the hon. Vice-Prime Minister mentioned that the initial bidding exercise was carried out and the bidding amount exceeded the cost estimates by about 39%. So, can the hon. Vice Prime Minister inform the House who actually does the cost estimates at the level of the District Council of Flacq, please?

Dr. Husnoo: There is an engineer at the District Council of Flacq.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Vice Prime Minister inform the House if it is not high time for the District Councils to have a Quantity Surveyor for the cost estimates so that we avoid this type of variances between the cost estimates and the actual cost? Thank you.

Mr Armance: *Hey pose kestion!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: I agree with the hon. Member but there is shortage of QS on the market.

Mr Nuckcheddy: We have one here.

Dr. Husnoo: We have 12 Councils and if I have to take 12 QS, it will not be that easy to fill these posts.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SCHEDULED BREADS - ADDITIONAL SUBSIDY - ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/1094) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the grant of an additional subsidy to bakeries producing scheduled breads, he will state the total amount paid since the introduction thereof, indicating the eligibility criteria to benefit therefrom.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 09 September 2022, Government decided to provide an additional subsidy of 9 cents per scheduled bread of 100 grams in order to compensate bakeries for the increase in cost of production and maintain the current prices of scheduled bread.

The financial incentive is effective as from 01 October 2022 and the Mauritius Revenue Authority has been entrusted with the responsibility to effect payment of the subsidy on a monthly basis accordingly.

I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that Rs18,015,901 has been paid to bakeries producing scheduled bread from period October 2022 to June 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the eligibility criteria, bakeries are required to register with the State Trading Corporation and the following documents have to be submitted –

- (a) An application letter from the owner of the bakery, along with a copy of his or her National Identity Card and the location plan of the bakery, and
- (b) A Baker Declaration Form, signed by the owner of the bakery, with basically the following information –
 - i. details of monthly production of scheduled bread, and
 - ii. Business Registration No. including Business Registration Certificate mentioning “Manufacture of bread”.

Mr Speaker: Finished?

Mr Callichurn: Yes.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House about the procedure that has been put in place for the payment of this subsidy to bakers?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has provided the Mauritius Revenue Authority with a list of the bakeries registered with the STC as well as the expected monthly production of each type of scheduled bread by each bakery and that is based on a

survey done in May 2022. So, eligible bakeries are required to manually submit their monthly return to the Mauritius Revenue Authority, declaring the monthly production of each scheduled bread.

I have another information; the Mauritius Revenue Authority then proceed with the payment of each type of scheduled bread based on either the number of scheduled bread declared in the monthly return, based on the survey done, whichever is lower and multiply by 9 cents for each 100 grams of scheduled bread.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am informed that some bakers, they purchase flour directly from the STC, whereas some purchase through approved distributors of the STC. Can the Minister inform the House whether both of these bakers will benefit from the subsidy?

Mr Callichurn: I am informed that bakers who buy flour from STC, they purchase it up Rs108.50 whereas wholesalers and distributors who purchase directly from STC, they purchase it at the price of Rs217.50. So, obviously, those distributors will be getting less subsidy compared to direct buying from STC.

MASA ARTISTS SOLIDARITY SCHEME – BENEFICIARIES’ MONTHLY ALLOWANCE

(No. B/1095) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Mauritius Society of Authors Artists Solidarity Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if the monthly allowance payable to beneficiaries thereof has been stopped and, if so, indicate when and the reasons therefor.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the MASA that the MASA Artists Solidarity Scheme was launched in 2010 and its objective was to provide a monthly allowance to members of MASA having reached the age of 60.

MASA has stated that in respect of copyright fees collected, it retains 30% of the royalties to meet its administrative costs and 7% is transferred to the MASA Provident and Benevolent Fund. This Fund caters for the MASA Artists Solidarity Scheme and other purposes, such as medical schemes, death grants, costs for the annual general assembly and the elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by MASA that the monthly payment made to beneficiaries having reached the age of 60 has indeed been stopped and the last payment was effected in June 2023.

As to the reasons thereof, I wish to inform the House that, still according to MASA, in the year 2010 when the MASA Artists Solidarity Scheme was launched, no actuarial exercise was carried out to determine the capacity to pay of MASA. Such exercise was of utmost importance to foresee and ensure that financial stability, sustainability as well as the feasibility of the Fund over the ensuing years. Consequently, the funds of the MASA Provident and Benevolent Fund has considerably depleted over the years, leading to a decreasing sustainability of the Fund.

Moreover, taking into consideration the financial projections for new beneficiaries, that is, new full fledged members reaching the age of 60 and the payments which will have to be made, the financial viability of the Fund could no longer be sustained. Thus payments could no longer be effected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by MASA that a market survey was carried out with a view to securing a costing for professional services from insurance companies for a fully sustainable pension plan. Actually, one proposal from the NIC has been received which is under consideration by MASA.

I wish to inform the House that all necessary actions are being taken by MASA to provide the best options for treatment to our artists. However, many discrepancies and inconsistencies are still to be corrected and in this optic, a restructuring exercise of the MASA has been initiated. The tender procedure is under process.

Mr David: M. le président, dans sa réponse, le ministre a indiqué que 7% des *royalties* sont transférés au *Provident and Benevolent Fund* de la MASA et c'est de ce fonds qu'est puisé l'argent pour la pension des artistes. Puis-je demander au ministre, car il ne l'a pas clairement dit, de ces 7% de *royalties* – et 7% de R 50 millions, c'est R 3.5 millions alors que la pension des artistes est moins d'un 1 million roupies par an – quelle est la part qui alimente la *MASA Solidarity Scheme* ?

Mr Teeluck: I think I did not get the question properly, but I will still try to reply. You mentioned about Rs50 m. Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned 2 rates – 30% of royalties being redirected for administrative costs and that 30% is out of the royalties collected, copyright fees collected. So, it is not grant being allocated by the Government to MASA and the 7%, again, royalties out of copyright fees collected from users of work.

There is no fixed Rs50 m. fund. It depends on the rate of collection and it depends on how pressing MASA has been over the financial year to get money in from users of work. It varies. But the 7% comes out of all the fees collected over the financial year and

that is directed to the MASA Provident and Benevolent Fund. Out of that 7% that goes out to the fund, part of it is earmarked for the MASA Artists Solidarity Scheme.

Mr David: Precisely, my question was: out of those 7%, what amount is earmarked to supply the Artists Solidarity Scheme? That was my question actually.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the exact figures, but as I mentioned, the MASA Provident and Benevolent Fund caters for the solidarity scheme, the pension, medical schemes, death grants, cost for annual/general assembly and elections. But, of course, I will be very happy to table *le décompte des allocations et* where the money is being redirected in that fund.

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

At 1.01 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.34 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Next question would be for hon. Bodha!

SRI LANKA, APRIL 2021 – MV MAURITIUS TROCHETTIA – COVID LOCKDOWN – DISTURBANCE ALLOWANCE

(No. B/1096) **Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the vessel MV Mauritius Trochettia drydocked in Colombo, Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2021 with 28 crew members, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd., information as to if –

- (a) the disturbance allowance payable thereto, if any, have been disbursed, and
- (b) the Corporation is considering the replacement of the local workforce thereof by foreign workers.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd that on 12 April 2021, MV Mauritius Trochetia left Mauritius for its dry-docking in Sri Lanka. The vessel reached Colombo on 20 April and with 28 crew members on board, comprising of 4 foreigners and 24 Mauritians.

The four foreign crew members were the Master, the Chief Officer, the Second Engineer Officer and the Third Engineer Officer. The vessel came back to Mauritius on 14 September 2021 after the dry-docking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when the vessel reached Sri Lanka, COVID-19 Pandemic was at its full swing worldwide. On 22 April 2021, a first meeting was held with the shipyard on

board the vessel. The repairs work started at berth from 23 April 2021 up to 05 May. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, procurement of parts, repairs of crane and testing were completed on 26 August 2021. The vessel left Sri Lanka on 27 August 2021 and reached Mauritius on 03 of September. All crew members who on are in Colombo for the dry-docking returned to Mauritius.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the MSCL that, in practice, during a dry-docking exercise, whether in Mauritius or abroad, the crew members are paid their salaries as per their contract of employments signed with the MSCL.

To that end, no disturbance allowance has been paid to the crew members as they have worked as per their normal scheme of duties as per their contract of employment. There is already a provision of monthly allowance of Rs3,000 for crew working on board vessels in their salary.

As regards part (b) of the question, it has never been and will never be the policy of MSCL to replace the local workers by foreign workforce. As per prevailing policy at MSCL, as far as possible, local workers are recruited on board the vessel.

However, at times, MSCL has to resort to the employment of foreign crew to cater for the shortage of seafarers on the local market for certain positions. This has been the case for MV Mauritius Trochettia during its dry-docking where nine crew members signed off after they were infected with COVID-19. Thus, MSCL had to resort to Sri Lankan foreign workers. In fact, I am informed by the MSCL that out of those nine crew members who signed off, six have already been reemployed on board the Mauritius Trochettia.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the required posts on board the vessel, which are scarce and not easily available in Mauritius, include the Master, the 2nd Officer, the 3rd Officer, Chief Engineer, 2nd Engineer, and of Able Seaman Deck and Able Seaman Engine also.

I am further informed by the MSCL that, as at date, out of 34 crew members, there are eight foreign crew members on board MV Mauritius Trochettia. The eight foreign crew members on the vessel occupy the post of 2nd Officer, 3rd Officer, 2nd Engineer, 3rd Engineer, Able Seaman Deck. Most are Sri Lankan, Indian and Malagasy.

I am informed also that training for seafarers on Deck and in Engine room are being provided by the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy in collaboration with the Shipping Division of my Ministry to replace these foreigners, of course, as far as possible.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware in what harsh conditions the Mauritian crew lived during those months in Sri Lanka?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know, especially hon. Bodha – we were together – how harsh it was, not only for our crew over there, but in Mauritius, worldwide and everywhere, even for the Mauritians working on cruise vessels abroad, so many were stranded. It was not a normal situation. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, when they were tested COVID-19 positive, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation took care of all facilities with regard to medical care provided to them in Sri Lanka.

Mr Bodha: Given the fact that the crew was away from home for five months in harsh conditions, may I ask the hon. Minister, whether a special allowance cannot be granted to them? I think they have made a request to him. I think, on humanitarian grounds, being given that he says that the disturbance allowance is not payable – because of the contract – and the dry-docking allowance either.

Can he consider the possibility of a special allowance being given to them given the harsh conditions in which they spent five months in Sri Lanka?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 pandemic caused major disturbance in all sectors. Many can recall, as I said rightly, not only in the shipping but also in the Police, everywhere. Now we start with COVID-19 Disturbance Allowance Programme; I know where to start and where to end with this. But anyway, this will be sent to the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Board for them to take stock of it and decide upon that.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister for his time but may I ask him a last question?

Mr Speaker: Exceptionally!

Mr Bodha: May I know from the hon. Minister what is the status today of the 24 members of crew, whether they are still on board the ship; whether they have been granted the possibility of upgrading their skills at the school? What is the status of that crew today as he has already confirmed that foreigners are not going to be recruited unless there is no other possibility?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, actually we have eight foreigners working on board and out of the nine who signed off, six have been re-employed on board. So, it is an on-going programme on board with regard to training. To upgrade our crew on board Mauritius Trochetia, there are courses which are being done at the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy and this is done at the cost of the Mauritius Shipping Corporation.

Mr Speaker: So, next question!

ST MARTIN - PIG BREEDERS - POLLUTION & WATER SHORTAGE

(No. B/1097) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the pig breeders at St Martin, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof operating thereat;
- (b) if his Ministry is in presence of any representation in regard to pollution and water shortage;
- (c) where matters stand as to the integrated plan for the –
 - (i) waste disposal access, and
 - (ii) infrastructural works in terms of road access, lightning, fencing, water availability and installation of camera thereat.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are presently 174 pig breeders who have been allocated State land for pig breeding activities at St Martin at two different phases known as St Martin Phase I and St Martin Phase II, which are adjacent to each other.

There are 39 pig breeders in St Martin I on agricultural State land of an extent of 10 *arpents*. They fall under the purview of the Cooperatives Division of the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives. These pig breeders had backyard pig rearing activities in regions such as Plaisance, Stanley, Camp Le Vieux and Rose Hill and had relocated to St Martin Phase I in 1983. They are re-grouped under the Plaisance Pig Credit and Marketing Cooperative Society. As for St Martin Phase II, there are 135 pig breeders on agricultural State land of an extent of 25 *arpents*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the outbreak of African swine fever in 2007, a policy decision was taken to establish St Martin Phase II in order to relocate pig breeders operating in their backyards in the regions of Albion, Roche Bois and other areas in the vicinity of Port Louis.

71 out of these 135 pig breeders have a valid lease agreement of a period of seven years. The remaining 65 breeders' lease agreements have expired and will be renewed after a survey exercise by my Ministry and after obtaining a Parcel Identification Number from the Ministry of Housing and lands. The plots of land leased to these breeders vary from 10 to 30 perches.

Officers of the Land Use Division of my Ministry and the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) carry out sites visits at Phase II, that is, St

Martin II, at least four times a year to ascertain whether the lessees are occupying the plots of land and complying with other conditions of the lease agreement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to part (b) of the question on pollution, I wish to inform the House that several Government agencies, including my Ministry, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the District Council of Black River and the *Police de l'Environnement* have received complaints with regard to odour and wastewater nuisances originating from St Martin Phase I.

Furthermore, FAREI has also received complaints with respect to the following issues, namely –

- (a) Odour nuisance emanating from St Martin;
- (b) Air pollution due to burning of domestic waste;
- (c) Discharge of waste in Magenta Canal;
- (d) Overflow of waste on access roads, and
- (e) Erratic water supply.

The Central Water Authority (CWA) carried out a site visit in St Martin I in November 2020 and following an assessment, it was noted that the central wastewater facility thereat was not functioning properly.

In the light of this assessment, remedial action was taken by my Ministry and a contract for the cleaning and rehabilitation of the wastewater system at St Martin Phase I was awarded to contractor Prakash Foolchund Contracting Ltd for an amount of Rs3.5 m. The project was completed in October 2022 and since then, all wastes emanating from St Martin Phase I are channelled through this central waste treatment facility which is fully operational. Furthermore, FAREI is giving constant training to pig breeders on good husbandry practices at both St Martin I and II.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to St Martin Phase I, St Martin Phase II is not provided with a wastewater treatment facility due to technical reasons. Therefore, at St Martin Phase II, most of the breeders are using an uncovered absorption pit to collect the waste. The remaining breeders have installed septic tanks. Around 20 of the breeders do not have a waste disposal system.

With a view to alleviating the problem of obstruction of drains caused by discharge of wastes at St Martin Phase I, my Ministry is proposing the construction of individual waste treatment plants for each breeder and maintenance of the new individual treatment plants at regular interval of three months. In that respect, a study will be carried out on the

feasibility and cost estimate for this project with technical specifications, following which funding will be identified in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for part (b) of the question concerning water shortage, I have been informed that such situation was prevailing during the dry season which had, in fact, affected the whole island. However, during the said dry season, the CWA was assisting the breeders through provision of water tank service.

Furthermore, St Martin Phase I also obtains water from a borehole. Necessary action is being taken by the CWA to connect the breeders in St Martin Phase I with domestic water supply. All the farms in St Martin Phase II are already connected to the domestic water supply. My Ministry is in the presence of a proposal from the Plaisance Pig Credit and Marketing Cooperative Society to review the penalty ceiling limit of borehole water to 3,000 m³ and to fix the daily water extraction per day by the said cooperative society to avoid payment of penalty. The said proposals are being looked into.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to part (c) of the question, in respect of an integrated plan at St Martin, my Ministry is proposing the setting up of a Technical Committee to look into the said integrated plan.

With regard to infrastructure on site, I am informed that the main road and internal access roads are asphalted and that street lighting is available. Some of the breeders have secured their respective plots with metallic fencing as well as CCTV cameras.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: I would like to thank the hon. Minister for his reply which is very comprehensive, because this is a region with pig breeders, small breeders who have been facing lot of problems over the years and different governments have been trying to help them. Can I ask the hon. Minister, I am, through you, sending a request by the pig breeders if he can see and attend to these requests and whether he is agreeable to go and do a site visit with the co-operators and responsible authorities as well and the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives to see de visu by himself the situation actually prevailing at the St Martin Site II?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, we shall look into the matter jointly with my colleague, the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: A supplementary question. Being given that there are underground water tables in the region and also the villages of Canot, Gros Cailloux and Albion which

are affected with regard to these pollution problems, can I make a request to the Minister to at least see with the Minister of Environment what can be done to alleviate the problem of pollution pending the implementation of the projects mentioned by the Minister?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, we shall indeed have a holistic approach to this long-standing problem around St-Martin. As I have stated in my reply, a number of initiatives are being implemented and the request of the cooperative society will be taken into consideration. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Quirin!

GRA – HORSE RACING INDUSTRY – COST, TAXES & REVENUE

(No. B/1098) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Horse Racing Industry, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Horse Racing Division of the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to the –

- (a) cost incurred by Government in connection with the organisation of horse racing, giving details thereof;
- (b) amount of money collected by Government in terms of –
 - (i) taxes, and
 - (ii) other revenues therefrom in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, and
- (c) funds allocated to the Authority for each of the Financial Year 2020 to 2023.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question. J'ai été informé par la *Gambling Regulatory Authority* que la *Horse Racing Division* est entrée en fonction en janvier 2022 avec pour principal objectif de réglementer, contrôler et surveiller les courses hippiques à Maurice conformément à la section 15(a)(i) de la *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act*.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé que le coût encouru par le gouvernement par l'intermédiaire de la *Horse Racing Division* pour la saison des courses hippiques 2022 était de R 51,7 millions. Le détail des postes se présente comme suit –

- (i) R 29,3 millions au titre des frais de laboratoire pour les tests d'échantillons avant et après les courses et hors compétition ;

- (ii) R 15,3 millions pour les honoraires des expatriés employés comme *Head of Horse Racing, Stipendiary Stewards and Handicapper* ;
- (iii) R 5,2 millions pour l'équipement informatique, le mobilier, le matériel de bureau et d'autres dépenses annexes, et
- (iv) R 1,9 millions pour les frais de personnel.

S'agissant de la partie (b) (i) concernant la collecte de taxes, les montants sont comme suit –

- (i) pour l'année 2020 : R 476,2 millions ;
- (ii) 2021 : 413,2 millions, et
- (iii) 2022 : 446,4 millions.

Pour les autres revenus, à savoir les licences, les pénalités et autres –

- (i) 2020 : R 58,6 millions ;
- (ii) 2021 : R 57,3 millions ;
- (iii) 2022 : R 53,4 millions.

S'agissant la partie (c) de la question concernant les montants alloués par le gouvernement, je vais parler en année fiscale parce que ce n'est pas en termes d'années calendaires –

- (i) pour l'année financière 2020/2021 : R 43 millions ;
- (ii) 2021/2022 : R 37,9 millions ;
- (iii) 2022/2023 : R 92 millions.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Quirin : M. le président, les spécialistes de ce secteur avancent que les revenus sont à la baisse et les chiffres que vient de mentionner l'honorable ministre vont définitivement dans ce sens. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire quelles sont les mesures prises par son ministère pour lutter contre les paris illégaux qui constituent le principal fléau de ce secteur ?

Dr. Padayachy : M. le président, je laisse le soin aux régulateurs de par leur indépendance de proposer des mesures pour mieux contrôler les courses. De notre côté, nous, nous apportons tout notre soutien aux régulateurs pour mieux réguler ce secteur.

Donc, n'étant pas moi-même un spécialiste des courses, je l'ai dit plusieurs fois ici, je ne pourrais, de prime abord, comme ça, sorti de nulle part, avancer des propositions

pour dire comment mieux réguler les courses, parce que je ne suis pas un expert des courses. Merci.

Mr Quirin : M. le président, avec ce qui se passe actuellement au Champ-de-Mars, le public a perdu confiance dans cette industrie, et principalement avec la nouvelle compagnie organisatrice de courses. De ce fait, le ministre peut-il nous dire ce que son ministère compte faire pour restaurer cette confiance ?

Dr. Padayachy : M. le président, je pense que n'étant même pas un expert concernant les chevaux, je sais qu'il y a eu des problèmes avec la Covid, on n'a pas pu organiser les courses avec le confinement, avec le fait qu'il fallait y avoir une distanciation, il y avait eu beaucoup de problèmes concernant l'organisation des courses. Par la suite, nous avons un nouvel organisateur qui est en train d'organiser les courses. Nous allons voir comment cela évolue et, par la suite, nous ferons les recommandations au niveau de mon ministère avec la GRA.

Mr Speaker: MP Armance!

LIVESTOCK & LIVE CATTLES – IMPORTATION FROM RODRIGUES

(No. B/1099) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Meat Authority, information as to the number of live cattles and other livestock imported from Rodrigues since January 2022 to date.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would refer the hon. Member to my reply given to Parliamentary Question B/848. I reiterate that the Livestock and Veterinary Division (LVD) of my Ministry has issued, from January 2022 to date, 41 movement permits to the Mauritius Meat Authority (MMA) following which, 842 cattle, 1,723 sheep and 1,562 goats have been moved from Rodrigues to Mauritius.

I wish to point out that in was in January 2022 that the restriction on the movement of animals from Rodrigues to Mauritius was partially lifted.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Armance: May I know from the Minister when was the last importation of cattle from Rodrigues and when will be the next one?

Mr Gobin: It all depends on the movement of the ship from Mauritius to Port Mathurin and back. I don't have the exact date of the last voyage.

Mr Armance: Concernant l’embargo que le ministre lui-même vient de mentionner, pendant sa visite à l’île Rodrigues, le ministre avait mentionné qu’il allait enlever l’embargo sur l’importation de bétails à Rodrigues. Est-ce qu’il peut nous dire si oui ou non il va considérer à enlever l’embargo sur l’importation de bétails à Rodrigues ?

Mr Gobin: I reiterate that it was partially lifted in January 2022, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, concerning the complete lifting of the restriction, it will depend on the vaccination programme against the foot-and-mouth disease followed by a serosurveillance exercise. I wish to point out that the foot-and-mouth disease prevalence is estimated at around 10% right now in Rodrigues and there is a third vaccination programme which is ongoing since last month, that is, June 2023. One Vet Officer has moved to Rodrigues to help the two veterinary officers in Rodrigues for the said vaccination programme. Once this vaccination programme will be completed, a serosurveillance will be done and in the light of the result of the serosurveillance, then a decision will be taken whether to completely lift the restrictions or not depending on the results.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

SOCIAL SECURITY – ENLISTED DOCTORS – CONTRACT PERIOD

(No. B/1100) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the doctors enlisted by her Ministry, she will state the number thereof, indicating the contract period thereof.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at date, there are 316 medical practitioners whose services are retained by the Ministry on a sessional basis for a duration of one year renewable for another period of one year on the basis of satisfactory performance, conduct and upon mutual agreement.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, the contract of 200 doctors has expired since 28 May this year but they are continuing to work and prescribe dangerous drugs. May I ask the hon. Minister if ever there is a case of medical negligence, who will bear the responsibility? Is it a doctor or your Ministry?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: As you have rightly said, they are working. Needful is being done to renew their contract but I have been told that they have made representations before the Conciliation and Mediation Division of the Ministry of Labour and we are waiting for the outcome of the report but at the same time, we are trying to get information from the SLO to clarify all matters and a letter will be sent to them. Since they are working, everything is being looked at by the Ministry.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that it is a recurrent feature at the Ministry, that is, the last time the contract was to be renewed, it was renewed after six months, and doctors...

Mr Speaker: So, what is the question?

Mr Ameer Meea: Will the hon. Minister agree with me that this situation, that a doctor has to wait for six months for his contract to be renewed, is a humiliating one, because they are doing a noble job...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr Ameer Meea: ...and also...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr Ameer Meea: It is also tantamount to an infringement...

Mr Speaker: Are you making a speech now?

Mr Ameer Meea: ...to labour laws!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: I do not agree with the hon. Member because I have been told that out 316 medical practitioners, the contract of 72 medical practitioners has already been renewed in January and February 2023, and offer of employment for at least 10 medical practitioners will expire in August, September and October this year. I agree with you that there are some 234 medical practitioners whose contracts have expired, but as I have said, we are looking into the matter. I am sure that needful will be done in the months to come.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Ms Anquetil : Je vous remercie, M. le président. PQ B/1101 !

L'OISEAU DU PARADIS RELAY SHELTER – CARE GIVERS' DUTIES

(No. B/1101) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the 43 care givers currently serving 12 residents at Relay Shelter Cap Malheureux, also known as *l'Oiseau du Paradis*, she will state the duties assigned thereto.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Children's Council that there are presently 38 child care givers working on a roster basis at the Cap Malheureux Relay Shelter instead of 43, as mentioned by the hon. Member.

I am further informed that the number of residents admitted thereat as at date stands at 20. I wish to inform the House that there are actually 14 care givers who are

suspended. Moreover, the National Children's Council was previously managing the *Notre Dame* Relay Centre and 14 June of this year, the management of that shelter has been handed over to a NGO. 13 care givers who were working over there have been redeployed at the Cap Malheureux Relay Shelter. Consequently, the services of these child care givers have been retained in order to consolidate the existing workforce.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the National Children Council, in addition to the normal duties performed, the care givers are also called upon to accompany and take care of a child who has been admitted in hospital around the clock basis, to work with residents with serious behavioural problems on a one to one basis, to cater for those who are on vacation, sick leaves or casual leaves. Since the number of residents fluctuates constantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the services of these care givers are required in order to maintain a child to child care giver ratio. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre, peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre si cette situation de sureffectif chronique du personnel découle d'une planification lourdement défailante lors du transfert de gestion de l'abri de Notre Dame à une ONG, il y a plus d'un mois ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, not at all, to be putting it like this, because I have just explained in my main answer that there is a child to child care giver ratio that has to be respected. The duties of the care giver are not limited to a two line scheme of service. It is a very extensive list of services that are delivered to the residents of the Cap Malheureux or any other residential institution for that matter.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. J'ai bien écouté la réponse de la ministre, mais je maintiens, je suis en possession du *roster* de Cap Malheureux, et je maintiens qu'il y a une situation de sureffectif chronique dans ce *shelter*. Puis-je demander à la ministre de fournir des éclaircissements sur la décision de ne pas déployer le personnel de l'abri de Notre Dame vers d'autres départements ou services au moment du transfert de la gestion à une ONG, étant donné – écoutez bien – que le sureffectif a un impact...

Mr Speaker: No! Now...

Ms Anquetil:sur les enfants placés...

Mr Speaker: ...you are going too much. Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: Merci, M. le président.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, once again, the hon. Member is not correct in what she is purporting in the House. I reiterate – like you maintain, I maintain

too – that the care giver ratio to children at the moment, at Cap Malheureux Relay Shelter is adequate and they are fulfilling what is required of them. Any policy or any decision of redeployment of those care givers is not going to come through one of your recommendations.

We have, at the level of the Ministry, capable officers who are in charge of a specific unit which is the Child Development Unit of the Ministry. Those shelters are run by the National Children Council. The decision to redeploy or reallocate any care giver or any human resource, as we say, will be up to them. They will be very well informed decisions as well. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SOCIETE VALLÉE DE STE CROIX– MORCELLEMENT PROJECT

(No. B/1102) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the project for the residential *morcellement* at *Société Vallée de Ste Croix*, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand, indicating –

- (a) if there was any tampering of natural drainage path thereat, and
- (b) the number of Building and Land Use Permits granted therefor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that the project for the residential *morcellement* at *Société Vallée de Ste Croix* is located upstream of *Vallée Le Cornu* which has been declared as high risk flood prone area.

I am also informed that a Letter of Intent was granted by the then Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning on 08 June 2018 to the *Société Vallée de Ste Croix* for subdivision of a portion of land of an approximate extent of 9 to 3000 m² into 78 plots plus one green space. The proposed *morcellement* was overlain over the existing GIS data set available at the Land Drainage Authority, namely the digital elevation model and the natural path. The said site is found to be crossed by several natural drainage paths. The site downstream of the proposed *morcellement* has been impacted during the past flooding events, whereby it was observed that clearing of the subject *morcellement* site at *Vallée de Ste Croix* has obstructed the natural drainage path and the Land Drainage Authority has informed the Municipal Council of Port Louis accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in a letter dated 13 April 2023, the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, National Development Unit has informed my Ministry that the *morcellement* project at *Vallée Le Cornu* will disrupt the natural drainage system and accentuate the flooding downstream. As such, the Government has taken the decision to put on hold the *morcellement* project in that region. Subsequently, my Ministry has, on 20 April 2023, instructed the Municipal City Council of Port Louis not to issue any Building and Land Use Permit for the said *morcellement* until further notice. However, as per the Land Drainage Authority, the natural drainage path has not yet been restored by the promoter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Municipal Council of Port Louis that the application for 11 permits has been received for the specific region and no Building and Land Use Permit has been issued in line the instruction from the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. I have received numerous complaints from future inhabitants of that region who have invested a lot of money for that plot of land and they have been inquiring and waiting for answer as well. May I request the hon. Minister to kindly advise what the way forward is? What is he proposing as Minister towards those inhabitants of that region? Thank you.

Dr. Husnoo: Actually, the remedial works that have to be done by the promoters. When the remedial work is acceptable to the LDA, then I think that we can reconsider afterwards. But until these works are not done, it is a bit difficult to reconsider the issuing of the permits now.

Mr Speaker: Put a question!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Yes, one last question to the hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House that no reinstatement work has been done following the different site visits and the different reports of the LDA?

Dr. Husnoo: That is what I have been told, yes.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PUBLICS HOSPITALS – IPC SCORE

(No. B/1103) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public hospitals, he will state the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) score of each hospital.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Infection and Prevention Control (IPC) Committee was set up in May 2021. The main objective of the National IPC Committee is to provide strategic guidance and directives on infection prevention and control activities to ensure that the risks caused by transmission of preventable infection are minimized.

In 2022, a national action plan on IPC was written in collaboration with WHO to address the gaps that were identified.

Mr Speaker, Sir, assessment on IPC is carried out as follows –

- By the National IPC Committee: twice a year (March/December);
- By the World Health Organisation: once yearly (July).

In 2021, the National IPC Committee carried out assessment four times, with mean score at 64% while the WHO carried out the assessment on two occasions with the mean score at 62%.

In 2022, the National IPC Committee undertook the assessment thrice, with mean score at 68% and the WHO obtained a mean score of 78% during its assessment.

In 2023, the National IPC Committee carried out an assessment in March 2023 and the mean score was 59%. The assessment by the WHO is in progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that according to the national checklist, the IPC score of each hospital in March 2023 was as follows –

- 63% at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital;
- 63% at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital;
- 48% at Victoria Hospital;
- 72% at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, and
- 52% at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital.

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister mentioned about a National IPC Committee. May I ask him to clarify whether there is an IPC Department with a dedicated team within his Ministry to assess the IPC targets and measures?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a National IPC Committee and the Regional IPC Committee. So, the task of the members of the National IPC Committee is to

–

- set up planned and relevant objectives in keeping with IPC;

- develop and regularly update IPC guidelines and to review and approve IPC policies;
- develop a system to monitor infection control;
- coordinate continuous training;
- ensure access to products essential to IPC;
- review epidemiological surveillance data;
- coordinate outbreak investigations, and
- communicate and cooperate with other committees.

So, this is for the National IPC Committee. It is chaired by the Director of Health Services, co-chaired by the Deputy Permanent Secretary and all the different Directors of the Ministry.

Then, the Regional IPC Committee is at the hospital level, with the Regional Health Director and the Nursing Administrators and so on.

Mr David: Mr Speaker, Sir, IPC is all about infectious diseases. May I know from the hon. Minister how many Infectious Disease Medical Specialist Doctors are employed by his Ministry?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has only one Infectious Diseases and Control Specialist in the service. The control of infection is dealt at different levels, be it from the nursing staff, doctors working in the wards, and the nursing officers working in the operation theatre in the IPC. So, you do not need to have many specialists in Infectious Diseases Control, but you need to train all grades of staff on infection control.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION – STAFF SALARY REVIEW EXERCISE

(No. B/1104) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the salary review for the staff of the Financial Services Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to where matters stand.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to inform the House that the last salary review exercise was undertaken at the Financial Services Commission in 2016. The next report was due in January 2021.

I am informed by the FSC that following a procurement exercise launched in January 2022, a Salary Commissioner was appointed on 03 June 2022. The terms of reference of the Salary Commissioner included the following –

- (a) to conduct a review of the existing salary and terms and conditions of employment;
- (b) to carry out a review of the existing employee handbook and code of conduct, and
- (c) to provide recommendations with respect to review of organisational structure, including manpower plan.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the Salary Commissioner started the review exercise on 22 June 2022 and all staff had the opportunity to make their representations. The Salary Commissioner submitted his report to the Board in March 2023. The report was considered at the level of the Board over several meetings. The report was due in January 2021 and the review in the salary would have considered the loss in purchasing power up to 2020, which would have amounted to 14.65%.

However, the Salary Commissioner recommended to include the loss of the purchasing power of 2022. The loss of the purchasing power up to 2022 was computed at 27.03%. Consequently, the recommendation of the Salary Commissioner was to grant an increase of 23.67%, taking into consideration the Government compensation of 3.36% which was already paid up. Hence, all staff on substantive capacity will be granted an increase of 23.67%.

The final version of the report was approved by the Board of FSC on 22 June 2023 and the process is still ongoing administratively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the FSC that the report on the revised salary and terms and conditions of employment have been imparted to the staff on 29 June 2023. Staffs were invited to accept the report through an Option Form with a deadline of 12 July 2023. At the expiry of the said deadline, save and except for one staff, all staff have exercised the acceptance of the report.

Mr Uteem: Thank you. I understand that the hon. Minister is not the substantive Minister but will he consider tabling a copy of the report of the Salary Commissioner?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply I said that the report was approved by the Board on 22 June and the process, administratively, is still ongoing. So, it is not proper to table any report as they have not completed the whole process at the level of the FSC.

Mr Uteem: One last question. One of the main problems which the staff had with the report is that it was to take effect from January 2023, whereas the hon. Minister, himself, mentioned that review was due as far as back January 2021. So, may I know from the hon. Minister, who I know is not the substantive Minister, whether this question as to the date of application of the report has now been resolved between management and staff?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also asked some information on this particular topic raised by the hon. Member and as I have mentioned that once the report was approved by the Board and that the process is ongoing, these are the discussions happening to finalise the effective date of the report. I am sure once it is done, my colleague, the Minister could eventually answer the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE – ALLEGED CASES – INVESTIGATION

(No. B/1105) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medical negligence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as the number of alleged cases thereof investigated, since 2022 to date, indicating the –

- (a) number of officers found guilty thereof;
- (b) disciplinary actions taken, and
- (c) department/s concerned therewith.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Medical Negligence Standing Committee (MNSC) has been constituted in June 2020 to carry out preliminary investigations into cases of alleged medical negligence in public health institutions. The objective of the MNSC is to expedite matters and to ascertain as to whether there has been any act of medical negligence during medical treatment and hospitalisation of a patient.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since the constitution of the MNSC in June 2020, a total of 138 cases have been investigated. For the period January 2022 to June 2023, a total of 68 cases have been investigated by the MNSC.

Out of the total of 138 cases investigated, the MNSC has concluded that 37 cases need to be referred to the Medical Council of Mauritius and Nursing Council for further investigation and appropriate actions as deemed necessary.

Following the investigations at the level of the Medical Council of Mauritius –

- 19 cases have been set aside;
- 5 cases have been referred back to my Ministry;
- 1 case has been referred to the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal;
- 1 Warning and 6 Severe Warnings have been issued;
- 1 Suspension has been effective, and
- 4 cases are still under investigation.

Disciplinary actions are taken by the Public Service Commission following recommendation of the Statutory Bodies through which delegation of powers is entrusted as per PSC Regulations.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the 138 cases investigated by the MNSC pertain to the departments of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Paediatrics, General Surgery and Orthopaedics.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: M. le président, les négligences médicales ont des conséquences graves comme perte de vie ou séquelles permanentes. Je demande donc à l'honorable ministre si son ministère a une stratégie pour réduire et protéger la population contre ces négligences médicales parce que le nombre ne baisse pas au fil des années, ce qui démontre clairement que la stratégie actuelle ne marche pas.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to whether the number of cases referred to and whether the number of cases of medical negligence have been going up since the last few days, in fact, they have been going down. The number of cases with proved medical negligence has been going down for the last three-four years. Now the question is: what is the strategy? Obviously, the strategy would be how we improve the service delivery in terms of capacity building and Information and Technology (IT). So, these are being undertaken, and obviously, with time, we will have different services. It takes time to improve all the different aspects to upgrade the service in the public health sector.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ILLICIT DRUGS CONSUMPTION – YOUNGSTERS' ADMISSION IN HOSPITALS – TREATMENT & ACTIONS

(No. B/1106) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the consumption of illicit drugs, he will state the number of young persons, under the age of 20, admitted in the five regional hospitals and other related centers since January 2020 to date, gender wise, indicating the –

- (a) treatment provided in relation thereto, and
- (b) remedial actions taken in relation thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the consumption of illicit drugs, the number young persons under the age of 20 admitted in public hospitals and residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres since January 2020 to June 2023 is 479 that is, 444 males and 35 females.

In Public Hospitals, 300 admissions, that is 272 males and 28 females, have been recorded from January 2020 to June 2023 in regard to consumption of illicit drugs for this age group. For the same period, the number of admissions for males in residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres are as follows –

- a. 100 at Nenuphar Centre at Montagne Longue;
- b. 36 at Mahebourg Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre, and
- c. 36 at Frangipane Centre, which is operational since July 2021.

And with regard to female patients, 7 were admitted at the Centre Orchidée which became operational in July 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question about treatment provided, substance use disorder patients in the centres of the Harm Reduction Unit are seen by a multi-disciplinary team comprising of Doctors, Specialised Nurses, Psychologists, Psychiatrists and also Non-Governmental Organisations and Social Workers to ensure their holistic management.

The medical management of substance use disorder patients is tailor made to the need of each patient. The different treatments available in our hospitals/centres are as follows –

- a. Detoxification with suboxone in the context of suboxone/naltrexone treatment;
- b. Methadone Substitution Therapy Programme, and
- c. Addressing comorbidities related to substance use disorders like HIV infection, Hepatitis infections and sexually transmitted diseases and psychiatric comorbidities are also addressed.

All these programmes are in line with the protocol - *Protocol de Prise en Charge de l'Usage de Drogue*, which is in place since March 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, patients also undergo psycho-social management and rehabilitation which encompasses the following –

- a. Preparation to stay for treatment and other routine activities contributing to a successful rehabilitation, including daily hygiene;
- b. Physical exercises;
- c. Indoor games;
- d. Literacy and numeracy exercises;
- e. Creative arts;
- f. Counseling activities;
- g. Psychosocial support;
- h. Agriculture and gardening, and
- i. Relapse prevention sessions.

After treatment and care at regional hospitals and related centres, the follow-up of patients is carried out at the regional hospitals and Methadone Day Care Centres and Addiction Treatment Units thereafter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question about remedial actions for this target group, the following measures have been taken by my Ministry –

- a. Drug use prevention activities in line with the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023. Prevention is carried out in educational and training institutions, the community including Correctional Youth Centres and Rehabilitation Youth Centres and the workplace;
- b. The National Mass Media/Social Media Campaign is carried out targeting adolescent and young adults;
- c. The Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drugs, launched in 2021;
- d. The setting up of a Drug Users Administrative Panel in order to give the population, including young drug users, an opportunity to rehabilitate and re-integrate the mainstream society.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, selon un rapport du bureau de l’audit intitulé ‘*Enhancing The Effectiveness of Interventions Related To Drug Demand And Arm Reduction*’ datant d’avril de cette année, mention est faite que plus de 150 jeunes de 15 à 19 ans sont admis chaque année dans les hôpitaux pour des complications liées à la consommation de drogue. De ce fait, le ministre peut-il nous dire quelle est la stratégie à part de ce qu’il a mentionné dans sa réponse initiale, que son ministère a mise en place pour aider ces jeunes à sortir de cet enfer et pour ne pas rechuter à l’avenir ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I already mentioned, different treatments and different programmes are being proposed. Now, the question is whether we have to redevise another strategy. So, we will be having a new Masterplan – the National Drug Control Masterplan 2019-2023 and in that Masterplan, we are going to see what is happening to people who use drugs, Intravenous Drugs and thereafter, we can devise another strategy for the next five years.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, au niveau des jeunes de 14 ans, dans ce même rapport, on fait état que de sept admissions par an, par rapport aux jeunes de 14 ans. De ce fait, le ministre peut-il nous dire ce qui est fait actuellement par son ministère pour inverser cette tendance, cette situation, surtout que le rapport du bureau de l'audit a fait un constat d'échec du programme *Get Connected* pourtant implanté dans 24 écoles secondaires ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to look at it again with the different stakeholders, Ministry of Education and the National Secretariat Against Drugs, the NDS as well. We have to work it again, and then probably I will be able to give an appropriate answer.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Boolell: Next question?

Mr Speaker: Next! Your...

Dr. Boolell: No supplementary! Next question!

Mr Speaker: No supplementary!

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR – CLUSTER MUNITIONS CONVENTION

(No. B/1107) Dr A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, he will state if Mauritius is a signatory thereof and, if so, indicate the stand of Mauritius on the use of these types of munitions in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for having asked this question which I am sure will help me to enlighten the House on this issue.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is a legally binding international treaty that prohibits the use, the production, the transfer and the stock piling of Cluster Munitions in accordance with human rights and humanitarian law. The commonest type of cluster munitions is air dropped or ground launch explosive weapons that eject explosive bomblets that kill indiscriminately over a wide area and are known to linger unexploded

for years and then suddenly detonate causing life loss and injury to civilians and infrastructure alike. Certain cluster munitions can disperse chemical or biological weapons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Convention on Cluster Munitions entered into force on 01 August 2010. To date, the Convention on Cluster Munitions has 111 State parties and 12 signatories. The USA, Ukraine and the Russian Federation are neither party nor signatory to the Convention. Mauritius deposited its instrument of accession to the convention on 01 October 2015. Accordingly, the convention entered into force for Mauritius on 01 April 2016 pursuant to its Article 17 (2). Mauritius, therefore, is a State party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions has been incorporated into Mauritian law through the Anti-Personnel Mines and Cluster Munitions Prohibition Act of 2016. The law strictly prohibits cluster munitions among other level weapons and provides for hefty punishment for offenders. The law also provides for extra territorial jurisdiction by Mauritian courts where the alleged offence has been committed outside Mauritius and that the person to be charged of the offence is either a natural or legal person of Mauritian nationality or where the offence affects any natural or legal person in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is among those countries that enforce a complete ban on cluster munitions by virtue of being a State party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. It is also the result of our adherence to human rights approach to address the humanitarian consequences and unacceptable harm to civilians caused by cluster munitions. Mauritius, therefore, subscribes to a complete prohibition of such weapons that cause excessive victims, including among civilian populations and infrastructure.

We recognise, Mr Speaker, Sir, that disarmament is an essential part of conflict prevention and is paramount to achieving lasting peace. Therefore, Mauritius will continue to work with like-minded countries and the Secretariat of the Convention in Geneva to sensitise stakeholders and non-state parties to the convention against the use of cluster munitions in any military conflicts and to resolve all disputes in a peaceful manner and in accordance with established norms. We also follow closely the work of the Secretariat of the Convention for the universalization of the convention; the surest way to achieve a world ban on cluster munitions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of the foregoing, Mauritius is against the use by any party of cluster munitions at anytime and anywhere and in any circumstances. Accordingly, we call on all countries, whether or not signatory to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, not to frustrate the aims and objectives of the convention and to be

compliant with International Humanitarian Law. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius deplores the transfer of any such weapons to a third-party for eventual use by the latter. Thank you.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. I subscribe to the comprehensive reply given by the hon. Minister, but can I ask him whether, – well, of course, we all expressed our deep-seated concern –he had meetings with the Russian Ambassador and with the US Ambassador to express our deep-seated concern, notwithstanding the fact that we are working with like-minded countries, of course?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the answer to the hon. Member's question is already found in the reply to the question. I have already replied, in fact, to this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will repeat the stand of our country is that we call on all parties not to use such weapons in any circumstances, whether against a foreign country or within one's own territory or in any occupied zone of one's own territory. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have gone far enough also because the call of Mauritius with regard to the conflict in Ukraine has been that all parties should renounce the use of cluster munitions, which as I just said, is an internationally banned weapon and both countries should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

This is our call, Mr Speaker, Sir, cluster munitions stockpiles should have been declared and destroyed and must be destroyed as soon as it is safe to do so. International support must be given to enable clearance efforts. Mr Speaker, Sir, our call also goes in the direction that governments worldwide should continue to condemn the use of these munitions in Ukraine and elsewhere, and call for all States to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Dr. Boolell: Hon. Minister, you forgot that I was also Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am not asking that we have to punch above our weight. I have asked a specific question. Did you have a meeting with the Ambassador of US and the Ambassador of Russia to express our deep-seated concern?

Mr Ganoo: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just said that the stand of Mauritius is that we are not only a State party to this convention. We have also incorporated...

Ms Anquetil: *Mais il ne répond pas à la question !*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ganoo: Let me finish.

Dr. Boolell: *Zot in zwenn, zot pan zwenn?*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ganoo: Let me finish!

Ms Anquetil: *Repon kestion la.*

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! What is happening?

Ms Anquetil: *Mais il ne répond pas à la question !*

Mr Speaker: Who are you?

Ms Anquetil: *Reponn kestion!*

Mr Speaker: Who are you?

Mr Ganoo: We have also...

Mr Toussaint: Ambassador!

Mr Speaker: Who are you? Ambassador?

Dr. Boolell: Minister!

An hon. Member: Ambassador *ki repon sa! Pa p don tiket la !*

Mr Ganoo: We have also domesticated this convention. We have incorporated it in our law since 2016, Mr, Speaker, Sir. So, the stand of Mauritius is very clear with regard to this convention and with regard to the parties involved in the conflict.

Mr Toussaint: *Li bien kone.*

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister informed the House that USA, Russia, Ukraine are not signatory of the convention. But can they act regardlessly under the cluster munitions?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Li pa konpran kestion la !*

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer to this ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint, what is happening?

Mr Toussaint: Sorry.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer to this question is that regardless of whoever has joined the Convention on Cluster Monitoring, the rules of International

Humanitarian Law must be respected. Regardless of whether you are a State party or not, the rules of International Humanitarian Law must be respected by all parties to any armed conflict, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In fact, media reports are to the effect that Russia has been using these weapons since the beginning of this military conflict in Ukraine, but the media reports also are to the effect that Ukraine has also used its own ex-Soviet stockpile of cluster bombs. But the nature and the characteristic of these weapons, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just said, is that these weapons can scatter 10th or 100th of explosive sub munitions over a wide area and these sub munitions do not explode on delivery, but they are left sinking in water, in muddy areas or in soft grounds and can explode years or decades after, and can injure or harm children or civilians who can come and pick up these munitions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is why adhering to the rules of war – there is a principle called the rules of war which is strictly required, Mr Speaker, Sir. These rules are, in fact, designed to balance military necessity and humanitarian considerations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The use of such type of weapons, in fact, breaches International Humanitarian Law. This is the answer to the hon. Member's question because the use of these weapons, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, breaches two principles; the principle of distinction which upholds the need in an armed conflict to distinguish between combatants, soldiers and civilians, and also another principle called the principal of proportionality which upholds the role of indiscriminate attacks.

Mr Speaker Sir, having said this, let me just finish on one point. According to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, by way of the declaration of President Biden on 07 July at the NATO Summit, we all are conscious and are aware of what declaration I am referring to. In fact, the US on that day sent a very poor message to the world, especially to countries who were not yet parties to the convention, but, fortunately, the declaration of President Biden did not erode the fundamental value and importance of this convention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, any modern nation using cluster ammunition loses its moral leadership under International Humanitarian Law and Practices.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the following questions have been withdrawn. Parliamentary Questions B/1109, B/1113, B/1116, B/1121 and B/1133. Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Private Recruitment Agencies Bill (No. XII of 2023) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

(No. XI of 2023)

Order for second reading read.

(3.40 p.m.)

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. XI of 2023) be read a second time.

The Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill No. XI of 2023 provides for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2023-2024 and its Annex, and for matters connected, consequential or incidental thereto.

The Bill brings amendments to 90 enactments which cover the 3 themes of the Budget, namely –

- (a) Strengthening the Foundations of our Economy;
- (b) Continuing the Transformation of Mauritius into a Sustainable Economy,
and
- (c) The Future We Deserve.

Mr, Speaker, Sir, the main amendments contained in the Bill will be explained.

I will now speak on the main amendments which relate to Strengthening the Foundations of our Economy.

A. STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR ECONOMY

Advertisements Regulation Act

Clause 2 amends the Advertisements Regulation Act to provide that the fee payable on an advertising structure will be reduced by half as from 01 January 2024.

Allied Health Professionals Council Act

Clause 3 amends the Allied Health Professionals Council (AHPC) Act to provide, *inter alia*, for—

- (a) a representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of finance to be a member of the AHPC, and
- (b) application for registration as an allied health professional to be considered as approved in case the AHPC does not determine the application within 30 working days.

Asset Recovery Act

Clause 6 amends the Asset Recovery Act to –

- (a) impose the requirement of keeping documents beyond the prescribed timeline in cases where a restraining order or restriction order has been granted, and
- (b) exempt the Asset Recovery Investigation Division of the Financial Intelligence Unit from payment of any duty, tax or registration fee pertaining to seizure of assets.

Bank of Mauritius

Clause 8 amends the Bank of Mauritius Act to clarify that transfers from the Special Reserve Fund are no longer warranted.

Banking Act, Landlord and Tenant Act and Mauritius Cane Industry Authority Act

Clauses 9, 43 and 45 amend the Banking Act, Landlord and Tenant Act and Mauritius Cane Industry Authority Act, respectively, to replace the term “Repo Rate” by “Key Rate” in the context of the implementation of the new monetary policy framework.

Civil Aviation Act

Clause 12 amends the Civil Aviation Act to increase the Passenger Fee with effect from 01 January 2024 and applicable fines for offences made under the Act.

Clinical Trials Act

Clause 14 amends Clinical Trial Act to, amongst others –

- (a) review the composition of the Clinical Research Regulatory Council (CRRC), and
- (b) provide for the determination of an application for clinical trials within 30 working days.

Companies Act

Clause 15 amends the Companies Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide that listed companies shall have a minimum of 25 percent of women on their boards to promote gender equality;
- (b) require a company to send its annual report to shareholders at least 21 days, instead of 14 days, prior to the annual meeting, and
- (c) enable a company to send its annual report and financial statements electronically coupled with a right for shareholders to request for a hard copy of the documents.

Construction Industry Development Board Act

Clause 16 amends the Construction Industry Development Board Act to, *inter-alia*, exempt foreign contractors and consultants from the requirement of sub-contracting to local firms in cases where no local consultant or local contractor has the necessary experience or expertise.

Dental Council Act

Clause 22 amends the Dental Council Act to, *inter-alia* –

- (a) review the composition of the Dental Council, and
- (b) provide for application for registration to be considered as approved if the application is not determined within 30 working days.

Economic Development Board Act

Clause 24 amends the Economic Development Board Act to, amongst others –

- (a) allow professionals from all sectors to be granted occupation permit provided that they draw a monthly basic salary of at least Rs30,000;
- (b) provide for the establishment of a National Contact Point, under the EDB, in line with OECD guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct.

- (c) open the Young Professional Occupation Permit to all fields of study, and
- (d) enlarge the objectives of the Premium Investor Scheme with a view to allowing the implementation of projects under an Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) framework.

Finance and Audit Act

Clause 29 amends the Finance and Audit Act to provide for, *inter-alia*, statements to be prepared by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly in line with IPSAS.

Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act

Clause 31 amends the Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act to exempt the FIU from payment of registration duty or fee in respect of any document signed or executed by the FIU.

Financial Services Act

Clause 32 amends the Financial Services Act to, amongst others –

- (a) empower the FSC to take enforcement actions in case of breach of AML/CFT legislation;
- (b) provide that the FSC can enter into arrangements and extend assistance to a foreign supervisory institution provided that confidentiality requirements are met;
- (c) enhance the role of Management Companies with respect to ensuring compliance of their clients with relevant laws, and
- (d) provide for the electronic filing of documents by licensees.

Freeport Act

Clause 34 amends the Freeport Act to add minting and refining of precious metals as new freeport activities.

Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021

Clause 30 amends the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 to facilitate the winding up of the Fishermen Investment Trust.

Immigration Act 2022

Clause 37 amends the Immigration Act 2022 to, amongst others –

- (a) allow for the Young Professional Occupation Permit to be opened to all fields of study;

- (b) allow a non-citizen and his family to be granted a residence permit on the acquisition of property of a minimum price of USD 375,000 under the Sustainable City Scheme, and
- (c) grant a residence permit to a retired non-citizen and his family on the acquisition of a property in a Property Development Scheme (PDS) project relating to senior living.

Independent Broadcasting Authority Act

Clause 39 amends the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act to allow foreign investors to invest in companies holding a Subscription Television Direct to Home Satellite Broadcasting and Rebroadcasting Licence.

Insolvency Act

Clause 40 amends the Insolvency Act to, inter-alia, clarify that a liquidator cannot set aside any transfer from an insolvent party to a non-insolvent party unless there is a clear and convincing evidence that the insolvent party made the transfer to defraud the entity to which the insolvent party was indebted.

Insurance Act

Clause 41 amends the Insurance Act to enable the Insurance Industry Compensation Fund to provide for appropriate non-pecuniary assistance to victims of hit and run road accidents.

Land (Duties and Taxes Act)

Clause 42 amends the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) re-introduce the Arrears Payment Scheme for another year. A debtor will benefit from the full waiver of interest and penalties if he settles his debt on or before 31 March 2024, and
- (b) grant exemption of land transfer tax and registration duty on the transfer of immovable property from Wellness-Related Activities provided the company holds an Investment Certificate issued by the EDB.

Medical Council Act

Clause 50 amends the Medical Council Act to, *inter alia* –

- (a) review the composition of the Medical Council, and

- (b) provide for application for registration as a medical professional to be considered as approved in case the Medical Council does not determine the application within 30 working days.

Merchant Shipping Act

Clause 51 amends the Merchant Shipping Act to, amongst others –

- (a) make it mandatory for the Director of Shipping to hold preliminary inquiry in case there is a loss of life, presumed loss of life or serious injury to any person as a result of a shipping casualty, and
- (b) empower the Director of Shipping to recover from the owner of a ship all Government expenses incurred in respect of measures taken to prevent any damage to the environment or mitigate any hazards to safety of navigation.

Morcellement Act

Clause 52 amends the Morcellement Act to exempt the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd from the payment of processing and morcellement fee.

Meat Act

Clause 49 amends the Meat Act to allow the Mauritius Meat Authority to, amongst others, purchase or import livestock for slaughter, resale or slaughter and resale.

National Agricultural Products Regulatory Office Act

Clause 53 amends the National Agricultural Products Regulatory Office Act to enlarge the definitions of “tea” and “tobacco”.

Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act

Clause 58 amends the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act to -

- (a) make it mandatory for applications for work permit to be made on NELS, and
- (b) introduce a silence is consent principle of 30 working days for the determination of applications for work permit.

Non-Citizens (Property Restriction) Act

Clause 59 amends the Non-Citizens (Property Restriction) Act to review the criteria relating to sale of Immovable Property outside the Schemes to Resident Non-citizens.

Nursing Council Act

Clause 60 amends the Nursing Council Act to, amongst others –

- (a) review the composition of the Nursing Council, and
- (b) provide for application for registration as a nursing professional to be considered as approved in case the Council does not determine the application within 30 working days.

Ombudsperson for Financial Services Act

Clause 62 amends the Ombudsperson for Financial Services Act to exclude financial services not licensed by the Bank of Mauritius and the Financial Services Commission from the purview of the Ombudsperson for Financial Services.

Ports Act

Clause 65 amends the Ports Act to increase the fines applicable when a person fails to comply with or contravenes any other provision of the Ports Act.

Private Pension Schemes Act

Clause 66 amends the Private Pension Schemes Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide for settlement of unclaimed benefits by a beneficiary's assignee, legal heirs or legal representative, seven years or more after death of the beneficiary;
- (b) enable the FSC to maintain records of abandoned funds so as to ensure the refund of these funds to the legal representative as well, if need arises, and
- (c) introduce micro pensions through the setting up of a private pension scheme targeting the informal sector.

Securities Act

Clause 74 amends the Securities Act to enable funds to invest in loans or similar debt instruments.

Shooting and Fishing Leases Act

Clause 75 amends the Shooting and Fishing Leases Act to, *inter alia*, have better control on the Biodiversity and Ecosystem restoration activities, eco-tourism activity, Forest Management activity and Agroforestry activity on leased State land.

Small Farmers Welfare Fund Act

Clause 76 amends the Small Farmers Welfare Fund Act to enlarge the scope from small planters to small farmers.

Sugar Industry Efficiency Act

Clause 82 amends the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act to, amongst others -

- (a) provide that a Government entity, undertaking a project in the national or economic interest of Mauritius on State land, will not require Land Conversion Permit to put the State land into non-agricultural use;
- (b) provide that applications for land conversion will have to be made on the National E-Licensing System, and
- (c) exempt the New Social Living Development Ltd (NSLD) and the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd from payment of the Land Conversion Tax.

Tourism Authority Act

Clause 84 amends the Tourism Authority Act to remove the restriction on the number of restaurants a hotel can have under a Tourism Accommodation Certificate.

Variable Capital Companies Act

Clause 85 amends the Variable Capital Companies Act to extend the scope of the Variable Capital Companies to allow their use for family offices and wealth management.

Veterinary Council Act 2020

Clause 87 amends the Veterinary Council Act 2020, to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) review the composition of the Veterinary Council, and
- (b) provide for application for registration as a veterinary professional to be considered as approved in case the Council does not determine the application within 30 working days.

Virtual Asset and Initial Token Offerings Services Act

Clause 88 amends the Virtual Asset and Initial Token Offering Services Act to, amongst others allow a Virtual Asset Custodian to also hold custody of securities tokens.

B. CONTINUING THE TRANSFORMATION OF MAURITIUS INTO A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to the second theme which is about continuing the transformation of Mauritius into a sustainable economy.

Ayurvedic and Other Traditional Medicines Act

Clause 7 amends the Ayurvedic and Other Traditional Medicines Act to cater for specialists in traditional medicines.

Civil Status Act

Clause 13 amends the Civil Status Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) empower the Central Civil Status Office to generate a NIC number for a child born in another country provided that at least one parent is Mauritian;
- (b) give an additional period of 15 days to parents for the declaration of birth of their child, and
- (c) share information with Agencies for the discharge of their respective functions.

Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Act

Clause 23 amends the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Act to, amongst others –

- (a) enlarge the functions of the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority, including payment of grants to aided pre-primary schools in the context of the free pre-primary education scheme, and
- (b) review of the composition of the Board of the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Board to include a representative of the Special Education Needs Authority.

Education Act

Clause 25 amends the Education Act to, amongst others –

- (a) establish the framework for implementation of the free pre-primary education scheme, and
- (b) provide for two scholarships annually, to the best performing candidates having opted for the HSC Professional National Scheme.

Firearms Act

Clause 33 amends the Firearms Act to, *inter-alia*, reduce the time period for a holder of firearm licence, who intends to leave Mauritius, to surrender any firearm and ammunition in his possession from 3 months to 2 weeks.

Mauritius Institute of Education Act

Clause 46 amends the Mauritius Institute of Education Act to –

- (a) review the composition of the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) Council, and
- (b) include the Director of the Special Education Needs Authority in the Academic Board of the MIE.

Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act

Clause 47 amends the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) Act to, amongst others, empower the MQA to –

- (a) approve and recognise micro-credentials in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and
- (b) monitor the implementation of the National Credit Value and Transfer System in TVET under the National Qualifications Framework to facilitate mobility and lifelong learning.

National Identity Card Act

Clause 55 amends the National Identity Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide for the establishment of a National Identity Card Unit to ensure proper functioning and administrative efficiency of the National Identity Card, and
- (b) cater for the introduction of Mobile ID as a new feature in the new Mauritius National Identity Card system.

Pharmacy Act

Clause 64 amends the Pharmacy Act to facilitate registration of locally manufactured products under a technology transfer agreement with good manufacturing practices of the World Health Organisation.

Roads Act

Clause 72 amends the Roads Act to introduce a Fixed Penalty System for persons who commit offences under the Roads Act.

State Lands Act

Clause 79 amends the State Lands Act to, *inter-alia*, –

- (a) provide for a reduced rental in respect of a socio-economic project implemented on State land leased by a statutory body or a Government-owned company in which the Government directly or indirectly holds at least 90% of the share capital;
- (b) grant to a lessee holding an industrial or commercial lease and facing financial difficulty, to pay annual rental for any particular year in not more than 3 consecutive equal yearly instalments without interest provided no dividend is distributed during that period, and
- (c) grant a reduction in annual rental for a period not exceeding 5 years in respect of lease granted for any particular business activity.

Waste Water Management Authority Act

Clause 89 amends the Waste Water Management Authority Act to, *inter-alia*, allow the Wastewater Management Authority to enter into an agreement with an approved entity for the purposes of implementation, management and funding mechanisms of wastewater projects and systems.

The Future We Deserve

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now elaborate on the third theme of my speech which is about the future we deserve.

Animal Diseases Act

Clause 4 amends the Animal Diseases Act to, amongst others, include diseases listed by the World Organisation for Animal Health in the definition of “diseases.”

Animal Welfare Act

Clause 5 amends the Animal Welfare Act to, amongst others –

- (a) review the composition of the Council;
- (b) require a person to register his dog with Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare (MSAW) not later than 60 days after he becomes the owner, and
- (c) empower MSAW, instead of the Division of Veterinary Services, to issue breeder’s permit.

Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act

Clause 17 amends the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act to, *inter alia*, make it mandatory for traders, with annual turnover exceeding Rs50 million, to submit information electronically to the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection for the 'MOPRI' application.

Customs Act

Clause 19 amends the Customs Act to, amongst others -

- (a) allow a right of appeal to an importer who imports goods on behalf of another person entitled to tax exemption, and
- (b) provide that the penalty provision applicable when an importer has not submitted a Bill of Entry for the clearance of goods within 5 working days after the time an aircraft has landed or a vessel is berthed will not apply until 30 June 2024.

Customs Tariff Act

Clause 20 amends the Customs Tariff Act to *inter alia*, -

- (a) exempt from the payment of customs duty any contractor engaged in the construction of social housing units by the New Social Living Development Ltd, and
- (b) provide for NGOs registered with the National Social Inclusion Foundation to be entitled to customs duty exemption on a motor vehicle.

Dangerous Drugs Act

Clause 21 amends the Dangerous Drugs Act to, amongst others, provide for an Electronic Drug Register.

Employment Relations Act

Clause 26 amends the Employment Relations Act to, *inter-alia*, provide that the Employment Relations Tribunal will have to make its order in cases of reinstatement within a period of 60 days instead of 90 days.

Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2019

Clause 27 amends the Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2019 to, amongst others provide for a wage grid for graduates to ensure that they are remunerated accordingly.

Excise Act

Clause 28 amends the Excise Act to, *inter alia*, -

- (a) extend the Negative Excise Duty Scheme on electric vehicles up to 30 June 2024;
- (b) exempt from the payment of excise duty any contractor engaged in the construction of social housing units by the New Social Living Development Ltd;
- (c) provide for NGOs registered with the National Social Inclusion Foundation to be entitled to excise duty exemption on a motor vehicle, and
- (d) provide for an increase in the rate of refund payable for waste PET bottles recycled into reusable goods from Rs15 per kg to Rs30 per kg.

Gambling Regulatory Authority Act

Clause 35 amends the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act to, *inter alia*, -

- (a) empower the GRA Board to issue warnings to its licensees in case of non-compliance with the GRA Act and conditions of licence, rules, directions or guidelines;
- (b) allow the Horse Racing Committee to provide for veterinary services in and out of competition, pre-race and post-race sampling and testing of horses;
- (c) empower the Gambling Regulatory Authority to issue directives in respect of interactive gambling sites outside Mauritius, and
- (d) enlarge the duties of Inspector to carry out Anti Money Laundering/Counter Terrorism inspections and compliance audits.

Human Resource Development Act

Clause 36 amends the Human Resource Development Act to reinforce the sustainability of the Workfare Programme Fund (WPF). The contribution rate of levy remitted to the WPF will be aligned to that of the National Training Fund (NTF), that is, at 0.75%, for the period 01 July 2023 to 30 June 2025.

Income Tax Act

Clause 38 amends the Income Tax Act to, amongst others -

- (a) implement the holistic and progressive tax reform of our personal income tax system as from 01 July 2023;
- (b) grant a double deduction in respect of emoluments paid to a woman employed under the *Prime à l'Emploi* Scheme for a period of 2 years and triple deduction in respect of emoluments paid to a disabled person;
- (c) allow taxpayers to deduct from their taxable income Rs10,000 for each animal adopted from an NGO registered with the MRA up to a maximum of Rs30,000 in an income year;
- (d) grant a company a triple deduction in respect of donations to a charitable institution involved in supporting persons with health issues and disabilities, protection or rehabilitation of street children or animal welfare and protection;
- (e) grant to a company a double deduction in respect of the cost incurred for setting up a Child Day Care Centre;
- (f) extend the investment tax credit granted to manufacturing companies for up to 30 June 2026, and
- (g) exempt from income tax, interest income derived from bonds, debentures or sukuk issued by an overseas entity to finance renewable energy projects.

Local Government Act

Clause 44 amends the Local Government Act to, *inter alia*, exempt a religious institution from payment of local rates on its halls and buildings.

Mauritius Revenue Authority Act

Clause 48 amends the Mauritius Revenue Authority Act to, *inter alia*, re-introduce the Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme which provides for full waiver of penalties and interest where tax arrears are paid in full by 31 March 2024.

National Employment Act

Clause 54 amends the National Employment Act to ensure that real time information is available on the number of registered jobseekers who are willing to follow training and take up employment.

National Pensions Act

Clause 56 amends the National Pensions Act to, *inter alia* –

- (a) extend payment of Child's Allowance to all beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pension;
- (b) provide for Child's Allowance to be Rs2,000 monthly irrespective of age, and
- (c) increase Basic Retirement Pension, Basic Invalidity Pension, Basic Widows Pension and Basic Orphan's Pension by Rs1,000 monthly.

National Wage Consultative Council Act

Clause 57 amends the National Wage Consultative Council Act to provide that the Council may proceed with review of minimum wage before the prescribed period of 5 years.

Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022

Clause 61 amends the Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022 to reinforce the safety and health standards at the workplace.

Pensions Act

Clause 63 amends the Pensions Act to clarify that the death benefit, for an officer who joined service on or after 01 January 2013 be deducted from total pension contributions paid.

Public Debt Management Act

Clause 67 amends the Public Debt Management Act to introduce a public sector debt ceiling of 80% related to the fiscal anchor fixed by the IMF.

Public Procurement Act

Clause 69 amends the Public Procurement Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) introduce low value procurement for goods, works, consultancy services or other services not exceeding Rs500,000, and
- (b) cater for planning, pre-bidding and post award activities in the e-Procurement system.

Registration Duty Act

Clause 70 amends the Registration Duty Act to, *inter alia*, -

- (a) allow for the levying of an additional registration duty of 10% on the acquisition by a non-citizen of an immovable property of at least USD 500,000;
- (b) increase from 15 days to 28 days the time given to an aggrieved person to object to an assessment of the Registrar-General following a transfer of a movable property, and
- (c) extend the Home Ownership and Home Loan Schemes up to 30 June 2024.

Registration of Associations Act

Clause 71 amends the Registration of Associations Act to provide for the election of officers to be conducted at least once every five years.

Sale of Immovable Property Act

Clause 73 amends the Sale of Immovable Property Act to, *inter alia*, specify that where the seized property is the sole residence of the debtor, the *mise à prix* shall not be less than 90% of the open market value and 80% for a property other than the sole residence.

Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act 2021

Clause 77 amends the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act 2021 to, amongst others, -

- (a) extend the payment of the CSG Income Allowance until June 2024 including end of year bonus. The amount of allowance payable is being –
 - (i) increased to Rs2,000 for individuals deriving income not exceeding Rs25,000, and
 - (ii) maintained at Rs1,000 for individuals deriving income above Rs25,000 but not exceeding Rs50,000;
- (b) introduce the monthly CSG Child allowance of Rs2,000 for children up to the age of 3 years, and
- (c) introduce the Independence Allowance of Rs20,000 to an individual having attained the age of 18 years as from 01 January 2023.

Social Integration and Empowerment Act

Clause 78 amends the Social Integration and Empowerment Act to provide for the increase in the household income threshold to qualify for eligibility under the Social Register of Mauritius.

Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act

Clause 81 amends the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act to, *inter alia*, provide that an officer appointed before 01 January 2013 and reckoning not less than ten years' pensionable service in statutory bodies, be eligible to a portable benefit equivalent to at least one-year pensionable salary.

Value Added Tax Act

Clause 86 amends the Value Added Tax Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) clarify that a VAT assessment should not be made in respect of a period beyond 4 years immediately following the last day of the taxable period;
- (b) provide for zero-rating for VAT purposes of 15 key items of everyday consumption, musical instruments, apparatus used in medical, surgical, dental or veterinary sciences, medical grade silicone and glass-ceramic blocks for dental use;
- (c) extend the VAT exemption on the construction of a building for primary and secondary education, and
- (d) exempt from the payment of VAT any contractor engaged in the construction of social housing units by the New Social Living Development Ltd.

Workers' Rights Act

Clause 90 amends the Workers' Rights Act to, amongst others, -

- (a) provide for more flexible working arrangements by authorizing a worker to complete his normal working hours in a week on 4 days;
- (b) provide for payment of the special allowance to public officers to guarantee them a monthly income of Rs15,000 as from 01 July 2023;
- (c) provide that a worker may opt that his untaken annual leave be accumulated instead of being refunded;
- (d) provide that a worker may avail of his entire leaves entitlement to care for his child and 10 days of his leave entitlement to care for his parents and grandparents;
- (e) provide that in addition to the 3 weeks' leave, a female worker who suffers a miscarriage be granted another 5 days' leave on full pay;

- (f) provide that an employer having more than 250 workers shall provide free of charge, childcare facilities to a worker having a child aged up to 3 years, and
- (g) provide that the 10% increase in petrol allowance, shall, as from 01 July 2023, be between 1,000 rupees and 2,000 rupees.

Workers' Rights (Payment of Special Allowance 2023) Regulations 2023

Clause 91 amends the Workers' Rights (Payment of Special Allowance 2023) Regulations 2023 to provide for a “*Revenu Minimum Garanti*” of Rs15,000 monthly as from 01 July 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am proposing amendments at Committee Stage to the Bank of Mauritius Act, Economic Development Board Act, Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2019, Income Tax Act and Local Government Act. These amendments are being circulated in the House.

I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

ANNOUNCEMENT

FINANCE BILL – STANDING ORDERS – DEBATES’ RELEVANCE

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, before we proceed with the debate, I wish to draw the attention of hon. Members that in March 2015, an amendment was brought to Standing Order 52(1) by adding paragraph (b) and I quote –

“A Finance Bill may, in addition to the measures relating to taxation and national finance announced in a Budget Speech, contain provisions relating to the other measures announced therein and provide for matters connected, consequential or incidental to those measures.”

In keeping with past practice, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has worked out Explanatory Notes on the provisions of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023 for ease of reference of hon. Members to the relevant paragraphs of the Budget Speech and the Annex thereof to which the amendments relate and same has been circulated to hon. Members on Wednesday last together with the existing legal provisions.

Moreover, your kind attention is also drawn to the provisions of Standing Order 42(1) in regard to relevancy in debate. Hon. Members, in the light of the above, hon.

Members are expected to confine their observations to the proposed amendments contained in the Finance (Miscellaneous) Provisions Bill and should not open the debate on policy matters which have already been canvassed during the second reading of the Appropriation Bill. In view of the technicality of the amendments, I appeal to hon. Members to kindly indicate the Clauses on which they are offering their observations for the orderly conduct of the debate. Hon. Members are invited to kindly stand guided accordingly.

Thank you.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(4.21 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am well aware of the usual practice concerning debates on Finance Bills. I must say that this Finance Bill will propose to change or amend 90 laws and the Office of the Clerk has kindly submitted the clauses that will be amended. So, for your benefit and that of the public, you will see that in this one week, we have had to consult this book which will be used afterwards to stop the door from closing in my house. This is the work that we have had to do for the last week, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, it is of huge regret that many of the laws that are being changed today, were not canvassed, discussed, introduced during the speech of the hon. Minister of Finance at the budget time. Mr Speaker, Sir, you could have reminded him that the usual practice is either for the changes in the Finance Bill to be introduced during the Budget Speech so that we can debate them during the Budget Speech or at least in the annex but I would ask you – perhaps you can help me, I wonder where on earth did the Minister tell us that he was going to amend the Bank of Mauritius Act? Important issues! Very important issues! Never!

So, we will need to deal with policy issues on quite a few of the items because they have not respected the usual practice and the same will go as far as the Public Debt Management Act – not introduced anywhere. It comes with this book, Mr Speaker, Sir, and even the explanatory notes; many of these notes in fact just bypass the important issues in its clause, guiding you to some severe amendments whereas in fact if you look at it properly, you will see that the explanatory notes ought to have guided you on the real issue of the clause being amended.

So, that was what I had to say, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am sad that we have to say this. I would have hoped that we could have kept with the previous practice. I was Minister of

Finance myself; most if not all of the Finance Bills ought to be presented during the budget speech or annex and one or two exceptions will obviously arise but this not the case. Now, I will restrict myself to about 12 issues which I think are important. The other members of the Opposition will no doubt raise other issues where we have no chance, no hope of ever covering everything that needed to be covered and don't blame us if we have missed something important because we are human beings and we cannot deal with 90 amendments from this book in one speech, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, I want to firstly deal with what the Minister just said. I am a bit surprised. He said that clause 8 of the Bill now does away with transfers from the Special Reserve Fund to Government because they are no longer warranted but that is not the case. That is not true. I refer the hon. Minister to clause, and I will come back to the speech in a moment – how can you say that when we all can see fully well that clause 47(5) of the Bank of Mauritius Act still provides for the Special Reserve Fund to transfer money to Government for repayment of central Government external debt obligations; black on white and then we are told in a speech by the Minister of Finance that this no longer exists but it is there in the law. It is not being removed; other provisions have been removed but not this particular one.

So, I would like the hon. Minister, later on, to correct this. There is still danger; it still lurks in the amendment that was brought, I think it was 2018- 2019. A dangerous amendment was brought to the Bank of Mauritius Act. That amendment is not being reduced; I will take care of that in a moment, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What are we doing in this Finance Bill? We are doing two things; we are saying that the use of official reserves to invest in a company, that is, the MIC will no longer be possible. I can't help it; it is a very technical question. Emphasis must be on official reserves. He will no longer be able to use official reserves to invest in a company. That doesn't mean that the Bank of Mauritius will not be able to invest in a company. No, it is official reserves that will not be used because the provision of Section 6(1) (y), says this and this is not being removed –

“With the approval of the Minister, the Bank of Mauritius can subscribe to hold and sell shares, invest in any corporation or company set up for the purpose of facilitating economic development.”

So, a quick reading of this Bill today will tell you that he can no longer invest in MIC but in fact, he can still but he cannot use official reserves and the second thing that is being said, so we maintain the possibility of investing in a company like MIC by the Bank of Mauritius, like the Bank of Mauritius as if it is State Investment Corporation if you

want but we cannot use official reserves and the other change that is being done today is that the Bank of Mauritius will no longer be able to use the Special Reserve Fund to just give money to Government as a gift. That is the two but again, the Special Reserve Fund will continue to be able to be used by the Bank of Mauritius to repay Central Government's external debt.

So, it is a fine line, whether you use the money to repay your external debts or you use the money just for budget support; budget support is out but you can still use it for Central Government debt. Mr Speaker, Sir, I take you back to 2019 when this Government decided to use Rs18 billion of the Bank of Mauritius funds to repay Central Government external debts. I, particularly, was very upset by that.

I raised that many times. We showed that, in fact, it was wrong, but Government continued on its way of ignoring us. We even showed, Mr Speaker, Sir, – I think it was the Prime Minister who was the Minister of Finance – that the IMF had severely criticised Seychelles at the time for trying or doing this sort of thing. It was ignored! Worse, with the new Minister of Finance – *qui peut le plus, peut le moins, qui peut le moins, peut le plus* – this time, not Rs18 billion was taken, but Rs140 billion was taken! Rs140 billion, that is, Rs60 billion as budget support and Rs80 billion to the MIC! If you add it up, it becomes Rs158 billion in all. We have never seen this. Most Mauritians do not know what is the difference between Rs158 billion and Rs158 million. Most people won't even know, Mr Speaker, Sir! That is the problem because it is a huge, huge, huge amount of money!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken one with the effigy of my father on it because it is only Rs1,000. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Finance and his predecessor took Rs158 millions of these. If you were to put them side by side on all the roads of Mauritius, I think, you would cover all the roads of Mauritius and still have some left! So much that you could carpet the whole of the roads of Mauritius with these Rs1000 notes just to show how much money was taken from the Bank of Mauritius! If you look at it another way, Mr Speaker, Sir, you could give 150,000 households in Mauritius Rs1 m., not Rs20,000, you could give 150,000 households in Mauritius one whole million rupees and change their lives completely, and still have Rs8 million left to do your hanky-panky! That is how much money...

Mr Speaker: Please table the note.

Mr X. L. Duval: Sorry?

Mr Speaker: Table the note!

Mr X.L. Duval: Ah! I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, you have much more than that in your bank account! Surely!

So, that is, in fact, how much we took from the Bank of Mauritius. And how did that money arise in the Bank of Mauritius? Have we had such a governor of the Bank of Mauritius who actually whisked it financially, that is, made billions of rupees for us, that Mr Bheenick and anybody else before him could not do? No, no! Mr Speaker, Sir, this money comes from the Special Reserve Fund. Now, we have at least one accountant there. Maybe more!

Why is it called special? Ask yourself a question: why is it not reserve? Why is it called Special Reserve Fund? It is called Special Reserve Fund, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it is not true profits. They are paper profits; profits from revaluation. The more the rupee depreciates, the more the financial asset in dollars increase and the more the Bank of Mauritius makes money!

Mr Speaker, Sir, to generate this huge amount of money, the Bank of Mauritius had depreciated the dollar since 2014 elections by 42%. That is the only reason why this money has been generated. Huge depreciation of the rupee creating huge inflation, huge raise in prices, huge misery, but huge amount of money for the Government, Mr Speaker, Sir! So, this is the situation.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that the Government is trying to say that when you look here and there, it is huge, the economy is doing so well, and that is why we can spend. That is not true! Government is spending money that it has taken from the Bank of Mauritius from these paper profits. That is what is happening, because the economy has still not recovered in real terms from COVID. We are one of the few economies in the world that has not yet recovered fully from COVID. Yet, when you listen to speeches of the Government, it is as if we are prospering! We are not even back to 2019 levels! We had for a very short time high income status, and then, we went down again to middle income status! That is the truth!

So, it is not money that has been arising from great management of the economy and from a huge growth, no! As I said, the economy is still below 2019 in real terms. In dollar terms, it is much worse. But in real rupee terms, it has not recovered yet. And the money that is being spent is money that has come from, if I can say, fictitious profits, not real profits arising not from the reserves of the Bank of Mauritius, but from the Special Reserve of the Bank of Mauritius. The Special Reserve of the Bank of Mauritius, being special, was protected by special clause in the Bank of Mauritius Act. There was a special clause there to say you cannot use it for this, that, and the other. You can use it if you want

for monetary policy when you need it. The Government added this clause that you can use it to repay Central Government Debt and added this clause that you can use it to grant monies to the Government.

As I said, part of it has been rescinded or is being rescinded. Today, *c'est un petit pas*, the other bit also has to be rescinded, that is, using the Special Reserve Fund, paper profits, to pay for Central Government Debts. Because what is going to happen? It is another incentive for the Government and the Bank of Mauritius to continue depreciating the rupee. Once the rupee continues to depreciate, the SRF will go up and this money can be transferred and pay the whole of the debt of Government, if that is the objective. That is what can happen. In pure accounting terms, this is what can happen. That is dangerous and that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, that section of the law ought also to have been removed.

So, we expect now that the World Bank and the long ignored issues of transfer from the Bank of Mauritius and the IMF. Long ignored! I remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, on 10 May 2021, I sent a quite long letter to the IMF telling them that I thought this was an acceptable and they replied to me. They told me that they are dealing with the issue. It is true. In their Article IV assessment, they raised the issues which I had pinpointed to them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now we are expecting by June 2024 about Rs11 billion worth of loan from the World Bank to help pop-up our foreign currency – it is going to be in foreign currency. I suppose we will need it eventually, probably to pay for flour and petrol, etc. that may be of concern to the Government, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, just one thing, the dollar may not always stay as strong as it is now. It may depreciate with all the issues that are arising with China and the BRICS and all that, Saudi Arabia trying to move away from the dollar.

So, a word of caution because if the dollar goes the other way, that is going to destroy the balance sheet of the Bank of Mauritius, which has so thoughtlessly given away all this money to the Government. And so, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is a word of caution.

As for the MIC itself, although we can no longer use reserves to pay for the MIC, it is still sitting on the balance sheet of the Bank of Mauritius. When you look at the Bank of Mauritius, sometimes, it looks like you are, in fact, dealing, not with the Bank of Mauritius, but with the State Investment Corporation because it has got investment companies there. The issue, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the MIC took Rs80 billion from the Bank of Mauritius, spent about Rs50 billion, and Rs30 billion is left. I remember I asked a PNQ here to the Minister of Finance because I thought the board was acting totally irresponsibly.

I am happy although whatever the Minister of Finance may have said in this House, the board was changed a little time after the famous Lord Desai – I won't go into details – left, or he was sacked. God knows! A new guy came in and a new board came in! I am happy to say that that PNQ had some results as it put a brake on so many *petits copains et copines* who wanted to take money from the MIC. It did put a brake on that! I cannot say it put 100% brake, but I do know that this has been reduced considerably and the temptation was reduced when the new board came in. Obviously, Government knew that the Opposition knew exactly what was happening at the BOM. We even had, at that time, copies of the board's Minutes, etc.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what to do with the MIC? Who wants that baby? That baby, Mr Speaker, Sir, is worth Rs50 billion. The Rs30 billion unspent, hopefully the Government would take it and recapitalise the Bank of Mauritius. The MIC is worth between Rs50 billion and Rs80 billion. Who can afford to buy that of the Bank of Mauritius? Nobody has that sort of money. None of the institutions of Government, be it the SIC, this and the other, has that sort of money. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is likely to sit there as an unwanted baby on the balance sheet of the Bank of Mauritius for some time, and that is also a sad thing because the Bank of Mauritius is being drawn into a lot of issues like managing companies, that it should not be doing. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude on this bit, there has been 50% effort in trying to clean up the mess that the Government created when it passed laws to take money from the Bank of Mauritius but there are still dangers lurking in the remaining clauses that have been inserted by Government like clause 46(5), 47(5) which still remain on the Bank of Mauritius Act, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Coming to a related matter, coming to clause 67 now so that we continue on this related matter, which is Public Debt Management Act, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, I said last time and I meant it that the inflation is the Minister of Finance's best friend and we will prove it quite easily, Mr Speaker, Sir, because oh wow! Wow! Public debt has fallen in percentage terms to 79%! Why? One reason is that, Mr Speaker, Sir, when you are talking about 79%, what is the 79%? You are talking about public debt as a percentage of money GDP, GDP in current terms. The higher the inflation, the higher the GDP in current terms whether or not you have added economic development, added economic activity or not. Even if you had no added economic activity, GDP would increase by 10% because that is the inflation rate. So, GDP goes up because of inflation and the debt is in fixed terms; it does not increase at all. Obviously, some of the foreign debts will increase if the exchange rate goes against us. So, you win all the time. Just by sitting still and doing nothing, the

public sector debt falls at a time of high inflation and that is the truth. So, we can no longer unfortunately just look at percentage figures that we would usually look at in a stable inflation situation. In a high inflation situation, you can no longer just look at the percentage terms.

If I may, let us look at the actual figures. Again, there is no mention in the budget of this. Actual figures, Mr Speaker, Sir. When we left in 2014, public sector debt was Rs235 billion. What does that mean? If you take 2014, it is not yet 50 years, 46 years since independence, it took Mauritius 46 years to actually write-up a debt of Rs235 billion, and it took this famous Government only eight years to more than double this figure. What we took 46 years to arrive at a debt of Rs235 billion, hon. Dr. Padayachy and the others, they just took eight years and they added Rs250 billion to the Rs235 billion. So, the debt now in absolute terms is Rs485 billion. Official figures: Rs485 billion. Huge amount! You can see therefore that this inflation is helping. Inflation is helping to drive artificially GDP so that the percentages fall, but the absolute amounts are horrendous. The absolute amounts are horrendous, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, this Rs485 billion comes after use, not the whole Rs158 billion, but Rs78 billion of the Bank of Mauritius. This Government has indebted this country to the tune of Rs485 billion after having used Rs78 billions of Bank of Mauritius funds. That is the enormity! That is why you see roads everywhere, that is why you see so many planes being bought. This is a new stadium; you have a new Court House. This is where it comes. Indebt us to the neck and use the money of the Bank of Mauritius and they will tell you: “no, it is economic development”. It is not economic development - that is my main point. It is not economic development! And, Mr Speaker, Sir, what has all this done? It has given inflation. I raised it last time; nobody said anything. Seychelles: 2% inflation; Maldives: 2% inflation; Mauritius: 11% or 12% inflation, Mr Speaker, Sir. There you go, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So now, we are setting the limit to 80%, and this limit of 80%, where is it? It is not in the law; it is in the schedule to the law, meaning that at a stroke of a pen, any Minister of Finance can just change it, G.N so and so 80% becomes 90%, it goes to 100%. The other limit was in the law itself. You had to come to Parliament to change the law. Here, it is in the Schedule and it can be changed at the whim of any future Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that is the danger. The limit is not really any limit when it can be changed so easily. That is my point, and previously, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was also some provisos in terms of economic emergency, whatever you could actually increase it. But the previous law, again it was in the law, in the Act itself, it could increase only by 2%, meaning that if we take to current figures, had we maintained the 2% maximum increase

that he could have gone in case of emergency, large contracts etc., meaning that it would be about Rs14 billion that Government could have used. But no, Government has decided that is not possible, it is not enough. If we need to spend, we really want to spend, take out the cheque book and spend. And so, the 2% limit that was in the original Bill, the public sector debt in the original Bill, 65% reducing to 60% with a proviso that it could increase under special circumstances by 2%, here the 2% has gone. The special circumstances have stayed; the 2% have gone. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is just to please the eye. It has no importance. Putting the debt in a Schedule, removing the 2%, it has no bite. It is not any constraint on any Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to leave the financial situation. I am going to come to the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority, Clause 23. And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are asked to vote for a number of amendments to enable the Minister of Education to operationalise the free pre-primary education. They first announced this on 04 March, and you would have imagined four months later that the Ministry of Education when asking us to vote for this, would actually tell us, or the Minister of Finance, what is meant by free pre-primary education. What is going to be done? How much money is going to be given? Is it going to be given on a per capita basis? Is it going to be given on cost-plus basis? How is it going to be operationalised? Will it be given to children attending half day pre-primary? Three quarter day up to 3:30 or what I hope is up to 5:30 full day, meaning that in fact, mums and dads can actually work and leave the kids at the pre-primary school. This is what we expected of a responsible Government to come and tell us. I think the Minister of Education will speak later on.

I think the Minister of Education will speak later on. So, I have some questions for her as to how is it going to apply; why should we vote for something completely in the dark as to what will happen to pre-primary education?

I have made some research and I have a very good pre-primary school in my village in Grand Gaube, Mr Speaker, Sir. It charges Rs1,000 plus it gets Rs400 grant from Government, I think which I have started myself in 2013 – Rs1,400. I know some kids who are paying Rs6,000. I know some kids who are paying Rs8,000 and there are those, the very rich kids who are even paying Rs12,000. So, what is going to happen? We cannot just vote for something and not know what figure the hon. lady has in mind and what is being proposed. As I say, is it going to be per capita? I am going to give Rs2,000-Rs3,000 per child or am I going to do like the mess that she has created in the grant-aided schools where it is a cost plus basis principally? It is a mixture.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we are entitled to know because section 10B which have been asked to vote today just says this, “the subsidy will be determined in accordance with such criteria as the Authority will determine.” Is this serious that we are asked to give a blank cheque?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am told that a large number of these pre-primary schools have been closing down because of the mismatch between regulations and revenue. The greater the regulations, if they are necessary fair enough, but if they are unnecessary, then it just creates a hindrance and the owners of these pre-primary schools have to close down. I am going to give you an example, Mr Speaker, Sir. To get a permit for your school, you need a Building and Land Use Permit. Now, what has a Building and Land Use Permit got to do with this?

You just look at the premises and if they are good, you approve them. Why take all this time, all these unnecessary regulations? There is a big debate in the UK, Mr Speaker, Sir, as to the level of control that you should have on the kindergartens and pre-primary schools. The more control may be good, but the higher the price to the child, meaning that the child may have to skip pre-primary school. So, you need an equilibrium between regulation and cost to the school so that not only we do have decent, secure, safe schools but also plentiful of schools for the children, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I am told that a large number of pre-primary schools have closed and a large number of other schools operate without a permit at all. Neither, Mr Speaker, Sir, is acceptable. We have to again look at how the regulations are worked out and cut out the non-essential red tape and allow the schools to flourish in the right conditions. That is what I had to say, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, it is very important. As they say, after eight, it is already too late. I have said this many times in the House. You need to catch these young kids as early as possible and this is from three years old – we agree on this – to five years old. Let’s catch them as early as possible but for god’s sake, four months after the announcement, give us some indication of what is going to happen before we vote this part of the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come to clause 24, I still have about 12. Clause 24 – Economic Development Board – this is what is going to happen now, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are going to enlarge the Premium Investor Scheme. It is going to give the power to the Minister of Finance to play *bonom nwel*, Father Christmas. “You are a premium investor? Come, no need to pay taxes here. This is Cloud Cuckoo Land, we do not pay taxes. You have fees? You do not pay for fees. Regulations? I will get rid of them.” It is a blank cheque to the Minister of Finance of the day to decide what goodies to give to a premium investor. That

is the Premium Investor Scheme. Now, it is being enlarged so that anyone who wants to purchase Government property will be able to do so and will be able to ask the Minister of Finance. What control, what checks and balances are you going to have? None, except that it is supposedly going to be disclosed later on the website of the EDB. No checks and balances at all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is my issue. Sale of Government property does not need to go by tender. When Government buys something, except for all the loopholes that have been created, you are supposed to go by tender. When you sell, you do not. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, *c'est au gré de* or whatever, it is one-to-one. Someone comes and says he wants to buy casinos, "Oh yes, you want to buy casinos, what exactly would you like my friend? I do not want to pay any taxes in Mauritius. No, no, no. Remove the gaming tax from the casinos. Give me rent-free for 10 years." All this is possible under the Premium Investor Scheme.

Do you think that this is reasonable in a democracy where you are supposed to have transparency and checks and balances? Because this is not a tendering process, this is a one-to-one process. The risks are huge, Mr Speaker, Sir. Save of public assets, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not want to end up like Russia, with local magnets having brought assets on the Chip and suddenly found they are multibillionaires. We do not want that. We want the thing to go correctly and this is why Mr Speaker, Sir, I am absolutely against these provisions – absolutely against these provisions! You cannot give a blank cheque to the Minister of Finance, whoever he may be, to decide on what rate of income tax someone is going to pay, what rate of gaming tax someone is going to pay, etc. This is not acceptable. Mr Speaker, Sir. Not acceptable!

And sometimes you can even have private assets disguised as lame ducks and sold off. "Ah, I could not find a buyer. I have given him the world." Dangerous, Mr Speaker, Sir! It allows the Minister of Finance to give rebates, give tax exemptions, to give preferential rates, reduction in taxes, reduction in duties, special deals on land and buildings and even utilities. "Ah, don't pay the CEB that much, they don't deserve. You pay half my friend." And so on and so forth, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unacceptable, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Now, I will come to another unacceptable bit, the famous Pharmacy Act. Three years or four years ago, we were told that we are going to have the pharmacy industry in Mauritius, making medicines. Of course not! We cannot, with the cowboy Ministry, have a pharmacy industry here because the pharmacy industry, above all, it relies on trust and confidence in the product that you are buying. When you take a pill, you do not know

what is inside that pill. It has got a name; it has got a manufacture and that's it. It could have anything. Maybe if you are taking Nexium, it has maybe none of the active ingredients. You do not know and so, the pharmacy industry relies only on reputation, trust and regulation.

When we talk about the Ministry of Health, among its staff, it has no one capable of regulating, in any way, the manufacture of medicines in Mauritius. No one! Not a single person on its board capable of doing that and yet, year after year, we try to sugar the pill. And again this year, this clause 36D that is being proposed as an amendment to the Pharmacy Act gives a shortcut. Ignore this, shortcut! "You go and manufacture in Mauritius. No problem Sir, come and manufacture.' What do you need?" You need to have a good manufacturing practice certificate and it says a WHO, and this is where misnomer is, a World Health Organisation Good Manufacturing Practice but if you know what you need to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the WHO, *l'OMS*, only gives guidelines and these guidelines are published as good manufacturing practice. It is up to the country where the manufacture is to give the certificate that it complies with the good manufacturing practice of the WHO. WHO itself does not give a certificate. I will tell you what it is now.

If you have a company in Mauritius, if it wants to have a short cut to produce medicine to sell to the local population, I don't think it would be able to export. What does it do? It signs a transfer of technology agreement with another company that has a WHO Good Manufacturing Policy Certificate; WHO being a misnomer, it is only a guideline. Now, I will give you an example, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let us say that the pharmacy company is set up in Nigeria. Now, the WHO will give the guidelines. It is up to the Nigerian Health Authorities to deliver the GMP and this Nigerian company or Tanzanian company or Chinese company, whatever company, can actually come and set up under a technology transfer agreement here and manufacture. What faith are you going to have? Mr Speaker, Sir, this is dangerous for the population in Mauritius because some countries will deliver the GMP properly and some will not. If you are telling me if it was in the US, in France, in England, in some other countries, I might believe you. But what about other border line countries? That is where the danger is because the only requirement that the law gives here for this to go ahead is that you hold a GMP under WHO guidelines delivered by some country or other. That is the danger, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Anyway, what is the point of manufacturing in Mauritius? Are you just going to manufacture because you want a contract from the Ministry of Health? Is that all you are going to be able to attract? Or some poor fellows around the world who want to benefit

from some contract from the Ministry of Health to supply panadol or whatever it gives by millions every year? Or do you want a company that's going to be able to export? Given the weakness of our regulatory authority here, no one will register medicine manufactured in Mauritius. No one! No one will register because they will know full well that we don't have any capacity to regulate it. We don't have even a decent testing lab.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it looks to me that the whole point of this amendment 36D is to facilitate some poor fellow wanting to come to Mauritius to manufacture some pills for sales on the local market and for sale to the Ministry of Health. That is the only point I can see, because he will not be able to export. No one is going to buy under these conditions. Mr Speaker, Sir, the industries are extremely worried about this because one bad batch of medicines that you sell, let us say you sell either in Mauritius or overseas, some poor fellow falling ill somewhere, some poor fellow dying, not one, maybe more than that, will destroy the pharmacy industry in Mauritius forever. So, this is a case where you need to stop high quality and expand. It is not the case of an industry where you start low and rise. Like, as if, Mr Speaker, Sir, you want to go in textile, you start manufacturing *culottes* and underwears. I can understand that. Eventually, you go and manufacture suits. That's okay, but this is not what you want to do in a pharmacy industry; you want to start high.

I have a few more bits, Mr Speaker, Sir. Workers' Rights Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to be able to get the right balance between productivity and work because productivity gives high wages, gives high value added and gives prosperity to the workers. I am going to ask you about this – and this is clause 90 by the way – particular amendment that is being proposed. I don't understand how any Government can propose this? Whereas it is absolutely correct to say that if your child is sick, the parents or one of the parents would be able to take some holidays to care of him – I have no issues with that – and count it with the sick leaves, but Mr Speaker, Sir, to say, as the law is drafted, that if your grandparent is sick, then not only your all the children can take the 10 days, all the grandchildren can take the 10 days. That is not, Mr Speaker, Sir, good economics!

I will take the example of the president of the party, Véronique Leu. She has 8 sisters and brothers, 8 of them in all. They have 17 grandchildren. If the grandma is sick, would you find it acceptable that all 25 take 10 days off, and therefore, the economy loses 250 days' of work? Do you find that acceptable? Is that not crazy economics? This is what is being proposed. I can understand fully when someone is under the care of someone – my mother is in the UK. If she is sick, I might be able to take 10 days off. Let us hope she doesn't fall sick –, lives under the same roof, that sort of thing, I can understand that that one child can take 10 days. But this provision as it is, unless I am reading it badly, tells

you that in the case of the Leu family, 250 days can be taken off on the strength of merely one grandma falling sick.

Now, I don't think this is where you want to take the Mauritian labour sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. I don't think so. Maybe it is bad drafting, maybe he didn't think about it! He has to sort this out because this is serious business. If you look the greatest business of all nowadays is recruiting people from overseas, and that's a shame. That's a shame! Thousands and thousands are queuing; thousands are queuing to leave, thousands are queuing to come! Mr Speaker, Sir, so we have to talk very seriously about this.

As far as child care facilities are concerned, I am all for it, but we have to clarify because some people might be employing 250 employees or more, but not on one site, they may have 10 sites or 20 sites. So, what happens then? There must be a provision for them to be able to contract out 1 to 3 years child care service. Otherwise, it does not make sense that Kentucky chicken or whatever has to operate 50 nurseries. It's a small point, Mr Speaker, Sir, but it's important that I get clarification on that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Dental Council Act, we are going to have complete government control on the Dental Council. Complete Government control! Out of 14 members, only 5 will be private, the rest are going to be government dentists or directly appointed by the Minister. He will tell you here when he answers, 'oh, it's not me; it's the Dental Council that decided.' There is nothing independent about the Dental Council. Same goes, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the Medical Council. Nothing is independent about the Medical Council. Out of 23 members, Mr Speaker, Sir, 17 are government employees or directly appointed by the Minister of Health. So, nothing is independent about either the Medical Council or the Dental Council. Yet, successive people who hide behind these will 'oh, it's not me; it's the Dental Council.' That is unfortunate, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I come now to the famous Shooting and Fishing Leases. Some amendments are being brought. I would have thought, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the hon. Minister would have put one additional bid, that is, that it should be leased to fit and proper persons. It should be leased to fit and proper persons because he had this issue, I presume, having inadvertently given it to a famous drug trafficker! He did not know about it. Fair enough! But, at least, correct it today!

We have expected in good faith that he would have said: I am going to have this fit and proper person, as you do many other things, even if we want to go and have horse races, you have to be fit and proper but that would have been *une occasion ratée*. You see, I am being very fair. You could have put that in the law. I hope it was not deliberate that you didn't do so.

On the Roads Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just going to say this: when you have a fine, you have to go personally to the District Court to pay for it; if you are travelling in Grand Baie and you live in Mahebourg, then you have to travel there. Do you know how much time this cost the economy; how it is a waste of time when in fact it can be easily paid digitally? You have Juice, you have Blink – God knows what else – MRA, etc. Yet in 2023 in Mauritius, when you have a fine of a Rs1,000, Rs2,000 or whatever, you have to go to the District Court and pay it. That is symptomatic of this *dysfonctionnement* of Government in this case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act. We were promised amendments in the annex, I can't see any amendments. Good thing, because there was a bad provision. Everybody was afraid because the annex announced that the Minister of Finance was going to remove, *s'il vous plait*, FINTEC, from the ambit of the Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act. Many people were afraid whether, in fact the Bitcoin, etc. was now going to be out of the FIAMLA, but it didn't happen. Very good, Mr Speaker, Sir!

One general point – licences. Everywhere in this Bill, licences are being given for one year. Everywhere! What a mistake! You want people to keep on applying every single year? The previous Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, tried to extend the life of licences from one year to three years. You don't want the whole nation to keep on reapplying every single year for every single license which is being done here. You don't want our civil servants everywhere just to be stamping payments for every single license every year. That is a big mistake! And this book is full of these instances where licences are being paid every year. What? Same as going to pay for your fine physically in the District Court, licences I knew it should be a thing of the past. You should be given the choice at least of paying three, four, five years in advance and be safe. What's more, Mr Speaker, Sir? Not having your licence renewed for any one year is a huge source of uncertainty. It stops you from investing properly not knowing whether year by year your licence will be renewed.

The last point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Public Procurement Act. To be on the safe side, I will tell you which clause. Clause 69 (a) (iii) of the Public Procurement Act says –

“prescribed amount” means such amount as may be prescribed;”

It seems to make sense.

Now, what is he doing actually, Mr Speaker, Sir? He is allowing for Schedules to the Act to be changed because each type of entity, each company has a prescribed amount higher than which, it needs to go to the Central Procurement Board for allocation of a

contract lower than this amount. He can do so for various amounts in various ways. Fair enough! We don't know the prescribed amount that the Minister will give. We don't know, but what we do know, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that this was a fantastic chance for the Government of Mauritius to change that Schedule I of the Public Procurement Act by including companies like National Social Living Development Corporation, by including other companies that, it seems to me now, are deliberately being left out because here we are changing Schedule I, changing the Public Procurement Act for the prescribed amount but not changing anything to do with the prescribed organisations. That is my point.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will give you this and you will see very clearly what I am saying. The National Housing Development Corporation (NHDC), yes it is on the Schedule, whatever prescribed amount. By magic, deliberately, now we understand that NSLD, which he created, is not. NHDC construct houses and we can see NHDC houses are relatively cheap and it has to abide by the Public Procurement Act which is the Bible for procurement but its subsidiary, the NSLD doesn't care about that, never heard of the Public Procurement Act, it doesn't need to. Prescribed amount change and not prescribed organisations.

State Property Development Ltd., the precursor of Landscape, it can sell, Mr Speaker, Sir, differences also between Governments here. State Property Development Ltd, yes, on the Public Procurement Act as a prescribed organisation but Landscape, no. It doesn't want to know anything about the Public Procurement Act. The State Investment Corporation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a prescribed organisation; it has to abide by the Public Procurement Act. Would you be surprised if I tell you that the Mauritius investment Corporation (MIC) is not under this Government? And I have just taken a few, there are dozens and dozens of entities like this deliberately kept out – I can say deliberately now – of the Public Procurement Act, Mr Speaker, Sir.

There you go, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have finished. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 5.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.01 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene on the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023.

The Bill provides for amendments in different legislations in order to give effect to the measures announced in the Budget 2023-2024. I said it, and I say it again – the budget is an all-inclusive budget catering for the economy development without forgetting the social aspect. I always say we cannot have *développement économique sans un développement social. Donc il est primordial d'avoir le développement social. Notre gouvernement fait beaucoup d'effort afin d'avoir un équilibre entre le développement économique et le développement social, M. le président.*

The House will recall my intervention on the Appropriation Bill following the Budget Speech last month. I had explained the vision of our Government to improve the quality of life of our elders, persons with disabilities and helping the vulnerable. The Budget 2023-2024 has in fact proved to the population that our Government cares for the welfare of our people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said that, let me say a few words on the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition. I have listened carefully to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Well, it seems that he is finding it weird for a Finance Bill to be amending, I must say, only 90 legislations. May I remind the hon. Member that at the time he was Minister of Finance from 2012 to 2013, only 32 amendments were made, both in the Finance Act 2012 and 2013. I repeat, only 32 and not even half of what we are doing today. Mr Speaker, Sir, what do a few amendments show? A few amendments only show one thing; that the previous government did not take bold measures, did not bring important measures to improve the quality of life of our people. So, no comparison can be made between them and us. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the first time that a Finance Bill is amending legislations. So, we are at ease with it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my intervention will be restricted to amendments in legislation pertaining to my Ministry with respect to both the Social Integration and Social Security Division. I am sure that other Members on this floor will tackle other clauses of the Bill.

The first clause which is relevant to my Ministry is clause 38 of the Finance Bill which amends the Income Tax Act. As the House will recall, during the Budget Speech, it was announced that the *Prime à l'emploi* scheme is being extended to persons with disabilities and companies are provided with an increased tax deduction of 300%. In order to further improve the lives of persons with disabilities and also to facilitate their employment, the Income Tax Act is therefore being amended.

Another important clause, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the Finance Bill which concerns my Ministry is of course, clause 56 which amends the National Pensions Act. Section 7 of the National Pension Act 1976 is being amended to allow dependent children of beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pension to benefit from the Child Allowance. As it is now, beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pension are not eligible to Child Allowance unless he/she is a beneficiary of Basic Invalidity Pension, Basic Widow's Pension or Survivor's Pension prior to attaining the age of 60. Some 950 Basic Retirement Pension beneficiaries are deprived of this monthly Child Allowance for their dependent children. Now, this will no more be the case. They will be able to claim this allowance, Mr Speaker, Sir, an allowance which has been increased from Rs1,700 to Rs2,000.

Another laudable measure has undoubtedly been the increase of Rs1,000 in all basic pensions. In order to implement this budgetary measure, the Second Schedule of the National Pensions Act is being amended under clause 56 and with the Finance Bill, Item 1 in the third column will be amended to provide the following –

- (i) Basic Retirement Pension for a person aged 60 and below 90 will now be Rs11,000;
- (ii) Aged 90 and below 100 will be Rs18,710;
- (iii) Aged 100 and over will be Rs23,710;
- (iv) Widows Basic Pension will increase to Rs11,000;
- (v) Orphan's Pension will be Rs10,000;
- (vi) Child Allowance will be Rs2,000.

And with the Rs1,000 of CSG Allowance under the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act 2021, those above 65 will get a pension of Rs12,000; those between 90 and 99 will receive a pension of Rs19,710, and our centenarians, Rs24,710.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now come to an amendment which is very important and I am here referring to clause 56 amending the Sixth Schedule of the National Pensions Act. Mr Speaker, this amendment is another big step towards improving the lives of persons with disabilities. It is not unknown to Members of the House that the award of the Basic Invalidity Pension to persons who have suffered amputations needs to be addressed in a proper manner. So, I have to acknowledge that this matter indeed needed our attention and it was high time to bring some amendments to relieve those persons.

Mr Speaker, let me give you some context. The Sixth Schedule of the National Pensions Act 1976 sets out the percentage for each type of disability resulting from amputation.

For example, the percentage of disablement for loss of leg above knee would be between 40 to 70%. This makes the applicant eligible to the Basic Invalidity Pension. However, loss of leg below knee would amount to a percentage of only 30 to 42%. Thus, the person is not eligible to the Basic Invalidity Pension. This is also the case for loss of arm above and below elbow, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, with the new budgetary measure, the Finance Bill is repealing the existing Sixth Schedule of the National Pensions Act regarding the percentage of disability for amputation and replacing it by a new one so that the disparity, that I have just mentioned, is addressed. Thus, an individual who has been amputated or lost his/her arm or leg shall benefit from the Basic Invalidity Pension of Rs11,000. I must say that this new and landmark measure was not easy to bring, but our willingness and determination made it possible, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, this the kind of Government that Mauritius deserves.

Now, Clause 78 of the Bill amends the Social Integration and Empowerment Act 2016, an Act which this Government introduced in December 2016 as a testimony of its robust commitment to fight poverty. It was a first of its kind in the history of Mauritius which made provision, *inter alia*, for the setting of a dedicated Ministry mandated for social integration and empowerment. We came forward with the Marshall plan to better cater for the vulnerable people. We all agree that without the Marshall plan, it was very difficult to provide support and to empower the neediest. Over the years, I must say that the Marshall plan has proved to be an essential tool in the fight against poverty. For the first time in history, our Government has made provision for a monthly income support to be paid to SRM households. Today, we are increasing the household income in order to benefit to more people.

Clause 78 amends the Schedule of the Social Integration and Empowerment Act (2016) so as to reflect the budget measure to increase maximum household income threshold from Rs10,500 to Rs14,650, an increase of more or less 39%, Mr Speaker, following the revision of the threshold that I have just mentioned, the monthly income support of our beneficiaries is being adjusted accordingly. Now that the poverty threshold has been increased, this means that automatically, more families will become eligible under the SRM.

Allow me to say a few words, Mr Speaker, Sir, on one of the budget measures which is to provide NGOs registered under the National and Social Inclusion Foundation

with duty free vehicles. It is in this spirit that Clause 20 of the Finance Bill amends the Customs Tariff Act to provide for a duty free vehicle for NGOs registered with the National Social Inclusion Foundation. Similarly, Clause 28 amends the Excise Act to make provisions for the duty free vehicles such as vans and cabin vehicles, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these were the few things that I wanted to say on the Finance Bill. As you can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have limited myself to the amendments which concern my Ministry. So, I am happy to have been able to bring my humble contribution to the present legislation. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(6.13 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since the Sittings are live and direct and we are under the constant gaze of the public, let me right from the outset spell out what a Finance Bill is. A medley of amendments in relation to specific legislations for measures announced in the budget.

I recall a ruling was given by the former Speaker, Kailash Purryag, in 2009, when inadvertently, an unannounced budget was surreptitiously introduced in the Finance Bill. He set his foot and, of course, these amendments had to be withdrawn.

In March 2015, the then regime wanted to do away with the Programme-Based Budgeting. With the Programme-Based Budgeting, Government was under the transparent budgetary scrutiny of Committee of Supplies. A Committee of the Standing Order met to examine Standing Order 52 and 73, and proposed a return to an outdated exercise although IMF, I was told, was informed. I still believe the Programme-Based Budgeting has its merits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me quote and state what the Bill is now today. It is a long title and reads as follows –

“(...) this Bill is to provide for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2023-2024 and for matters connected, consequential and incidental thereto.”

This is what you have said earlier, but it is a flood gate.

Now, the question that begs an answer is, irrespective of amendments proposed by late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, in March 2015, to amend the Standing Orders, we are yet to be told where in the Erskine May, which is the Bible of Parliament, is it said that those

amendments to Standing Orders are in order and parliamentary correct? This is what we call tacking. Tacking is perhaps legal in the minds of those who will bend the rules, but it is not legitimate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to specific amendments. Amendment to the National Identity Card in section 55 to me has no legitimate locus. It should have been a legislation on its own. Under the guise of national security and in the name of public interest, the regime can have access to personal data and invade privacy. Are there adequate safeguards to potential vulnerabilities in the digital infrastructure and risk posed to individual privacy? It is a violation of human right. Section 2A(4)(e) makes it clear that –

“(4) The Unit shall –

(e) have such functions and powers as may be determined by the Secretary for Home Affairs for the administrative and functional efficiency of the organisational framework relating to the MNIC System.”

We have to be enlightened on the uttered powers of the Secretary for Foreign Affairs who reports directly to the Prime Minister.

I will now come to Income Tax, section 38 amended. Taxpayers feel relief, but the relief is temporary. Why? The tax net has been widened to the joy of the MRA with its politics of bringing in more catch in the tax net. Depreciation of the rupee makes it happen. Then, the regime, of course, will use the depreciation of the rupee to narrow the budget deficit. The regime cares less of depreciation, inflation and cost of living crisis. Eligible tax payers, around 8% of the workforce inclusive of landed gentry and rent seekers, are filling the tax returns feel happy, but there is no free lunch. The MRA will collect more than it bargains. That collection expands from Rs49 billions to Rs62 billions for Financial Year 2023-2024. *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* is indeed a tax which spares nobody.

There is indeed a huge burden of taxation with unfair representation. Against this backdrop, I will now come, fair and square, on Pharmacy Act, Public Debt Management Act, Bank of Mauritius Act, EDB with a slight touch on Central Water Authority and Waste Water Management Authority Act. I will conclude by referring to the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act. However, I cannot be insensitive to Animal Welfare Act and Animal Diseases Act.

The Animal Welfare Act cannot go unnoticed and there is a call for vigorous condemnation of cruelty to dogs and other animals. There are a lot of controversies over the increasing export of long-tailed macaque monkeys due to departure from established

laws. It is a vicious trade and a slur on the reputation of our great little country. With breakthrough of research and development on human cell line and use of artificial in the lab, the export of live animals for medical and pharmaceutical research would have to be revisited. The amendments to the Animal Diseases Act are a reminder that there should be no compromise on biosafety and bio security of animal farm. Spread of diseases from animals to humans can lead to epidemic and pandemic. Tuberculosis is rife on the farm where monkeys are bred in captivity. As to quarantine regulations, they have not been applied and we have to beware of transmission to humans. There are lessons to be learnt and drawn from COVID-19 which could have spread from caged animals on sale at the Wuhan market. I would appeal to the responsible Minister not to exercise undue control over the Vet Council, whose members are duly elected. Much to my surprise, I have seen that there has been an amendment to the Vet Council which almost gives the unfettered powers to the Minister and in fact, those members who elected the Chairman will no longer be able to do so. That is why I say, a balance has to be struck and the Minister cannot depart from basic democratic principles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 64 makes provisions for the setting up of a pharmaceutical industry. How can we dare and dream of setting up a pharmaceutical industry in Mauritius if we do not have an advanced biotechnology plant? Where is our regulatory agency and who are the qualified inspectors? I am not going to mention Ajanta Pharma, but it is fair to say that Ajanta Pharma which manufactures specific tablets was last inspected in 2012. It has been given a GMP on a year to year basis sort of inspection. So, our Pharmacy Board is obsolete and there is a call for comprehensive Pharmacy Bill which was last introduced in 1983.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to clause 67 – Public Debt Management Act amended. Nothing is said on debt repayment. In Mauritius, the scenario will spell disaster; the Leader of the Opposition did mention it, if corrective measures are not forcefully taken to redress the economic situation. By the way, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister is yet to define the meaning of ‘non-strategic sectors’. He also has to inform how he will halt inflation, reduce debt and make the economy grow. The maximum public sector debt to GDP ratio for any fiscal year is increased to 60% to 80% in the current Bill from the previous 65% in the previous Public Debt Management Act. The Minister of Finance will have to inform the House on where the spending cuts will come from and if taxes would increase to achieve the long-term target of reducing the public sector debt to GDP of 60% within the ensuing three fiscal years.

The remedy proposed by IMF is not limited to a ceiling on budget deficit only. IMF has also set a ceiling on overall borrowing requirements to control borrowing from the outset. I was quite surprised in reply to a PQ put by hon. Ramful on Government borrowing requirements domestic and foreign debt, the Minister of Finance could not provide the relevant information in respect of loan from World Bank to finance among others a series of projects, especially those in the construction of a new airport in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, the political commitment to address economic fundamentals is lacking. Let me now come to what was said by the former Director of Budget of the Ministry of Finance in relation to comments on Public Debt Management Act, 'that we fall short of accepted global standards of fiscal governance and undermine our standing vis-à-vis our development partners and international financial institutions which impact upon our standing with credit rating agencies.' More than once, Government has been rapped on the knuckles by the IMF over management of public debt which has ballooned and is excessive. Moody's credit ratings agency has warned to err on the principle of caution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed amendment Public Debt Management Act in the Finance Bill 2023 relating to the waiver applicable to large investment projects under the public debt ceiling. Fair enough! But we have to be told whether waiver is going to be limited in size and the need to restore the full section 7 of the pre-COVID Public Debt Management Act, which restricted the increase in the debt ratio to 2 points of GDP between two fiscal years and stipulated that the debt ratio be reduced to a lower level in the medium term. So, there is no need to draw special attention to the waiver, to the application of the public debt ceiling to large investment projects in the public sector deemed by Cabinet to be timely and prudent, as stated under the section 7 of the Public Debt Management Act.

What is it that we have been told? The IMF has reminded us that we have to set up an independent fiscal council framework for fiscal responsibility to enhance commitment to credible mid-term fiscal framework. Unfortunately, Government falls short on the framework of fiscal responsibility. Mr Speaker, Sir, if we do not tread cautiously, we may be on the verge of social chaos. That is why we have to say it and it has to be said loud and clear because there are other jurisdictions which are praying and waiting for our downfall and Rwanda is one of those countries.

Now, let me come to the Bank of Mauritius Act. The Finance Bill 2023 is proposing amendment to the Bank of Mauritius to repeal certain provisions which were

introduced in the wake of COVID-19 to allow for the free and unlimited financing of Government budget by Bank of Mauritius from its Special Reserve Fund and General Reserves. But then, we have to ask the question: who has turned the Bank of Mauritius into an ATM and use helicopter money with no lending?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Special Reserve Fund, as has been explained by the Leader of the Opposition, is constituted by valuation gain on foreign exchange following a policy of deliberate depreciation of the Rupee. So, the Finance Bill is also repealing section 46 (5) of the Bank of Mauritius Act that authorised Bank of Mauritius to use official foreign reserves to invest in any corporation or company set up for the purpose of facilitating the economic development.

Much has been said about the Mauritius Investment Corporation but let me remind the House of the amount of investment from the MIC that has gone into the Airport of Mauritius Holdings. It is unfortunate that the fat cats of the Airport Holdings of Mauritius set up an illegal discriminatory, allegedly disciplinary committee to seek to sack the President of AMCCA. So, I hope corrective measures will be taken and she will obtain redress.

The Bank of Mauritius has to wage war on inflation but is now thriving on inflation to reap dividends. That is what the balance sheet of the profit and loss of MIC shows, a total and flagrant policy contraindication. It is now dependent on valuation game of land asset to realise profit. So don't be surprised if tomorrow we are told that the Bank of Mauritius just contemplates a merger of Landscape. Bank of Mauritius is now engaging in land speculation. These amendments to the Bank of Mauritius Act will put a stop to future monetary deficit financing and hopefully helps towards the normalisation of monetary policy to restore its effectiveness in controlling inflation which is a pre-eminent central bank objective. These amendments unfortunately are necessary but not sufficient. Bank of Mauritius requires and this is what we were told by former ministers of Financial Services that Bank of Mauritius requires a new legal framework recapitalisation and renouncement of the MIC.

So, we still have to be told where MIC is going to relinquish that money which should be, of course, relinquished by the Bank of Mauritius. Will it go to the Government, to the Development Bank of Mauritius, to the State Investment Corporation? Because it undermines the monetary policy credibility and effectiveness and adds credit risk to the Bank of Mauritius balance sheet. In 2021-2022, MIC recorded a loss of Rs1.5 billion on account of investment in airport Holdings, offset by valuation gain on its land asset bought from Omnicane. The valuation of MIC quasi equity investment with conversion clauses is

a complex exercise and there are serious doubts that MIC accounts indeed reflect true and fair value. The Audited Financial Statement of MIC for Year 21-22 are still awaited more than a year after the financial year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make a few comments in relation to amendments to the Economic Development Board. The Economic Development Act presently offers benefits to holders of the premium investor certificate for the following activities –

- emerging sectors pioneering Industries, and
- firm first movers innovative technology and such targeted economic activities as approved by the Minister.

The acquisition of non-strategic government-owned activities will now be considered as a subcategory of innovative technologies and industries which indeed is a ludicrous proposal and it clearly aims at sweetening the deal for acquirers of government-owned business. The term non-strategic is undefined and can be interpreted loosely to include any kind of government business. The offer of fiscal and other concession granted is tantamount to a subsidisation of private business with potential for corrupt collusion between politicians and their business cronies. The saga of the Film Rebate Scheme has already drawn attention to the wistful nature of alleged fiscal incentives and concession.

The Government is desperate to unload its poorly performing public enterprises like the Casino Companies, the National Insurance Company and Maubank in order to fund the government deficit and avoid raising public debt further but the fiscal sops being offered today will increase future financing needs and lead to higher public debt tomorrow.

Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, refer to what happened in UK. In UK, privatisation of Thames Water is a financial disaster and the taxpayers are being fleeced. God knows what the regime will do with the Wastewater Management Authority and CWA. The House would recall that when hon. Collendavelloo was DPM and Minister of Public Utilities, Government had started discussions with the IFC over *affermage*, which is not dissimilar to concessions or a PPP; a public-private partnership of CWA with government typically responsible for capital expenditure. Mr Speaker, Sir, the private-public partnership project has been shelved and set aside and was subject of discord between the Prime Minister and the then Deputy Prime Minister. There is no demarcation line between the Premium Investor Scheme and non-strategic sectors as the scope has been enlarged to cover non-strategic sectors. It is all in the same basket as in section 24, 2A (2) sub (a) sub (b).

Mr Speaker, Sir, by selling its assets under the Premium Investor Scheme, government is hoping to pass on part of the cost of its current mismanagement of state-

owned entities to future tax payers. Let me now come to a host of questions which I did ask when I intervened on the budget in relation to migration policy to develop the new economic sectors. Unfortunately, the Minister is yet to apprise us of new sectors to emerge through attraction of foreign talents, how and when they were identified, growth in terms of GDP to be generated in each of the emerging sectors and what would be the incidents on local workforce and the impact on demographic changes. I am all for but I need answers and we want to see more elderly people coming to stay in the golden homes as is the practice in Thailand but we don't have to change to rules and goalposts simply to meet the needs of cronies.

Let me now come to the SIE Act clause 82. Despite amendments to the SIE Act with insertion of intersection of a new section 27, that is section 27 (A), year in year out, land under sugarcane cultivation is decreasing and stands at 38,000 hectares as of now but where is policy coherence to rehabilitate abandoned land under sugarcane. The director of the Sugar Syndicate stated that –

“Remunerative market for special sugar is there for the day and a world harness policy should enable a farmer to turn his sugarcane fields profitable with value addition.”

We know of opportunities with bagasse, cane thrash special sugar and products derived from molasses will be windfall game for planters. I press upon the regime not to blurt out and to prepare the coherent policies and set targets which are achievable. The regrouping of planters with land area management unit for economies of scale should not be in the cloud.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the politics of biomass and renewable energy has been defined but we hope this policy will be implemented at the required speed. Let me concur with what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has stated in relation to shooting and fishing licenses. There should have been provision to lease shooting and fishing leases to people who are fit and proper.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Collendavelloo!

(6.37 p.m.)

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Merci, M. le président. Mon intervention ce soir se limitera à une seule clause du *Finance Bill*, c'est-à-dire la clause 44. La clause 44 vient amender ou bien cherche à amender la composition du

Permits and Business Monitoring Committee de toutes les municipalités et *District Councils*. Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce comité ? Tout à l'heure, nous viendrons à cela.

Mais voyons d'abord ce que l'amendement essaye de faire. Sommairement, nous voudrions qu'à la composition actuelle, on ajoute deux membres additionnels qui seraient des professionnels dans le domaine de l'aménagement du territoire, dans le domaine de la construction, architectes, ingénieurs, etc.

Comment cela se situe aujourd'hui ? Voyons l'historique. Auparavant, comment c'était ? Les permis de construction, tout ce qui concerne l'aménagement du territoire, étaient le monopole des conseillers de district et conseillers municipaux. Cela a malheureusement pêché par un excès de démocratie peut-être, mais cela avait mené, à l'époque, à toutes sortes de festivals, surtout dans quelques municipalités où on faisait la pluie et le beau temps avec les permis de construction.

En 2016, il y a eu les élections municipales. Ensuite, il y a eu les élections villageoises et conseils de district. Le gouvernement d'alors, dirigé par Sir Anerood Jugnauth, décide qu'il faut mettre bon ordre dans cette affaire. On ne peut pas laisser des conseillers, qui sont par ailleurs des gens qui ne sont pas nécessairement des professionnels dans le domaine, et Sir Anerood Jugnauth avait dit : 'allons mettre les officiers aussi dans le comité.' On les ajoute dans le comité et on diminue le nombre de conseillers.

Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ? Dans le *Finance Act* de 2016, il y a la section 32 qui vient dire ceci : *the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee* va être composé de deux catégories de personnes. D'abord, les officiers, *Chief Executive* et les chefs de départements ; il y en a trois, *Land Use and Planning*, *Public Health*, et le troisième, Infrastructures publiques. Donc, ces chefs de département plus le *Chief Executive* rentrent dans le *Permits and Business Monitoring Committee* que nous allons appeler maintenant *PBMC*.

Mais de l'autre côté, il y a les élus. Le maire ou le lord maire, ou bien le *Chairman*, va présider le comité, et avec lui, il y aura quatre conseillers. Comprendons bien ce que le gouvernement de 2016 a fait ; une balance entre les chefs des départements, le *Chief Executive*, qui vont emmener le côté technique et professionnel, et puis, les conseillers qui seront majoritaires, 5 contre 4, parce que les conseillers connaissent l'endroit, les nécessités du développement et ils savent ce qu'on a besoin pour leur ville ou pour leur village. C'est ce 5-4 qui a toujours depuis 2016 jusqu'à maintenant dominé tout le développement des villes. Nous viendrons tout à l'heure sur ce que sont les pouvoirs de ce comité ; d'immenses pouvoirs. On parle de milliards-là. C'est pour cela que j'ai demandé

d'intervenir et de prendre la parole, parce que c'est trop important cette clause 44 du *Finance Bill*. Donc, c'est ainsi la composition.

Aujourd'hui, le ministre des Finances vient avec une proposition. Il vient nous dire 5-4, la balance était en faveur de la démocratie, parce que quand tous les officiers marchent d'un côté et que tous les conseillers marchent de l'autre côté ; les conseillers ont toujours la majorité. Ce projet de loi, la clause 44 veut insérer un pouvoir au ministre, vient ajouter deux membres qui seront des professionnels, pas n'importe qui, et nous verrons qui sont-ils plus tard.

Allons voir ce qu'il dit, si vous me le permettez. Nous allons lire ensemble une partie de ce projet de loi, section 44 (b) (ii) (1A) (a) –

“(...) the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee shall comprise of [J'espère qu'on va corriger ce lapsus calami, parce qu'on ne dit pas ‘comprise of,’ mais enfin, c'est écrit comme cela.] 2 additional members who shall be independent and qualified in the field of architecture, (...).”

En d'autres termes, on vient d'ajouter une dose de professionnalisme dans le comité, mais attention, on dit que ces deux membres *“shall be independent.”* Je ne sais pas *‘independent’* de qui, *‘independent’* de quoi. Mais *they shall be ‘independent and qualified.’*

C'est pour cela que l'amendement, que j'accueille de tout cœur, proposé par le ministre, plus tard au stade de comité, va bien préciser comment se fera la sélection de ces membres additionnels, parce que ces deux membres ne sont pas des élus. Ils ne sont pas issus du vote et ils ne sont pas non plus des officiers mêlés à la technicité du conseil, comme l'avait voulu Sir Anerood Jugnauth à l'époque en 2016. C'était ça l'idée, je me souviens très bien, de Sir Anerood Jugnauth. C'était qu'on mette une balance technique dans la démocratie régionale, car la démocratie est un outil important.

Le projet de loi vient dire une chose. Comme je l'ai dit, il y aura deux *“additional members who shall be independent and qualified in the field of”* l'architecture (le génie civil), *civil engineering, land use planning*, (aménagement du territoire), *“surveying or such other field as may be prescribed.”*

Ce qui veut dire *such field as is related to these former fields but which may be prescribed by the Minister*. L'idée est excellente parce que cela vient instaurer, comme je l'ai dit, le professionnalisme dans toute cette histoire de permis.

Ce que je n'arrive pas à comprendre par contre, comment peut-on dire que *deux additional members shall be independent* lorsque leurs sièges dépendent de la volonté du

ministre ? Le ministre va les nommer et le ministre peut les révoquer *at will* sous le *Interpretation and General Clauses Act*. Donc, ne venons pas dire qu'ils sont indépendants. Je n'ai aucun problème que le ministre veuille les révoquer et veuille les nommer, mais ne disons pas qu'ils sont indépendants ; ils seront dépendants du ministre, et c'est bon ainsi. C'est comme les *Chief Executives* qui sont sous la responsabilité du *Local Government Service Commission* et donc, indirectement, qui dépendent du *Senior Chief Executive* du ministère qui est leur chef hiérarchique. Il n'y a aucun mal à cela, mais soyons bien clairs. Ne venons pas dire qu'ils sont indépendants quand ils ne le sont pas.

Qualified ? Oui, ils seront qualifiés puisque maintenant avec l'amendement que le ministre vient de proposer, il va décider qui seront ces deux membres spécifiques après consultation – je crois que ça a été écrit un petit peu en vitesse, vitesse – *after consultation with the members appropriate registration body*. Je pense que si on regarde le *CEB Act*, on a la terminologie exacte qui aurait pu être utilisée et il y a beaucoup de textes de loi là-dessus, mais qu'importe, nous savons de quoi nous parlons. C'est-à-dire que le ministre avant de nommer n'importe qui, va consulter le conseil des ingénieurs, des architectes, des *Land Surveyors* pour voir si ce sont des gens corrects ou pas.

Alors, pourquoi je parle de tout ça ? C'est parce que maintenant, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de notre pays, à part la commission administrative, le ministre aura une main directe dans l'administration de l'autorité locale. C'est l'interférence donc – ce n'est pas une mauvaise chose, l'interférence –, la gestion extérieure pour gérer un des comités les plus importants qu'il y ait dans notre pays, parce que regardez ce que la clause 44 (b) (ii) nous dit –

« (1A) (a) *For the purpose of section 117(6), the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee shall comprise of 2 additional members (...)* »

C'est quoi cette section 117(6) ? Ça vous dit ce que le *PBMC* peut faire. Peut-être qu'on ne le réalise pas très souvent, le *PBMC* est l'organe le plus puissant que vous avez à Maurice surtout avec tous les axes de développement qui ont commencé depuis 2015 et qui continuent. Nous l'avons vu aujourd'hui avec le *Finance Bill*. Le *PBMC processes every application for an online planning permission or a Building and Land Use Permit having regard to the provisions of the Building Control Act, the Environment Protection Act, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Act, the Planning and Development Act, the Town and Country Planning Act and the Planning and Development Act, and any guidelines issued under those Acts*. En d'autres termes, depuis la simple muraille que vous voulez monter entre deux voisins du village et le Tribeca Mall, des milliards passent par le

PBMC tous les mois. Tous les mois, nos conseillers municipaux, les officiers et maintenant, les deux *additional members*.

Il est intéressant de voir ce que Anerood Jugnauth avait fait en 2016 et de voir la progression qu'on essaye de faire aujourd'hui, parce qu'aujourd'hui, les conseillers seront minoritaires pour le développement de leur propre ville. Et le ministre aura nommé les deux membres qui auront bien évidemment à suivre la politique générale du ministère des autorités locales. Et voilà tout ce qui se passe. Et tout cela avec comme *backdrop* l'amendement que nous venons de faire au *Local Government Act*. Je dis ça, parce qu'il y a des affaires qui sont en Cour en ce moment et qu'il faut faire bien attention à ce que l'on fait.

Nous avons passé une loi afin de permettre à ce qu'un comité technique commence son travail sur la réforme du *Local Government*, des autorités locales, des collectivités locales. Est-ce qu'on doit municipaliser toute l'île Maurice ? Est-ce qu'on doit réformer le système du *Local Government* ? Et surtout tout le monde qui a parlé ici, avait parlé en faveur de la démocratie régionale et de la grande autonomie que nous voulons mettre. J'ai pris la parole moi-même, le ministre avait pris la parole, tout le monde qui avait pris la parole des deux côtés de la Chambre, même si nos avis divergeaient, nous avions un but. Ce qu'on disait – il faut revoir, réformer notre système.

Maintenant, est-ce qu'on doit réformer le système pour que le ministre nomme tous les conseillers des municipalités ? Peut-être. Et donc, on n'aurait pas besoin d'avoir des représentants populaires. C'est une fausseté cette histoire de constitution, démocratie, etc. Il n'y a pas de droit constitutionnel à l'autonomie régionale ; ça n'existe pas dans notre constitution, mais ça, le judiciaire va voir. Mais c'est ce *backdrop* qui est important. Je présume que le comité qui a été mis en place dans la mouvance du dernier amendement de 2023 du *Local Government Act* a dû conseiller le ministre des Finances pour lui dire : voilà, déjà une première étape urgente c'est de mettre deux représentants du ministre au sein du *PBMC* et donc faire la majorité devenir la minorité, parce que c'est ça ce qui va se passer. La majorité va devenir la minorité et cela dans le contexte de la démocratie régionale.

J'ai parlé donc de la composition du *PBMC*, mais j'ai également parlé d'immenses pouvoirs ; ce sont des organismes extrêmement puissants et ces deux éléments doivent cadrer dans ce que nous avons voulu faire le 23 mai 2023 lorsque nous avons renvoyé les élections afin de permettre la réforme. Aujourd'hui, est-ce que c'est ce que nous voulons faire dans l'éventuelle réforme des collectivités locales ou est-ce que c'est un petit cheveu sur une soupe de maïs que nous essaierons de corriger par la suite ?

On ne nous a pas dit quel était le *mischief* qu'on voulait guérir avec cet amendement, mais je suppose que tout ça est fait dans le bon sens des collectivités locales et non pas pour des besoins de politique partisane, parce que ce ne sont pas les habitudes de la maison.

Le but de mon propos était donc d'éclairer la Chambre sur tous les à-côtés de l'article 44 de ce projet de loi pour que nous soyons clairs sur la direction que le ministre des Finances veut donner aux autorités locales, aux collectivités locales en attendant que le comité mis en place, suite à la loi du 23 mai, puisse faire son travail et aller dans le bon sens démocratique que nous avons toujours voulu instaurer dans notre pays.

Merci, M. le président.

Hon. Members: Bravo! Bravo!

An hon. Member: *Carré, carré!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

(7.00 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start by congratulating the previous orator for having *oser* to think differently from what the Government is proposing. So, let me start with clauses 3, 22 and 50, Mr Speaker, Sir, which deal with the amendments to the Allied Health Professionals Council Act, the Dental Council Act and the Medical Council Act. I am taking all these three clauses together because they deal with the same issue.

Now, these legislations, Mr Speaker, Sir, as you would know contain provisions to regulate the registration of professionals in the medical profession. We are talking about registration of Physiotherapists, Dentists and, of course, Medical Practitioners. Now, the amendments to these legislations amongst others, seek to introduce a duration clause which provides that at the expiry of 30 days from the effective date, the effective date being the date when an application for registration has been submitted together with all the relevant documents, it is being provided that this application should be deemed to have been automatically approved by the Council.

Now, more importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, that duration clause would apply equally to Mauritians as well as foreign professionals. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have tried and looked for another jurisdiction where such a duration clause has been included in the nation legislation but I have seen none and rightly so, Mr Speaker, Sir, because any regulatory body should be given ample time and opportunity to assess the competency of the

applicant, especially when we are referring to the medical field, and the hon. Minister of Health who unfortunately is not here because he has some personal obligations, knows it very well. There is at present a Specialist Surgeon, General Surgeon who has been given a scholarship funded by the Mauritian Government to follow a training course in thoracic surgery in the UK and his application dates back to more than five months now and, his application has not yet been approved by the General Medical Council of the UK (GMC), and rightly so because the UK authorities want to ensure that the Specialist is a fit and eligible candidate to practice in the UK for the benefit of the UK patients.

Now, I agree that private clinics should be allowed to open up the profession to foreign professionals but there is a need for due diligence to be exercised before recruiting any medical health professionals. Also, we need to protect the local professionals from being flooded by pseudo professionals, especially in the medical field where you have, at present, an excess of medical practitioners. So, this is why I believe that the Medical Council, the Allied Health Professionals Council or the Dental Council should be given sufficient time to get all the necessary information about an applicant before his application for registration is approved. So, I will invite the hon. Minister of Health to think carefully about this proposed amendment before going forward with its implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now refer to clause 8 which concerns the amendments to the Bank of Mauritius Act. Now, section 6, subsection (1) (oa), section 46 subsection (5) and section 47 subsection (6) are now being repealed. These amendments, Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly come at a late stage and I will explain why and secondly, they do not fully comply with the recommendations of the IMF. You will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these amendments to the Bank of Mauritius Act were introduced during the COVID-19 period to allow the Bank of Mauritius to grant money to the Government and to even invest in private companies and we know how following these amendments, the Bank of Mauritius became the Government's ATM, paying Rs18 billion of Government external debts by transferring Rs60 billion to the Consolidated Fund and we also had the creation of the MIC where Rs80 billion were transferred.

Now, these measures were disapproved by the international agencies including the IMF and Moody's and the credit rating of Mauritius was even downgraded to Baa3. So, these amendments, I am afraid, come at a very late stage when the credit worthiness of our jurisdiction has already been put into question by reputable agencies but more importantly because I have said that these amendments do not fully comply with the recommendations

of the IMF, it is because the IMF also recommended in its July 2022 report and I quote what the IMF have recommended –

“21. To support policy credibility and remove unnecessary credit risk from the BOM’s balance sheet, staff recommends the BOM to relinquish ownership of the MIC, the MIC to return undisbursed financing to the BOM, and avoid quasi-fiscal financing.”

And, the reason why the IMF made such a recommendation is because they said that –

“The BOM’s ownership of the MIC weighs on the BOM’s independence blurs the separation of monetary and fiscal policies and will likely contribute to higher monetary policy costs and/or higher inflation going forward.”

And, this is what we are actually witnessing, Mr Speaker, Sir – higher inflation, higher interest rates and higher cost of borrowing and now, instead of returning the Rs30 billions left, the MIC, it would seem – will now engage itself in property development because, Mr Speaker, Sir, you will recall that the MIC had acquired the Mon Trésor Smart City for Rs4.45 billion from taxpayers money, a property development project in the South which was probably found not to be profitable and which was bailed out by the MIC.

Now, I see that the *Morcellement* Act will be amended at clause 52, where the MIC will be exempted from payment of *morcellement* fees. So, is it the case that now the MIC is going to be a promoter of that Smart City project? So, as I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, these amendments do not, unfortunately, satisfy wholly the recommendations of the IMF, in as much as the MIC is still being controlled by the Bank of Mauritius. Neither has the remaining balance which stands at 30 billion been transferred back to Bank of Mauritius, nor has Government taken control of the MIC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me very shortly refer to the amendments to the Public Debt Management Act. Clause 67 which seeks to amend the Public Debt Management Act to reintroduce a debt ceiling, but this time not at 60% to GDP, as it used to be prior to the last amendment, the debt ceiling has been raised to 80% to GDP. Now, true it is that the IMF has recommended that given the fact that the economy is exiting the pandemic, a new medium-term debt anchor could be set at 80% to GDP. However, to say that our public sector debt as a percentage to GDP stands at 79% and is within the debt anchor is an illusion. This is because our debt to GDP ratio is based on an inflated GDP, but in nominal terms, the debt has increased significantly. As said by the Leader of the Opposition earlier on, our debt in nominal terms has doubled since 2014.

On 27 June 2023, Mr Speaker, Sir, I had addressed a PQ to the Minister of Finance, PQ B/856. I asked him to provide details on the domestic and foreign debts contracted by Government since 2015, including details about the interests and service charges, especially the impact of the depreciation of the rupee on the foreign loans. I was told and I quote, Mr Speaker, Sir – because sometimes, it is good to remind the Ministers what they have said – the Minister said –

« M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question. Je lui explique que les informations actuellement sont en cours de compilation et seront très prochainement présentées et déposées à l'Assemblée. »

You will not be surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir. As at today, I am still waiting for the compilation of the debt to be tabled by the Minister in the Library.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me very briefly go to the amendments with respect to the Economic Development Board Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, the EDB, unfortunately, I have to say, has lamentably failed in its mission over the past few years to bring in productive foreign investment despite the resources that are being given to them, despite the amendments to the law that are being proposed, and despite the creation of new schemes. I recently asked a PQ B/1015 last week on the offices of the EDB situated abroad in relation to the expenses and the FDI generated for calendar year 2022. The Minister of Finance was not here, the question was answered by hon. Bholah.

According to the answer provided by the EDB itself, the total annual expenses for the officers in Japan, Singapore and Kenya amounted to approximately Rs14 m. Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised. The amount of FDI generated by these three offices was zero. I think the hon. Minister should decide whether we are going to continue wasting public funds or close down some of these inefficient offices.

I also asked PQ B/122 last year with regard to the costs incurred by the EDB during the Dubai Expo. I was told Rs43.9 m. was spent, excluding expenses for ministerial delegations. The Minister of Finance said in his reply with regard to investment in the pipeline, and I quote again –

« J'ai également été informé par l'EDB que 18 pistes importantes ont été générées dans le secteur bancaire, l'hôtellerie et l'immobilier, les ports francs et la logistique et les TIC. 8 projets sont déjà dans le pipeline de l'EDB pour s'installer à Maurice ou s'approvisionner à Maurice avec un montant d'investissement estimé à R 4,5 milliards. »

Where are we with the 8 projects, hon. Minister? Where is the *R 4,5 milliards d'investissement* ? From the figures provided by the EDB, from the whole of the UAE, we have obtained FDI amounting to *R 2,1 milliards*, not even half the amount that was forecast by the hon. Minister.

Even worse, according to the Press release of the Bank of Mauritius on gross direct investment flows, excluding global business sector, the total FDI for 2022 was approximately 27 billion, out of which 15 billion came from real estate which are non-productive investments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the amendment to facilitate the sale of non-strategic assets, that is, we are talking about the MauBank and the NIC. On 09 May 2023, I asked the hon. Minister of Finance in PQ B/451 where matters stand with regard to the sale of those non-strategic assets. You will not be surprised again, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this question, despite not having been reached, was not withdrawn from the Order Paper, has remained unanswered since 09 May 2023. But what is more important is that this measure was announced in the previous Budget 2022-2023 and was supposed to bring in *R 22 milliards* to reduce our debt deficit and consequently, reduce our debt to GDP ratio. But again, nothing concrete has come out of this measure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this brings me to the amendments to the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act. Clause 17 seeks to amend the Act to cater for the transfer of contribution under the price structure in respect to contribution to the construction of storage facilities for petroleum products, which have already been constructed years back, but we are still paying 65 cents per litre for Mogas and 50 cents for Gasoil, and contribution to the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund; COVID is behind, but we are still contributing R1 per litre, for those contributions to be transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account for year 2020 and 2021 rather than to the MRA.

Well this, I suppose, is a one-off measure to cover for the deficit in the Price Stabilisation Account. Maybe the Minister can tell us the amount that these two contributions have generated. But these amendments, Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, fall short of the expectations of the consumers, because I had addressed a PQ to the hon. Minister of Commerce, PQ B/520, where the Minister stated that over 10 billion were collected from receipt of VAT, excise duties and other contributions on Mogas and Gasoil. He also stated, and I quote –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Member, these are decisions for the Government to take, but let me inform the House, I was apprised that following a meeting chaired by the hon. Prime Minister, that is, in January 2023, it

was agreed that the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011 would be reviewed as it has been subject to numerous amendments over the years. It was also agreed that the functioning of the Petroleum Pricing Committee would also be reviewed. In this context, a technical committee has been set up comprising of members from my Ministry, the State Trading Corporation, the Attorney General's Office, and the Ministry of Finance. Discussions are ongoing and further inputs on proposals are being awaited (...)"

Unfortunately, we were waiting for major amendments to the law and the population also is being kept waiting for a complete reform of the Petroleum Pricing Committee, rather than these one-off measures that are being proposed, such as the reduction of Rs5 per litre on Mogas or a one-off transfer of contribution to the Price Stabilisation Account.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are some amendments that I do welcome. The amendments to the Sale of Immovable Property Act – I welcome these amendments, especially in the present context with the increasing rate of interest, where people are finding it difficult to reimburse their loans. The amendments seek to do away with the penalty interest on outstanding amount under a loan or credit agreement with an individual so that a lender can only recover the capital and interest following a seizure of the immovable property of an individual debtor and also the fixing of the *mise à prix* at not less than 90% of the open market value of the property. However, I see that it is being provided that the open market value shall be determined by an independent qualified valuer but appointed by the seizing creditor. Now, in order to ensure that the *mise à prix* does really reflect the market price, maybe it would have been advisable to provide for the possibility of the debtor to contest the valuation of the seizing creditor and provide for a counter valuation if need be.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I see that the Human Resource Development Act is being amended to now reduce the levy for training from 1% to 0.75% and to increase the contribution for Workfare Programme Fund from 0.5% to 0.75%. It seems that the funds in the Workfare Programme, which is used to pay transition benefit to workers who have been laid off, has depleted substantially and this is why there is an urgent need to replenish the account. This gives us an idea on the number of workers that have lost their jobs and who are on Workfare Programme given their economic situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I end, I will talk very briefly on the amendments that are being brought to the Civil Status Act and lastly the amendment to the National Identity Card Act. Clause 13 seeks to amend section 12 of the Civil Status Act to extend the time period for the declaration of birth of a child from 45 days to 60 days. I welcome this extension of the period for declaration of birth. However section 17B is being amended to

allow the Registrar of the Civil Status to share information to an agency approved by the Minister to whom responsibility for the subject of civil status matters is assigned, that is, the Prime Minister and an agency other than a public sector agency. So, the Prime Minister may ask the Registrar to share information which are data protected under the law on an individual other than a minor to a private agency and without the consent of that individual. And Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Data Protection Act, true it is that there are exceptions that may allow the Prime Minister to share personal data of an individual for the purposes of national, but only for limited purposes, for national security, for defence or public security which are necessary and proportionate in a democratic society and this without the consent of the individual. However to extend disclosure of personal data to any agency, especially private agencies, without the consent of the individual is questionable in a democratic society. So, maybe later on, in his summing up, we can be enlightened by the hon. Minister on this amendment and to which agency we are referring to because as I have said, it concerns the right to privacy of an individual.

On the same note before I conclude, under clause 55, the National Identity Card Act is being amended to provide for a National Identity Unit at the level of the Prime Minister's Office that shall have access to the personal data of all citizens. These personal data were previously being held by the Registrar of the Civil Status Office and I don't see why a new office should be created at the level of the Prime Minister's Office to store these data. I am putting the question; I hope we get an explanation. More importantly, those personal data would be accessible to an independent agency for auditing purposes. Again raising issues with regard to the protection of personal data of private citizens and why at this time when the general elections are...

An hon. Member: *Derier laporte!*

Mr Ramful: ... *derier laporte?* Why at this time we are coming up with a new National Identity Card? Getting the private data of people which will cost billions of public money.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have finished. These would be my observations on the Finance Bill.

An hon. Member: Bravo!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Callichurn!

(7.24 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir,

the Bill we are debating today is of utmost importance for the implementation of measures announced in Budget 2023-2024 and I would like to thank you for allowing me to share my views on certain provisions relating to my Ministry contained therein.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the population may have noticed by now, our Government is always geared towards improving conditions of employment of the workers of this country. Since I took office as Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training in 2014, I have always made it a must to constantly reinforce the protection of rights of workers in respect of their remuneration, conditions of employment and job security.

The roadmap of our Government is clear. We want to reinforce the rights of workers and guarantee them a better equilibrium between work and family. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have chosen to concentrate my intervention on the main amendments and shall therefore not dwell on the technical amendments which do not alter the substance of the provision concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will first of all come to the amendment being brought to the Employment Relations Act. I shall also refer to some specific amendments pertaining to the Workers' Rights Act which are directly related to these amendments. In 2022, I introduced an amendment to the Employment Relations Act and to the Workers' Rights Act to provide for the reinstatement of workers in cases of termination of employment other than termination for economic reasons. As the law stands, claims for reinstatement may be contested at the Employment Relations Tribunal on the ground that the definition of labour dispute and reinstatement is too restrictive and may be limited to cases of suspension only. I am, therefore, bringing the following amendments to address this issue and clarify the definition of labour dispute and that of reinstatement.

Section 2 is being amended –

- (a) to include in the definition of labour dispute a referral made by the Supervising Officer of my Ministry to the Employment, Relation Tribunal where a claim for reinstatement registered by a worker under section 69A of the Workers' Rights Act is considered to be *bona fide*, and
- (b) to review the definition of reinstatement in section 69A of the Workers' Rights Act to provide for a worker to be reinstated in the circumstances where his employment was terminated for reasons other than reduction of workforce and closure of enterprises.

Furthermore with a view not to impede on the operation of enterprises and for a timely processing of cases, the following amendments are being brought to the Workers' Rights Act and the Employment Relations Act –

- (a) in section 69A of the Workers' Rights Act to set a timeframe –
 - (i) of 15 days for a worker to register a claim for a reinstatement at my Ministry, and
 - (ii) of 30 days for my Ministry to make referral to the tribunal after ascertaining that the claim is *bona fide*.
- (b) in section 70A of the Employment Relations Act, the time frame for the Tribunal to dispose of a case has been brought from 90 to 60 days.

Finally, so as not to penalise workers whose cases are still pending at the Tribunal or at the Ministry, a transition period has been introduced in section 108 of the Employment Relations Act to the effect that the labour disputes related to termination of employment, which are still pending at the Tribunal before 01 July 2023, shall be deemed to have been referred on 01 July 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2019, the Employment Relations Act was amended to provide for the determination of wages, in the private sector, to be made on an occupational basis. The objective of this reform was to –

- (a) provide for a single rate of remuneration for one occupation;
- (b) align similar occupations with similar level of responsibilities for a fair and equitable remuneration;
- (c) facilitate collective bargaining, and
- (d) facilitate labour mobility.

This exercise, however, is very complex and would cut across all different sectors of the economy. It has therefore been considered appropriate to appoint a consultant to carry out this exercise. Therefore, a provision has been made to that effect in the new section, that is, 91A of the Employment Relations Act.

It has also been observed that many graduates who join employment for the first time and who perform work in accordance to their qualifications are being underpaid. I am, therefore, extending the scope of the reform by providing in section 91 for the consultant to work on a separate wage grid for degree holders who are employed on the basis of their qualifications. This measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, will create conditions for a

fairer distribution of wages and will encourage our young professionals to put their competencies at the service of the country.

To give effect to these amendments, it has been deemed appropriate –

- (a) to distinguish in section 2 between a Remuneration Regulations which would be related to specific conditions of employment only and Wages Regulations which would provide for job classification and their corresponding salary scale, and it will also
- (b) provide for the National Remuneration Board to take, as baseline, wages set in the new Wages Regulations to carry out the next review in 5 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is now a reality that our economy is more and more dependent on migrant workers. Just as any Mauritian worker, a migrant worker is entitled to join or form part of a trade union. The existing anomaly sees their membership being still alive whilst they have already returned back to their country of origin after expiry of their contracts. This makes the computation for determining the strength of membership of the trade unions inaccurate.

The amendment to section 13 is to ensure that the strength of a trade union will henceforth be computed only upon the number of non-citizen workers, holding a valid work permit and who have renewed their membership on 31 December during their period of employment.

Now, I turn to the amendment being brought to the Human Resource Development Act, clause 36 is amending the Human Resource Development Act at section 18 to reinforce the sustainability of the Workfare Programme Fund (WPF). It is to be noted that the Workfare Programme provides transition unemployment benefits and for payment of any remuneration due to cases of insolvency.

In this respect, the contribution rate of levy remitted to the Workfare Programme is being brought to 0.75%, for the period 01 July 2023 to 30 June 2025. Subsequently, the Seventh Schedule of the Workers' Rights Act is being amended to align the share of the levy to be allocated to the Workfare Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the National Employment Act. Section 10 is being amended so that henceforth any registered job seeker who declines a job offer or training offer two times successively within a period of one year shall not benefit from the services offered by the Department for a period of one year from the date of the last offer.

This amendment will allow the Ministry to get real time, reliable information on the number of registered workers, jobseekers who are willing to follow training and take up employment. It will also allow the National Employment Department to fully focus on such jobseeker and to accompany them until they find a suitable and productive employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act is also being amended at section 4 to make it mandatory for applications for work permit to be made on the National Electronic Licensing System and to introduce a “silence is consent” principle to put an obligation on the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training to determine applications for work permit within a period of 30 days as from the date of receipt of the complete application.

This amendment aims at further streamlining the work permit process and thus expedites the recruitment of the required workforce in Mauritius and alleviates the problem of acute labour shortage in different sectors of the economy.

I now refer to the health and safety issues. Amendment is being brought to section 6 of the Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022 at clause 61 to –

- (a) further improve safety and health at the workplace by promoting enhanced consultation and cooperation between employers and employees regarding the risk assessment process;
- (b) create a safety and health collaboration committee to enable the employer and employees to discuss safety and health issues at the place of work where the employer employs 5 or more employees but less than 50.

Mr Speaker, Sir, presently there are about 10,500 associations registered under the Registration of Associations Act. We have observed that sometimes there are excessive delays in the holding of elections. Hence, section 25 of the Registration of Associations Act and its corresponding Schedule are being amended to provide for the frequency for the election of officers to be conducted at least once every five years. The term of office of officers responsible for managing Associations will therefore not exceed five years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the world of work is subject to constant change and the new mode of work is requiring more flexible work arrangements. Hence, in order to adapt to these changes, we are formalising part-time work by providing explicitly in section 22 that an employer may employ a worker on a part-time basis and by defining, in section 2, part-time work as being work performed for less than the normal stipulated hours.

You will recall that one of the main components of the Government Vision 2030 was to promote the concept of work, live and play. This concept is in line with ILO recommendations for the right balance between family and work. A study by the ILO in 2022 has highlighted the multiple benefits. This new approach of work has produced both for workers and employers.

On the other hand, it is associated with increased job satisfaction and greater feeling of job security among those workers. Evidence shows that workers with greater flexibility in hours of work result in positive business outcome including improved productivity. There is presently an emerging trend worldwide towards a 4-days' work week. For example, countries like the UK, Belgium, Iceland, Portugal, Canada have already adopted it. We deem it important for Mauritius to follow suit because of its positive outcomes. We are thus introducing the same concept at section 21.

With this amendment, subject to its operational requirements, an employer will be able, with the consent of the worker, require the latter to complete his normal weekly working hours in 4 days. A worker may also choose to work on a new regime with the approval of his employer. It is important to note that under this new regime, all rights and benefits of the workers shall be maintained.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government is coming with the following amendments to increase the purchasing power of workers. In section 33A, the payment of special allowance to be applicable to local government workers, public officers, workers of statutory bodies and workers whose terms and conditions are governed by the PRB. The Workers' Rights (Payment of Special Allowance) Regulations is also being amended to bring the monthly revenue to Rs13,000. This amount will be topped up so that both the private and public sector workers will be guaranteed a minimum monthly revenue of Rs15,000 as from 01 July 2023.

The following amendments are also being brought to specific sections to remove any ambiguity in the interpretation of the computation of overtime payment –

- (a) in Section 25 to provide that hourly rate be computed on the basis of 195 hours in a month;
- (b) in Section 28 to provide that the increase of 5% payable on the basic wages of a part-time worker be aligned to the rate of 10% specified in the National Minimum Wage Regulations, and
- (c) in Section 24 to clarify that the absence in relation to an authorised leave be deemed to be attendance at work for the purpose of overtime payment.

Moreover, following representations received by female workers, I am bringing an amendment in Section 27 to provide that payment of their remuneration be credited in their individual bank account. This measure will give them the necessary autonomy to dispose of their remuneration because previously if they held a joint account with their spouse, they did not have sole control over their dues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the extreme weather conditions resulting from climate changes have raised concern of all stakeholders regarding conditions of work and security of workers. I am, therefore, proposing the following amendments in section 32 at clause 90 through this Bill to provide that –

- (a) as is the case for cyclone warnings, a worker be paid his normal remuneration where he is required to remain indoors during the period a safety bulletin is in force, and
- (b) an employer who does not have an adequate insurance cover for workers who would be working during these periods, be required to take a mandatory insurance policy to cover these workers in cases of injury, disease or death arising out or in the course of their employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some specific sections are being amended with a view to reconcile work with family obligations –

- (a) in Section 45, to provide that a worker may opt for his untaken annual leave be accumulated instead of being refunded;
- (b) in Section 47A to provide that a worker may avail of –
 - (i) his leaves entitlement to care for his child with health care related issues, and
 - (ii) a maximum of 10 days of his leave entitlement to care for his parents and grandparents with health care related issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the critics of the Leader of the Opposition on the leave granted to workers to take care of their parents or grandparents, I wish to draw his attention to the new section, that is, section 47A (2) paragraph (e) where provision has been made for an employer before approving the application of leave of a worker request any information from the worker, including whether the parent or grandparent is under his or her direct care. In any event, Mr Speaker, Sir, the 10 days leave will be deducted from the worker's leave entitlement, that is, from his annual, sick, vacation leave or any leave

that he or she is entitled according to the provision of the Workers' Rights Act. So, if there is any abuse on part of the worker it would be to his or her detriment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, again, for entitlement of these leaves, a worker shall submit the birth certificate and medical certificate of a child like I have just explained.

- (c) in Section 52 to provide that in addition to the 3 weeks' leave, a female worker who suffers a miscarriage, be granted another 5 days' leave on full pay;
- (d) in the new Section 52A, to provide that an employer having more than 250 workers provide, free of charge, childcare facilities to workers having a child aged 3 years old, on or outside the premises of the workplace.

Following the remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I inform the House today that a guideline will be worked out in consultation with all stakeholders for the proper implementation of this measure.

- (e) In Section 53, to clarify that where a male worker or his spouse has adopted a child aged less than 12 months, the male worker be also entitled to the paternity leave of 5 working days, that is, with a view to ensure the same treatment to the father of child.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an amendment is being brought to Section 64 to ensure that workers have a fair hearing in a Disciplinary Committee by providing that oral hearing be mandatory even in circumstances where a worker has been requested to give his explanations in writing.

Another amendment is being brought to this section to clarify that an employer shall make available for inspection such information or documents relevant to a charge levelled against him/her, which the employer intends to adduce as evidence in the course of the hearing, when the worker makes such a request.

As regards to the amendment concerning the Redundancy Board, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is actually a legal vacuum as the Redundancy Board can make orders only in cases of unjustified termination. Section 72 is, therefore, being amended to also empower the Board to make orders in cases of justified termination of employment. I am also amending section 75 to grant the board a more reasonable time to complete its proceedings by increasing the time frame from 30 days to 60 days.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been observed as rightly pointed out by the hon. Ramful who spoke before me that laid-off workers are more and more making an abuse of the

Workfare Programme. So, it is not true to say that they are making abuse. It is not true to say that there are more and more workers benefitting from the Workfare Programme.

With a view to controlling the abuse, Mr Speaker, Sir, and to better adjust demand to supply of labour, section 84 is being amended to provide that a worker who refuses two offers of employment, instead of three presently, be not entitled to the payment of the Transition Unemployment Benefit.

In Section 90, amendments are being brought to –

- (i) facilitate the conversion rate of contribution made to a private pension scheme to the PRGF rate by providing that the amount of the employer's monthly contribution is not less than the amount of the employer's monthly contribution if based on the PRGF rate.
- (ii) ease the administrative process by providing the administrator of the pension scheme makes a declaration to the FSC to the effect that every 12 months as from 01 July 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an employer will also be required to make a return to the MRA and to the administrator specifying the amount of gratuity paid on the retirement of a worker for his past services to avoid double payment in the computation of retirement benefit under the PRGF.

In section 95A, to provide for an employer who sponsors a worker in a private pension scheme to pay to the MRA, the PRGF contributions for the period the worker was not covered by the private pension scheme so as to ensure that the worker is not penalised.

In section 98 to also provide that the retirement benefit be payable as from the retiring age when an enterprise ceases its activities on ground of insolvency.

In section 109, to provide that where a worker has not been paid his retirement benefits by a private pension scheme sponsored by an employer, the employer be required to pay in lieu of retirement benefits, a lump-sum equivalent to the PRGF rate of 15 days' remuneration per year of service.

Finally, we are amending section 119 to classify the offence for failing to comply with a written notice, as a direct contravention, whereby there will be no obligation to put the charge on the employer, with a view to better defend the worker's interest in Court.

Mr Speaker, Sir, just two points before I end. It is with regard to the amendment concerning the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection. We are amending section 17 of the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act to make it compulsory for

traders with an annual turnover exceeding Rs50 m. to submit any information in relation to commodities being sold in their outlets, including the retail prices of such commodities. This amendment has been proposed to further improve the mobile application 'MOPRI' because previously it was not mandatory and retailers, commerce were very reluctant to provide such information. The amendment will undeniably be in the interest and protection of consumers since they are called to make an important decision before purchasing any goods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one last point which was raised by hon. Ramful concerning the price of Mogas. I wish to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, this measure to give a decrease in the price Mogas was important because actually the account of Mogas is positive by Rs275 m.; we could not give a decrease in the price of Gasoil because the Price Stabilisation Account for that particular product is in deficit, that is, as at January 2023, it was in deficit of Rs3.9 billion, and the deficit has further been increased by Rs519 m. since January 2023.

That is it, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am done. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 7.55 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.00 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! MP Uteem!

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):
Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Bill amends not less than 90 Acts of Parliament and is 218 pages long. You will appreciate that it is not possible in half an hour to cover all 90 pieces of legislation. The hon. Collendavelloo spent 20 minutes on only one of the proposed amendments, but it was a very good speech because at least, for once, he did a speech which was not applauded by the Government.

Mr Dhunoo: *Non, ti* applauded.

Mr Uteem: Except for hon. Dhunoo. Yes, because he was saying the truth. The truth is they are amending a law to shift the balance of power from elected members of local government, Municipal Councillors, to people who are appointed by the Minister, and there is a different concept of regional democracy. But, you see, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the problem. When you have 90 pieces of legislation lumped together in the Finance Bill, a lot of very important Bills making important changes go unnoticed. So, I am glad

that the hon. Member, hon. Collendavelloo, did point out the shortcoming, what is being done by amending the Local Government Act.

Various speakers before me mentioned the proposed amendment to the Bank of Mauritius Act. It came as a surprise to us because this was not announced in the Budget, it was not in the Annex and even when the hon. Minister of Finance did his Second Reading speech, he did not delve on it. He did not mention why the law was being changed. Now, the amendment to the Bank of Mauritius Act does two things. First, it prevents the Government from using official reserves and invests it in companies. Secondly, it prevents the Government from using the Special Reserve Fund of the Bank of Mauritius. Both these provisions have been used in the past by this Government, first to get Rs18 billion, then Rs60 billion out of Special Reserve Fund and the MIC obtained 2 billion dollars, Rs80 billion.

These provisions had been criticised by the IMF. The IMF, in its report, Staff Report for the 2022 Article IV Consultation, had already recommended to Government to amend the Bank of Mauritius Act to reverse this provision which was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, the big question that remains – and I hope the hon. Minister of Finance will tell us in his summing-up about what will happen to MIC. Now that the law is being amended, that you cannot use official reserves of the Bank of Mauritius to invest in companies such as MIC, what will happen to MIC? This is very important because a few weeks ago, when the question was asked to him, the hon. Minister of Finance said that he does not share the same point of view of the IMF as far as the shareholding in MIC is concerned. So, I will wait for him to state whether he has changed his mind because may I remind the House what the IMF said, and I quote –

“The MIC can either be taken over by the government or folded into the Development Bank of Mauritius. To finance the takeover, the government could raise liquidity from the market and/or deploy resources accumulated in government deposits (...) Such a step would also alleviate excess domestic liquidity.”

So, IMF has already told the Government how to get rid of the shareholding of the Bank of Mauritius in MIC.

Another measure in this Bill which was not really discussed during the Budget Speech is the amendment to the Public Debt Management Act. Hon. Members will recall that back in 2020 when there was the COVID-19 pandemic, the law was amended to remove all ceiling on public debt. Previously, the law provided that the ratio of public debt to GDP should be 65% maximum, and there was a legal requirement, a statutory requirement, for Government to bring down that public debt ratio to 60% of GDP by 2021.

So, that was 60% of GDP. The proposed amendment puts the ceiling of 80% of GDP. This is in line with what the IMF has recommended.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am disappointed that there are other recommendations made by the IMF to limit debt borrowing to ensure fiscal discipline, but this is not in the Bill. For example, the IMF recommended, and I quote –

“To reduce debt towards the proposed anchor, an operational rule could be adopted consisting of a ceiling for the overall borrowing requirement of 3 percent of GDP starting in FY2022/23.”

So, IMF said, not only should you have a ceiling, you cannot have public debt exceeding 80% of GDP, but it also said that you have to bring measures to limit your borrowing to 3% so there will be a limit on budgetary deficit. Unfortunately, this Bill does not go as far as putting this ceiling on budget deficit.

I will now go briefly through some of the provisions of the Act. I will do it by order in which they appear on the Bill. First of all, the Companies Act. One of the proposed amendments to the Companies Act is that when there is a last Director remaining and that last Director resigns, there is an obligation for shareholders to call a shareholders meeting for the purpose of appointing a new Director. Now, what happens if the shareholders do not call the meeting? What happens if the meeting is not held? The proposed amendment now states that the Registrar of Companies can remove the company from the Register. With all due respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think this is a draconian measure and is certainly something which may adversely affect global business companies and I will explain why.

Very often when shareholders are unable to appoint a Director, this is because there is a shareholders dispute. So, they cannot hold board meeting, they cannot hold shareholders meeting, they are unable to appoint the Director and many of these foreign companies have subsidiaries. So, if the Registrar of Companies were to remove the company, then the asset of that company would be vested either in the Registrar of Companies or in the curator of vacant estate, and that is a problem because just imagine, you have a Mauritian company which holds shares in an Indian company and overnight this Indian company realises that its shareholder now is a curator of vacant estate. How would they be able to operate?

So, my humble suggestion would have been that the law be amended if there is such a stalemate and the last remaining Director has resigned, the law should be amended to provide that any shareholder, any interested party or even the Registrar of Companies

could go to court and get the court to appoint a local Director in Mauritius. That would have solved the matter, rather than give the power to the Registrar of Companies just to remove the company from the Registrar of Companies.

The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act is being amended to allow State Trading Corporation to transfer the cumulative balance in respect of certain contribution collected from the sale of petroleum products to be transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account. Now, hon. Members know that the price of petroleum products consists of many components. In addition to the price that at which STC purchases the petroleum products, there are a number of taxes and contributions that are added. Two specific contributions, the contribution to the construction of storage facilities for petroleum products and the contribution to COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, are concerned by the proposed amendment. Now, what the proposed amendment is saying is that this 60 cent or 50 cent on each litre of petrol and Gasoil that was supposed to be used to construct storage facilities and this Rs1 which was supposedly for COVID-19 Solidarity Fund.

Now, this money will be transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account. In other words, what this amendment is effectively saying is that the money taken from consumers who have been buying petrol and diesel for COVID-19 Solidarity Fund will not be used by COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to help the victims of COVID-19. The money that has been taken from consumer to construct storage facilities will not be used for storage facilities. This money will be transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account.

But, what is worse, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that in an answer to a PQ, the hon. Minister of Commerce had already stated that the transfer has already been effected. So, even before the law was amended to provide for the STC, to give the right to the STC to transfer funds to the Price Stabilisation Account, this had already occurred. Something that was not authorised by law, something illegal has already been done.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, instead of backdating transfers, what we really needed in this Bill is to review the mode of calculation of the price of petroleum products. We should get rid of unnecessary contribution. We have just increased price of diesel and petrol, and we should certainly got rid of the provision which allow STC not to reduce price of petroleum products if there is a deficit in the Price Stabilisation Account.

So, I will move to the amendment to the Dangerous Drugs Act. This is a good measure. The pharmacies are now required to keep a drug register to record every transaction of dangerous drugs. This is in line with the recommendations of the Lam Shang Leen Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking and Related Issues. The pharmacist already has an obligation to keep a drug register today, but it is done manually.

What the proposed amendment does is to have the drug register in an electronic format, which is good, which is all welcome. But once this data has been computed, the question remains: who will have access to that drug register and for what purpose? Because here, we are dealing with very sensitive information and private data. We are talking about names, identity of consumers, of patients who have been prescribed drugs. So, the last thing we want to do is for victims to be stigmatised. There are privacy and data protection issues.

Now, who can have access to these data? According to the proposed amendment, 'the Permanent Secretary' – we don't have any problem with that –, a 'Custom Officer acting upon the written authority of the Permanent Secretary' – this also is fine –, but the third category of people is 'any public officer.' Now, any public officer, when we are talking about secret information, personal sensitive data, I would have hoped that this information could only be requested by a police officer acting upon written authority of a police officer holding a rank not less than a Superintendent of Police. So, at least, we will have a senior officer who would authorise a public officer to go and have access to this drug register. That would be a way to protect the sensitive personal data coming into public and the press.

Next, the Economic Development Board Act is being amended to extend the Premium Investor Scheme to investors who will acquire non-strategic assets of the Government. I am not going to repeat what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said except that we are also very much concerned that the Minister of Finance is being given blanket power to grant rebates, tax exemptions and other facilities to investors acquiring non-financial assets. And we are talking about big money here. We are talking about Casino of Mauritius, about former BAI assets such as Apollo Hospital, National Insurance Company, the Maubank, worth billions of rupees.

Like my friend, hon. Ramful stated, last year in the budget speech, the hon. Minister of Finance announced that he was expecting Rs20 billion from the sale of these sovereign assets. So, all these are very valuable assets and I am very disappointed that instead of legislating to ensure that we get value for money, that we get a fair price for these assets, Government wants us to give blanket powers to the Minister to have a free hand to negotiate what other term he wishes. This is certainly not good governance, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Gaming Regulatory Authority Act is being amended and there is a new section 91A that is being introduced to prohibit a person physically present in Mauritius from engaging in interacting gambling outside of Mauritius. We all remember, Mr Speaker, Sir,

the Bet 365 Saga which led to the resignation of the former Attorney General back in 2017 for having certified that there was no legal impediment for a gentleman lawfully to receive any stake due to him from Bet 365. So, now with this proposed amendment, it is clear that it is illegal. It is illegal for a person in Mauritius to go online, to go on bet 365 or any other interacting gaming run outside of Mauritius, the law is now being amended to make it a criminal offence. A person who contravenes that offence can have up to Rs100,000 of fine and six months of imprisonment.

The proposed amendment will also make it an offence for any person who facilitates the placing of a bet in a foreign jurisdiction. Now, we all watch sports events on TV, Mr Speaker, Sir. For all of us, we can't help noticing that during half-time, very often, there are adverts. They are the adverts that incite to bet outside of Mauritius. Many times, you know they put the name of the website that you have to go to do an online betting. Now, this also will be caught by this act.

So, even those TV channels who broadcast international sports events between the recess or the break, there is an advert calling on people to bet that outside Mauritius, that also will become a criminal offence. I am disappointed that the hon. Minister of Finance did not find it necessary to explain to the House the rationale for such a prohibition, neither in the Budget Speech nor in the Annex to the Budget Speech, and still less in the Explanatory Note that has been circulated to us. So, is this measure meant to protect local bookmakers? Is it meant to protect the local online gaming operators from foreign competition?

We all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, who will benefit the most from this amendment. When we have a Bill of 218 pages, it is very easy to slip in few amendments tailor-made to favour a few privileged ones, and very often, these measures go unnoticed. I will give you another example. The amendment to the Immigration Act – The Immigration Act is being amended to allow foreign senior citizens who have acquired a residential property under the Property Development Scheme related to social living to be eligible for a residence permit. To qualify, the purchase price must be at least \$200,000. So, if you have a foreigner who is at least 50 and he acquires immovable property in a Property Development Scheme relating to social living, as long as he pays at least \$200,000, roughly Rs9 m., he will be eligible to a residence permit. Now, if he was not a senior citizen, he would have had to fork out \$375,000, almost the double to be eligible to have a residence permit. The question that arises is : *pourquoi brader nos terres aux étrangers au moment où il est de plus en plus difficile pour un jeune couple d'acheter un logement décent ?*

And again here, just like for the GRA, I ask myself, is this proposed amendment tailor-made for any particular property developer? When we turn at section 93 (18) of the Bill at page 181, we see that this proposed amendment shall be deemed to have come into operation on 27 April 2019. So, we are today voting a loan, backdating a loan, to allow a foreigner who had acquired an immovable property under the Property Development Scheme for retired person as far back as 2019. So, who have constructed Real Property Development for old people in the past three years? So, this is what we have been told to do today in this 218 pages long Bill, we are asked to backdate to enable one property or more property developer to sell his property, to sell his houses to senior citizens for only \$200,000. Previously, he had to sell it for \$375,000 for him to be eligible for a residence permit and that's not all. That's not all!

Another measure tailor-made to benefit a selected few is the Income Tax Act. The Income Tax Act which is a very technical Act, which very few people who are not in the tax sector really understand because it is really very complex. The definition of "export of goods" is being amended to include sale of aviation fuel to airplane. What does this mean? It means that if you are in the business of selling aviation fuel to airplane, you would be deemed to be exporting goods and therefore, you will be taxed at the favourable rate of 3%. Not 15%, not 20% but only 3% on the profit you realise. Now, the consortium of oil companies which provide aviation refuelling services at SSR International Airport already makes hundreds of millions of rupees of profit. So, why should they be taxed only at 3% whereas, us common people, we are taxed up to 20%? So, the hon. Minister of Finance has a duty to the House, to the population, to inform us how much this proposed amendment is going to cost Government in terms of loss of tax revenue. And I hope he will have the decency to explain to those tax payers who will have to pay 20% tax, why he is drastically reducing income tax rate for companies selling aviation fuel to airline and enable them to pay only 3% income tax?

The next section that is being amended is section 66 of the Income Tax Act and this section which has been mentioned by Members from the Government side, is meant to allow deduction for companies who make donation to charities. So, at first sight, it seems to be a very laudable initiative but when we read the smaller prints, Mr Speaker, Sir, we find out that this measure is actually extremely discriminatory. So, it is section 66 of the Income Tax Act which is being amended. It is very discriminatory, first of all, because it applies only to companies. So, only if a company is making a donation, it is eligible to reduce three times the amount that he has donated up to Rs1 m. So, if he has donated

Rs300,000, he can claim as deduction Rs900,000. So, why is it limited to only companies and not individuals? So, that's the first discrimination!

Second discrimination: the donation must be made through electronic means. Why discriminate against those who want to make a cash payment or a payment by cheque? And we know that not all banks have electronic online banking facilities. So, why impose an additional burden on companies to make the payment electronically? So, if you want to favour payment to charities, you should get rid of electronic transfers. Anyone, whether it is by cash or cheque, should be entitled to the deduction.

Then the third discrimination, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that only three types of NGOs are eligible –

- (i) those who support persons with health issues and disabilities;
- (ii) those who protect or rehabilitate street children, and
- (iii) those who are involved in animal welfare protection.

What about the other NGOs? Are they less deserving? What about the NGOs, for example, who help battered women; who help the widows and orphans; who help alleviate poverty; who construct houses? Aren't they deserving charities? What about charities which help people in sport activities and other types of social work? Why are they not eligible to receive funding? Because clearly, if I am a company and I am going to have 300% deduction, if I pay to one of these three categories of NGO's, I am going to pay to these. I will be less inclined to pay to the other NGOs where I will have only 100% deduction. So, again I hope the hon. Minister of Finance will amend this section to remove the discrimination because it is a laudable initiative to encourage companies to pay to NGOs but all NGOs should benefit in the same way.

The hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity mentioned the amendment being brought to section 150F of the Income Tax Act. That is supposed to be a breakthrough. May I remind the House that this is the provision which allows triple deduction whenever a company has employed people with disabilities. Very laudable initiative! We are all in favour of this, but what the hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity failed to highlight is that there is a law, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act which already imposes, under section 13, a legal obligation on employer having a workforce of 35 or more workers to employ persons with disabilities representing 3% of their workforce. So, how many of these workers who are required by law to employ 3% of their staff, people with disabilities, how many are complying with this requirement? And what has the Ministry

done against those employers who are flouting the law and not employing people with disabilities?

The last amendment which I would like to comment on, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the proposed amendment relating to section 4 of the Meat Act. Section 4 of the Meat Act sets out the powers of the Mauritius Meat Authority. So, these powers are being amended to allow the Authority to import livestock for slaughter, resale or slaughter and resale. Before this amendment, the Mauritius Meat Authority could only purchase and import livestock for slaughter. So, the Mauritius Meat Authority did not have the power to import cattle and sell cattle. They could only import cattle, slaughter them and sell their meat. Yet, the hon. Vice Prime Minister has told the House that the Mauritius Meat Authority was going to import cattle for Qurbani.

The hon. Attorney General answered a PQ that I asked him and he confirmed that the General Manager of the Mauritius Meat Authority had gone to South Africa to look for cattle; that the meat authority has entered into an agreement with ship to take the cattle from South Africa to Mauritius; how could that be done? It is only now that we are amending the law; it is only now that we are giving the power to the Mauritius Meat Authority to import cattle and sell live cattle. It is a good thing that the General Manager has resigned, but I think the whole Board should be sacked.

Mr Speaker, Sir, such amateurism, engaging in activities not authorised by law, not just by the Mauritius Meat Authority but also by the State Trading Corporation; backdating legislations; favouring a selected few is, unfortunately, the hallmark of this Government and this Finance Bill is yet another illustration of this State capture mentality. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

(9.30 p.m.)

The Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. XI of 2023) comes as an important instrument to effectively implement Government policies during the course of this financial year and beyond. This Bill provides the legal framework for the implementation of some crucial policy measures pertaining to the early childhood care and education, secondary education, technical and higher education subsectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there has always been a powerful social demand for education because it has been seen as a social leveller, as a means of empowering a person in

shaping his life, improving the social status as well as being a source of personal growth and development. Today, education is free across both the schooling and the higher education subsectors and as from January 2024, the Government has decided that we will be closing the loop through the enactment of the policy of providing free pre-primary education.

It is now common knowledge, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it is during the early years of a child's life that a sound foundation is established for his future: emotional, physical and cognitive development. It is also that period of time that the trajectory, the contours of the learner's holistic development are defined. It remains therefore period that amply merits a strong investment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pre-primary education is dispensed by the State but also by private providers. The same applies to all the other subsectors of education. However, there has always been a missing dimension; the primary and secondary subsectors have been duly and freely catered for as has been the case recently for the tertiary subsector. The wheel now comes full circle through the introduction of free pre-primary education and that, Mr Speaker, Sir, has required the courage, the vision and the commitment of the Prime Minister to the cause of equitable education for all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the fact that we can boast of a gross enrolment rate of 102% at that level, there is unfortunately a wide diversity in the quality of the offer. Free pre-primary education will thus aim at ensuring that each and every child has access to the right pedagogies to achieve the readiness required to join the primary sector. The very basis of such a measure is of course to ensure that the pre-primary schools are adequately equipped and have the appropriate infrastructural facilities in place to provide a conducive environment for learning.

It is this Government's conviction that quality pre-primary education be affordable to all and should in no circumstances, be tied to financial means of the family. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is currently finalising the Grant-In-Aid formula that will come into force for the free pre-primary education scheme as from January 2024. The Early Childhood Care and Education Authority will be called to play a prominent role in the administration of the Grant-In-Aid scheme. In this regard, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Authority is organising meetings with the managers of private pre-primary schools and will be presenting to them the modalities of the Grant-In-Aid (GIA) Scheme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Finance Bill is bringing about a number of amendments to the ECCEA Act. I will not delve into all the provisions but I will highlight only some of the

salient ones. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Finance Bill is providing for the ECCEA Act to be amended to provide for the introduction of a new definition in subsection 2 of the Act for terms “pre-primary school” and “aided pre-primary school”. It is also providing for the inclusion in section 4 of a new object of the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority to enable it to ensure that pre-primary schools are managed in accordance with relevant laws, rules, guidelines, directives and standards. The introduction in section 5 of new paragraphs to include in the functions of the Authority, the operation of the Grant-In-Aid scheme, the payment of grants, the inspection and auditing of the accounts of the schools.

Further, Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments proposed also address governance issues by reviewing the composition of the Board in section 6 of the ECCEA Act to avoid any situation of conflict of interest. Furthermore, with a view to ascertain that issues and aspects of inclusive education related to that subsector are taken on Board, provision is being made for the representative of the Special Education Needs Authority to be included on the Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amendments at section 10(b) of the ECCEA Act aim at empowering the Authority to establish criteria and conditions for the payment of grants to the schools subject to them satisfying these criteria and also, for the payment of salaries in respect to the staff of the grant aided pre-primary schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the legislation will also entail a few consequential amendments to the Education Act. At section 3(2), two additional responsibilities are being entrusted to the Minister. These are –

- (i) the formulation and publication of policies and criteria for the registration of pre-primary schools, and
- (ii) the promotion and maintenance of high quality standards in these schools through the setting up of an appropriate quality assurance mechanism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these amendments are being made to ensure that the Grant-In-Aid system being put in place is adequate and caters for the needs of the sector.

Questions were raised, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the hon. Leader of the Opposition regarding the actual mechanism being put in place. Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned earlier, it is being worked out and it is being finalised. In fact, we are coming up with certain measures to ensure that all pre-primary schools have adequate means to provide to the students a conducive environment for learning and also to provide them with all the resources needed for them to be able to have within the school all educational resources

that are required in the subsector. Salaries for teachers and other personnel of the schools will be taken care of by the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amendments are also being brought in the secondary subsector. The education sector is allocated a budget of Rs19.7 billion. It is incumbent upon my Ministry to ensure accountability for every penny spent. Accountability, accordingly, has to be accompanied by transparency, the two fundamental pillars of good governance. It is in this context, Mr Speaker, Sir, that sections 11, 12 and 13 of the Education Act are being amended. With regard to section 11A, subsection (2) is being repealed such that it will no longer be possible for a person to cumulate both the functions of Manager and Rector of a secondary school. It is only legitimate to have a clear separation of duties and responsibilities. Clarity is ensured through the demarcation of lines of responsibility of each party.

At section 12, provision is being made for the issue of a Certificate of Registration to a Manager on an annual and renewable basis. As for the amendment to section 30, the emphasis is on additional conditionality relating to the appointment of a fit and proper person as a Manager of the private secondary school. It is unfortunate, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in a number of cases, industrial disputes are not resolved and lie dormant due to the inability or unwillingness of the Manager concerned to thrash them out. This has led to some unbearable situations for staff members in certain schools. Mr Speaker, Sir, this amendment will help to improve the state of affair.

The Finance Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, also make amendments through Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) Act. Allow me to come to this other important element of the Bill with respect to the MIE Act. The Chairperson of the MIE Council, Mr Speaker, Sir, is appointed by the Prime Minister under section 10(3) (a) of the MIE Act. The MIE Act (1973) also provides for its Council to include, *inter alia*, the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission. This is an anomalous situation, Mr Speaker, Sir, for it is not deemed proper for the Chairperson of a constitutional body appointed by the President after consultations with the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition to sit as an ordinary member of the Council. Hence, the amendment to the legislation will no longer require the Chairperson of the PSC to be part of the MIE Council.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, a representative of the Special Education Needs Authority has been included as a member of the MIE Academic Board. This is in keeping with the principles of equity and inclusion that my Ministry honestly promotes. This will guarantee that the needs of students with special needs and disabilities are well

catered for. To these ends, sections 10 and 11 of the MIE Act have been amended accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to come to another amendment of the Education Act in which we all have a keen interest, that of recognition of the efforts that our learners put in. The High School Certificate Pro is a qualification equivalent to the HSC. It aims at establishing bridges between the school and the world of work. Along with their academic studies, students undergo structured work placements to develop their employability skills, making them better prepared for the world of work. Section 33 of the Education Act concerns the inclusion of two scholarships for the most meritorious boy and girl from the HSC Pro stream.

I will now come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the Mauritius Qualification Authority Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, the technical and vocational education and training sector is also undergoing considerable development. As is the case for the tertiary education sector where the High Education Commission is working towards making the high education system more responsive, resilient and relevant to the need of society, so is it for the TVET sector. We also want the learners embarking on TVET programmes to be provided with similar life chances and opportunities.

Allow me to explain, Mr Speaker, Sir. The term ‘micro-credential’ has become part and parcel of the language of learning. A micro-credential is a form of certification of an individual’s discreet learning and achievements. This, as we all know, is also referred to as ‘bite-sized learning’ which is a small volume competency acquired through life experience, work or study. These, when combined, can provide credits towards formal qualifications.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MQA Act is being amended to include at section 2 the definition of the term National Credit Value and Transfer System, and it is stated that it will have the same meaning as in the High Education Act. In section 5 of the legislation, amendments have been brought so as to empower the Qualification Authority to have two new functions, namely –

- (i) the approval and recognition of micro-credentials in the VTET sector, and
- (ii) the monitoring of the implementation of the National Value and Transfer System in the sector to facilitate mobility of employees and also lifelong learning.

Amendments to section 18 enable the board to make regulations on matters related to recognition and equivalence of qualification and the implementation of the National Credit Value and Transfer Systems in the sector on the National Qualifications Framework.

With these amendments to the MQA Act, the board is being empowered to recognise the non-formal and informal learning and help widen access to formal education system. It will help employer identify candidates who have the fit for purpose set of skills. Furthermore, it will facilitate the transition of employees from one workplace to another.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been encouraging the uptake of continuous professional development as well as lifelong learning processes that are conducive to capacity building and development. The MQA has made major inroads in recognition of prior learning, and we intend to build on that. I wish to add here, that in May this year, the Special Education Needs Authority in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning enrolled 459 experienced SEN learned teachers in six stackable modules provided the Commonwealth of Learning through the Skilled for Work Programme. The UTM has on its part proposed to take on board these six modules and provide five additional stackable modules as a top up that will lead to a certificate in Special Inclusive Education pitched at level 5 of the NQF as a continuum of the programme offered by the Commonwealth of Learning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what we are doing right now is to recognise the experience of people who have been working for a long time in a sector, the recognition not only of their work experience, but also the possibility to allow them to learn and to stack up the different modules that they have learnt so as to eventually provide them with a formal certificate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, joint tertiary education with African universities form part of the Finance Bill. With a view of giving a further boost to attaining an aim of transforming Mauritius in an education hub, local universities are being encouraged to establish strong inter-institutional networks and alliances, especially with institutions on the continent to which we belong. This necessitates a degree of incentivisation for those institutions of higher learning moving forward in that direction.

The Income Tax Act is being amended at section 67 by inserting a new subsection 67Q. This provides the possibility of a registered High Education Institution having entered into contract with an African university to provide joint tertiary education with the final year being done in Mauritius. These institutions will be in the position to deduct from their gross income twice the amount of any expenditure incurred on the cost leading to the

conclusion of the contract. This will be valid for the incoming year where the contract has been established and excludes costs of a capital nature.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Act (2021) which provides for the establishment of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology (ITET) was assented to on 23 July 2021. It is currently formalising its organisational chart and proceeding with the determination of its general and specific conditions of service. As we know, the ITET has already been declared and approved as an approved service for the purpose of the Pension Act on 16 May 2023. This would naturally trigger increasing interest of job seekers in taking up career opportunities at the institute.

Additionally, with this amendment to the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act, employees already in the public service and wishing to join the Institute will be able to carry forward not only their accumulated work experience but also their accrued pension benefits and years of pensionable service. In this context, clause 81 of the Bill accordingly provides for the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act to be amended to include the Institute of Technical Education and Technology in the First Schedule of the Act. This will enable employees, as I have said earlier, of the ITET to contribute to the pension fund just like those of other statutory bodies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to note that the provisions of the Finance Bill 2023 cater for a series of measures that are multifold and that will impact on all sub sectors, from the pre-primary to the tertiary sub sector. They will also help alleviate the financial burden of families. In fact, today, parents having children who are studying in fee paying universities, locally or abroad, will be benefiting from tax deductions of Rs500,000 over a period up to 6 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, education is about facilitating the growth and development of an individual as from early childhood till he or she reaches the age of young adulthood. So many years of a young person's life must be looked after in gingerly and sensitive manner. Our Government has always made it its bounded duty to provide relief wherever it is needed. Thus today, a child up to 3 years of age will be provided with a monthly allowance of Rs2,000. The parents or legal guardians will have the possibility and the responsibility of satisfying the diverse needs of a growing child through that allowance and also, it will be a means of inculcating the savings culture in our young people right from the early age such that a responsible consumerism becomes the norm as the child grows up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we know, as from the age of three, the child, adolescent, young adult enjoy free education across the levels. As learners, they are entitled to free education, non-payment of exam fees, free bus transport, free textbooks from Grades 1 to 9. We also have the one-off independence allowance for those who reach the age of 18. We are now completing the process and creating an opening for a positive early start as they take their first steps into the world of adulthood.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me at this point to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and his team as well as the Attorney General's Office on the tremendous efforts that have been put in the preparation of this enabling Bill with not less than 90 pieces of legislation that have been amended. Their efforts will not go waste, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

(9.52 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Merci, M. le président.

Comme à l'accoutumée, je ne peux m'empêcher de débiter mon intervention en constatant une fois de plus les bancs vides de l'opposition qui nous offrent le même spectacle affligeant à chaque fois que nous débattons d'une question importante...

Mr Armance: *Get laba !*

Mr Uteem: *Get lot kote !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Ah mais non, je peux vous assurer que le Premier ministre et mes collègues sont présents à l'Assemblée nationale et que tous les débats sont suivis avec attention.

Je parlais de spectacle affligeant. Ce matin même, le leader de l'opposition nous faisait la leçon quant aux pratiques parlementaires dès lors que le gouvernement circule le *Finance Bill*, la loi des finances qui est un des projets de loi les plus importants dont nous débattons chaque année. Mais le leader de l'opposition est fidèle à ses habitudes. Je pense que nous connaissons maintenant son mode opératoire. Il vient pour la *PNQ* et puis il disparaît et il ne réapparaît que lorsqu'il a à faire un discours. C'est pour cela que je pense que nous n'avons aucune leçon à prendre de ceux qui eux-mêmes ne respectent pas les coutumes parlementaires.

Ce qui est encore plus désolant c'est que si l'on devait évaluer l'assiduité de ceux qui sont présents à la Chambre, l'assiduité à la Chambre des députés de l'opposition, ce sont toujours les mêmes qui sont présents.

Mr Toussaint: *Ramful lamem !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Prenez M. le député Lobine...

Mr Toussaint: *Hmm bon garçon !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... qui n'est jamais absent.

Mr Toussaint: Bravo !

The Deputy Prime Minister: Prenons M. le député Dr. Boolell, ancien leader de l'opposition, qui est toujours présent pour écouter ses pairs de l'opposition mais aussi les intervenants du côté de la majorité. Aujourd'hui même, nous avons eu droit à 4 discours de l'opposition, n'est-ce pas ? Et bien 3 de ces 4 sont toujours là – M. le député Ramful, M. le député Uteem et M. le député Dr. Boolell. Pourquoi ? Parce que c'est cela l'esprit des débats parlementaires...

An hon. Member: *Bann gentlemen !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... de parler, de se faire écouter et ensuite d'écouter les autres, n'est-ce pas ? C'est la politesse élémentaire et c'est aussi la pratique parlementaire consacrée. Ce qui est encore plus désolant c'est de constater l'absence des nouveaux députés. Et là, je dois reconnaître que M. le député David fait exception.

Mr Toussaint: *Bon garçon !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Même aujourd'hui, lorsque parlait mon ancien camarade de parti, le député de la deuxième circonscription, M. Uteem, je me posais la question : mais où sont ses camarades du MMM ? C'est du jamais vu.

Mr Uteem: *Zot ti lamem.*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Et c'est très inquiétant pour l'avenir de la classe politique et du Parlement.

Mais enfin j'ai écouté, néanmoins, le leader de l'opposition et il nous a refait le même discours que lors du débat en deuxième lecture, ressassant les mêmes arguments de l'opposition. Je m'étais apprêté à répondre à ses arguments, mais puisqu'il n'est pas là, je pense que cela ne vaut pas la peine. Donc, je vais me limiter à tenter d'éclairer la Chambre quant aux dispositions particulières de la loi des finances se rapportant au ministère dont j'ai la responsabilité, le ministère du Logement et le ministère du Tourisme, laissant le

soin à mon collègue, le ministre des Finances, s'il le souhaite, de revenir sur certains arguments entendus de l'autre côté de la Chambre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are four pieces of legislation concerning Housing and Tourism, the Morcellement Act, the State Lands Act, the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act relevant to the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, and the Tourism Authority Act concerning the Ministry of Tourism. So, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall as quickly as possible given the late hour refer to these amendments.

The Morcellement Act of 1990 as we all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, empowers my Ministry, empowers the Minister of Housing to oversee and regulate all sub division of land. Section 3 governs applications for subdivisions and subsection 5 imposes the requirement of an application to obtain a *morcellement* permit. Most importantly, section 3 (2) of the *Morcellement* Act provides for exceptions to the requirement of the *morcellement* permit, which exceptions are listed in the First Schedule to the Act.

And section 9 provides for the payment of a processing fee when an applicant first submits his documents and then also a *Morcellement* Permit Fee at the time when approval/authorisation is to be given for the sub division. Now, obviously this Act, this piece of legislation plays an important part in regulating land subdivisions in a country as small as ours where there is enormous pressure on land, and it ensures that whatever subdivision does occur, it is carried out in a manner that is beneficial for all stakeholders and sustainable.

Now, the amendment proposed is to the effect that there should be a new section 3, subsection 4, that exempts from the requirement of the *Morcellement* Permit Fee, the MIC. This is indeed the new Third Schedule, as pointed out by hon. Ramful earlier. Now, why should that be? Let me recall that as at present, a Smart City Project or a project under the Property Development Scheme is exempted altogether from the provisions of the *Morcellement* Act. No smart city company or PDS company is required to apply for a *Morcellement* Permit.

In addition to a number of exemptions listed in the First Schedule for instance, the National Housing Development Company, the New Social Living Development Ltd do not need to apply for a *Morcellement* Permit, but private projects, smart city, PDS do not also require a *Morcellement* Permit. Now, what is being proposed for the MIC? Just to remind the House and hon. Ramful, the MIC was incorporated in 2020 in those testing times of COVID-19. Whatever the Opposition may say, it was an act of courage at the time on the part of the Minister of Finance and of Government to create the MIC as an investment arm of the State to support those economic concerns that were experiencing

enormous difficulties at the time of COVID-19 and thereafter, the MIC, according to its objects, is called upon to invest the assets under its management to support economic growth.

Now, in that sense what the MIC now purports to do with the assets it has acquired is not only legitimate but in the interest of economic development. Providing the MIC with relevant facilities as the Finance Bill proposes will allow the MIC to operate on a level playing field with other large land donors; the more so, as I have just said. Already smart city projects, PDS projects do not require a *Morcellement* Permit.

Now, in the case of the MIC, the MIC is not being exempted from the requirement of a *Morcellement* Permit. It is being exempted from the payment of the processing fee and the *Morcellement* Permit fee. In other words, it will have to go through the whole procedure of the *Morcellement* Act which lays down appropriate safeguards. So, in that sense, the amendment to the *Morcellement* Act, I believe, requires no further justification and the end result will be that the MIC will be allowed to proceed with its mission without having to incur the expenses linked to the *Morcellement* processing fee and permit fee.

Secondly, clause 79 of the Bill addresses the State Land Act which, as we know, regulates all land belonging to the State, sale of State Land, grant of leases, payment of rental, exchange of State Land and in particular, the section we are concerned here today, section 6, provides for granting of leases for a variety of purposes in a variety of situations. Now section 1 (c) provides for payment of annual rental as per the Second Schedule which lays down rates which a Minister or government cannot change, cannot adapt to particular situation without amending the legislation itself. It is interesting to note that section 6 (1) (f) was introduced – was it in 2008 or 2009 under the previous government? From what I read, a large investment project may, subject to approval of Cabinet, of course, benefit from a reduced rental if the project is in the economic interest of Mauritius. Yes, that was introduced into the State Land Act through the Finance Act of 2008 as amended in 2009; so, under the previous Government.

Now, this time round, what is being proposed by way of an amendment is that if the land is leased to a statutory body or a government-owned company and that the State Land is used for a project team to be in the economic interest of a region, then the rental can likewise be reduced with the approval of Cabinet. In other words, before or rather up until now, only a large investment project could benefit from a reduction in rental. This amendment will now allow for a statutory body or governmental company meeting the criteria of economic interest of a region to benefit from the same reduction in rental. We should note that there is a definition of government-owned company as one where 90% or

more of the shareholding belongs to the State and should that shareholding fall below 90%, the entitlement to a reduced rental is no longer applicable.

The proposed amendment also provides in a new section 1 (j) that where a lessee is facing particular difficulty in paying the annual rental, he will be entitled to pay in three yearly instalments in the following consecutive years. Conditions may be defined by the Minister, but the conditions will have to be prescribed. So, there will be a level playing field because they will be prescribed in regulations. There will be transparency because the conditions will be provided for, either in the law, three yearly instalments, or through the regulations that will provide for further conditions. There will be an undertaking that the company cannot declare dividends while it is benefiting from these payment facilities.

There is also a new section (1K) that provides that the reduced rental cannot apply for a period exceeding five years. So, I believe the rationale should be fairly obvious. We have witnessed as a result of COVID, a number of Small and Medium Enterprises that are experiencing enormous difficulty in recovering their markets, in getting back to the business generation of the pre-COVID years. These enterprises, unless provided with some breathing space, will not be able to stay in business. This is why Government is coming forward with the present amendment to allow for appropriate support to be extended to such enterprises in all fairness and transparency.

My Ministry will, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and the Ministry of Finance, work out a precise mechanism to produce a relevant regulation so that we may implement this amendment to the State Lands Act and support economic enterprises facing difficulty. Now, the third piece of legislation relevant to the ambit of the powers of the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning concerns the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act. In fact, if I am wrong, it falls within the ambit of the powers of the Ministry of Agro industry, but there are proposed amendments that are of direct interest to the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning.

The Sugar Industry Efficiency Act, beyond its historic role of creating conditions for the transformation and enhance efficiency of the sugar sector/the Sugar Industry, as it was called in olden days, also contains part V that relates to conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes. There is the necessity of a land conversion permit as the authority from the Minister has come to be known, according to section 28 of the 2001 SIE Act, and that application for a permit must be in writing.

Section 29 provides for a number of exemptions that includes VRS situations and the National Housing Development Corporation (NHDC). Section 31 refers to exemptions from the fees either the Land Conversion Tax Fees or the *Morcellement* fees. There is a

specific Schedule that refers to “specified entity” and there is a long list of bodies in different sectors of social and economic activity, including once again the National Housing Development Corporation.

Now, what does the amendment purport to do? Firstly, there is a new section 27A that provides that where a project is undertaken firstly by a government entity, which is defined as Ministries, Government Departments, statutory body or government company, firstly, it has to be a government entity undertaking a project, and secondly on State Land. If that project is deemed by the Minister, and here, the Minister means the Minister in charge of agriculture, considers that the project is in the national or economic interest, the government entity may put the land into non-agricultural use. In other words, a government entity can use State Land without requiring a land conversion permit. But in any event, the land conversion permit is granted by the Ministry of Agro-industry, and in this case, who will bring the issue to Cabinet because, of course, it will require the agreement of Cabinet, is the Minister of Agro-industry, who will, therefore, have the oversight to determine the precise circumstances and the justification.

That is the main amendment that is being brought. But beyond that, there is another interesting, but perhaps, before I go to that, let me explain that main amendment. The example is the NSLD. The Opposition has been very concerned about the NSLD, worrying about what the costs of the houses will be, whether the contractors are all going to withdraw, whether those at the head of the NSLD are overpaid, and whether the land has got the appropriate geotechnical clearance. I appreciate their concerns about the NSLD.

Well, one of the issues of the NSLD, one of the numerous obstacles we have faced, is the time that it takes to obtain a land conversion permit. Not because the Ministry of Agro Industry or the Minister is lethargic and not working. Not at all! Precisely because of the requirement of scrutiny that requires that the Minister to go and consult a host of bodies and authorities within the agricultural landscape. Allowing the NSLD an exemption from the requirement of the land conversion permit, to the extent that we are talking of stake land, will allow us to save a lot of time in proceeding as quickly as possible to address the suffering of the thousands of Mauritians that do not have appropriate housing facilities as at present.

So, that is the main rationale of this amendment, but beyond the NSLD, of course, other State entities will benefit from this amendment to the extent, as I said, that they meet the criteria laid out in the new section 27A. Now, on top of that, there is section 28(3), the

new amendment, which says that instead of applying in writing, as used to be the case in the past, applications will now be online on the National e-Licensing System.

Now, one may ask what this National e-Licensing System is. Well, for those who are not conversant with the term National e-Licensing System, in fact, it is a one-stop portal managed by the Economic Development Board (EDB) to improve the investment and doing business climate in Mauritius. In this particular instance, I am told, applications for land conversion permits will be made online on the Government of Mauritius Licensing Platform and the e-Licensing Platform will bring imported advantages in terms of reducing the time and cost in the processing of applications as electronic issue of permits will be online. Payment of fees is also available online. So, it makes the whole process less bureaucratic and for recall, the e-licensing system came into operation in August 28. There was a phased coming into operation. So, a lot of time saved is what this amendment proposes.

Now, beyond that, there is also an amendment to the Fourth Schedule. Now, what is the Fourth Schedule about? This is the schedule that exempts from the list of specific entities and it provides that henceforth, the NSLD and the MIC will no longer require this permit as we said earlier; so much for the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act.

Maybe a quick word, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you will allow, on the sole piece of legislation that deals directly with tourism. The Tourism Authority Act is the Act that, apart from setting up the Tourism Authority, provides a regulatory framework for the sector and acts as a quality assurance framework as well. Section 25A of the Act as it stands to date states that any tourism enterprise requires a certificate – I am simplifying – and in the case of hotels, that means a hotel certificate. And section 2, the definition section, provides that a hotel certificate is a certificate to carry out the activities as set out in the First Schedule Part A Sub-part IC.

And one may say strangely enough for newcomers to the House or newcomers to tourism that Schedule states that there are a maximum number of restaurants that a hotel can operate as a function of the number of rooms that it carries, that it has, and when I learnt about this, I wondered why? Why on earth is it the business of the State, of Government to regulate the number of restaurants which are hotel wants to operate? Well, apparently, when this was introduced to the House by the then Minister Lutchmeenaraidoo in 2015 and the absentee Member of Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Tourism. And it was a consensual proposition agreed to by the private sector, the hotel operators because it fitted within a new perspective of rationalising licences. But seven and eight years on, it no longer makes any sense. We are busy trying to diversify our

tourism markets over and above the European markets and the South African market which are performing very well; the regional market in Reunion, that's well and good, but we all know that the opportunity markets mean that we need to look North – the Gulf countries and North East: India and beyond that: China and Russia.

Therefore, the demand for specialised restaurants, high-quality restaurants is ever increasing. And I'm sure that we will all agree that how many restaurants a hotel operates is not the matter for the Tourism Authority to dictate but it must be a business and investment decision on the part of the tourism enterprise of the entrepreneur. So, we are simply removing from the Tourism Act this item; we are deleting the item that mandatorily prescribes how many restaurants are hotel can have and applying for an additional restaurant is a nightmare in terms of the time it takes.

So, in a few words, this is the objective of the short but highly significant amendment that is being proposed. So, there we are, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have as quickly as possible tried to address the pieces of legislation that are of direct concern to the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning and to the Ministry of Tourism. I would invite the House to support the Finance Bill this year, which is the way which a Government implements in law the budget, and this year's budget was truly exceptional and extraordinary in terms of the social progress it promises and in terms of ensuring that our economy, that is now back on track, continues to progress for the benefit of our country.

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

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance!

(10.25 p.m.)

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, alors que s'achèvent les débats de ce jour autour du vote du *Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023*, permettez-moi de saluer l'ensemble des membres de cette auguste Assemblée y ayant contribué.

Je remercie particulièrement l'honorable Premier ministre pour sa confiance ainsi que mes collègues Ministres pour leurs interventions toutes très à propos.

Sous le leadership de notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, nous portons de ce côté de la Chambre un projet économique, social et environnemental empreint de pragmatisme et de solidarité. L'essence du Budget 2023-2024 présenté et voté le mois dernier en est l'illustration.

Dans son sillage, nous sommes aujourd'hui appelés à voter le Projet de loi de Finances qui nous permettra, en tant que gouvernement orienté vers l'efficacité de la prise de décisions, de mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires annoncées.

À cet égard, ce Projet de loi apporte les amendements nécessaires à quelque 90 législations existantes qui viendront soutenir le progrès économique, le développement social et la résilience environnementale de Maurice, de notre pays. Ce vaste et ambitieux plan est à la hauteur des aspirations que nous avons pour les Mauriciens. Et je dirais même pour tous les Mauriciens, en particulier ceux qui ont le plus souffert des multiples crises ayant frappé le monde ces trois dernières années.

Notre pays, avec une croissance en 2022 révisée à la hausse de 36% par le FMI lui-même, a montré au-delà même des attentes sa capacité d'adaptation et de rebond.

Ce Budget 2023-2024 est un budget d'engagement, de construction et de réalisations. Je suis convaincu que les mesures annoncées donneront le ton à la poursuite d'un développement robuste, durable et inclusif.

M. le président, les chiffres récemment publiés par *Statistics Mauritius*, la Banque de Maurice et d'autres institutions internationales confirment en effet l'efficacité de nos politiques publiques et de notre stratégie gouvernementale centrées sur l'Humain.

Dans le détail, notre PIB a augmenté de 8,8 % et la valeur ajoutée brute de 9,8 % en 2022. Au regard du contexte international, il s'agit d'une performance notable pour une année qui a pourtant été marquée par les effets persistants post-covid et ceux de la guerre en Ukraine sur le niveau des prix.

La lutte contre la cherté de la vie, la hausse des prix et l'inflation a été et demeure notre priorité. Grâce aux mesures de soutien déployées par le gouvernement couplées à un certain allègement des tensions sur le prix de l'énergie et du fret, nous nous orientons vers une lente décélération de l'inflation qu'il nous faut appuyer tout en maintenant le cap de la croissance et de l'emploi.

M. le président, pour cette année, grâce aux politiques adoptées et proposées par le gouvernement, nous allons poursuivre sur une trajectoire de forte croissance. Le tourisme, mais aussi le secteur de la construction, seront porteurs pour l'activité économique à Maurice.

Le secteur du tourisme poursuivra sa reprise, les dépenses par touriste et la durée moyenne des séjours dépassant largement leurs niveaux d'avant la pandémie. En effet, la durée moyenne du séjour est passée de 10,6 jours en 2019 à 11,8 en 2022, tandis que les dépenses moyennes par touriste ont augmenté de 45 600 roupies à 65 000 roupies.

Le secteur de la construction sera également un moteur majeur de la croissance, avec des investissements plus importants dans des projets de construction, tant dans le secteur public que dans le secteur privé. En particulier, la construction de 8 000 logements sociaux est maintenant bien engagée.

M. le président, indéniablement, les politiques mises en place par ce gouvernement au cours des dernières années ont renforcé la confiance des investisseurs dans notre économie. Les chiffres en sont le témoin objectif. Le niveau d'investissement s'est complètement rétabli et dépasse largement le niveau d'avant la pandémie. Je rappelle à cet effet que l'investissement total a atteint 112,8 milliards de roupies en 2022, ce qui représente une augmentation de 20,2 % par rapport à 2021. Cette dynamique positive devrait se maintenir en 2023, avec des investissements atteignant 129,6 milliards de roupies et le ratio investissement/PIB franchira la barre des 20% cette année.

En outre, les entrées d'IDE ont, elles aussi, atteint un niveau record de 27,7 milliards de roupies en 2022, contre 18,5 milliards de roupies en 2021. De même, les exportations de biens et de services ont dépassé les 324 milliards de roupies en 2022, ce qui représente une augmentation nominale de 53% par rapport à 2021.

M. le président, en plus de favoriser l'environnement des affaires, nous créons également les conditions pour un marché de l'emploi dynamique et équitable. Grâce aux régimes ciblés visant à favoriser l'emploi tels que la Prime à L'emploi ou encore le *SME Employment Scheme*, le taux de chômage est retombé à 7,7% en 2022 contre 9,1% en 2021. Il devrait encore baisser cette année. En effet, il a été estimé qu'environ 40 000 emplois supplémentaires seront créés grâce aux mesures annoncées dans le discours sur le budget. En ce qui concerne l'inflation, selon la Banque de Maurice, les pressions inflationnistes devraient continuer à s'atténuer, le taux d'inflation diminuant progressivement pour atteindre environ 6,8 % en 2023.

M. le président, sur un autre sujet d'intérêt prioritaire, je tiens à confirmer que la consolidation budgétaire va bon train. Grâce d'une part, à la stratégie du gouvernement et d'autre part, à la reprise des activités économiques, la dette du secteur public a été ramenée de 92 % à la fin juin 2021 à environ 79 % à la fin juin 2023. Ce chiffre est

inférieur à notre point d'ancrage fiscal de 80 % tel que défini par le FMI. Nous irons au-delà de cet important palier déjà atteint. Notre objectif est de ramener la dette du secteur public à 71,5 % du PIB d'ici à la fin juin 2024. Nous continuerons à réduire encore davantage le taux d'endettement à moyen terme pour atteindre les niveaux d'avant la pandémie, soit 60 % du PIB.

M. le président, nous tournons définitivement la page de la pandémie de la covid-19. Nous avons maintenu l'économie à flot pendant la période la plus difficile de la tempête et nous avons ensuite élaboré une stratégie de redressement post-pandémique qui porte aujourd'hui ses fruits. Les mesures budgétaires visent principalement à améliorer le bien-être de notre population dans le contexte d'une économie robuste, inclusive et durable. Il s'agit d'un projet qui aborde le front des grands défis économiques, sociaux, technologiques, climatiques et environnementaux de notre époque par le biais d'un large éventail de politiques et de mesures à court, moyen et long terme.

M. le président, alors que les orateurs de la majorité ont couvert de nombreux points dans leurs interventions respectives, je voudrais évoquer ici quelques-unes des mesures phares du Projet de loi de finances 2023. Elles traduisent notre profond attachement à la protection de nos concitoyens. Permettez-moi tout d'abord de revenir sur l'une des principales réformes du Budget 2023-2024 que nous mettrons en œuvre par le biais de ce Projet de loi.

Il s'agit du changement de paradigme que nous adoptons en matière de régime fiscal. La réforme totale de l'impôt sur le revenu est pour sûr l'une des pierres angulaires du dernier Budget. Elle constitue un changement profond de nos politiques fiscales et de redistribution. Nous introduisons plus de justice et d'équité dans le système, tout en garantissant la compétitivité internationale de l'économie mauricienne. Avant cette réforme d'envergure, 150 286 contribuables payaient des impôts aux taux de 10 %, 12,5 % et 15 %, dont une minorité assujettie au *Solidarity Levy* qui contribue plus largement.

Avec l'introduction du système d'impôt progressif, 23% des personnes gagnant en moyenne 30 000 roupies par mois sortiront du filet fiscal, c'est-à-dire qu'elles ne seront plus assujetties à l'impôt sur le revenu des personnes physiques. Par le truchement de l'abolition du *Solidarity Levy*, le taux d'imposition marginal maximal diminuera également pour atteindre 20%.

M. le président, tout au long de notre mandat, en tant que gouvernement bienveillant, nous avons protégé les personnes les plus vulnérables. Nos enfants méritent

toute notre attention et notre soutien. Jamais un gouvernement, un Premier ministre n'a fait autant pour le bien-être et le développement de nos plus jeunes concitoyens. Au travers du dernier budget, le gouvernement se place à nouveau aux côtés des familles mauriciennes, dès la naissance d'un enfant. Nous avons à cet effet introduit la *CSG Child Allowance* de R 2 000 par mois pour les bébés âgés de moins de trois ans. Cette mesure bénéficiera à quelque 40 000 familles. Pour alléger encore la charge financière des parents, nous avons également supprimé la TVA sur les produits pour bébés tels que les lingettes, le talc, la crème, les couches, les biberons et les tire-laits.

Nous modifions également la *Workers' Rights Act* afin de rendre obligatoire pour les employeurs employant plus de 250 personnes la mise à disposition gratuite et sur place de services de garde d'enfants aux travailleurs ayant un enfant âgé de moins de trois ans. Par ailleurs, l'*Income Tax Act* est également modifié afin de permettre une double déduction des dépenses engagées pour la mise en place de garderies pour les entreprises. Il s'agit de mesures historiques en faveur des parents et des enfants.

Mais ce n'est pas tout. Nous avons également augmenté l'allocation mensuelle accordée dans le cadre du *Foster Care Scheme* pour un enfant de 8 000 à 12 000 roupies et introduit une allocation majorée de 15 000 roupies pour un enfant ayant des besoins particuliers. Afin de concilier travail et obligations familiales, un travailleur pourra aussi bénéficier de tous ses congés pour s'occuper de son enfant et de 10 jours, pas supplémentaires, mais parmi ses congés déjà prédéfinis pour ses parents et ses grands-parents ayant des problèmes de santé.

M. le président, dans la mise en place de cette politique d'accompagnement des familles, ce gouvernement a été particulièrement attentif à la douleur des parents dont les enfants souffrent de graves maladies. Nous avons été touchés d'apprendre, lors des consultations budgétaires, que chaque année, une cinquantaine d'enfants sont diagnostiqués avec un cancer. Il était de notre responsabilité de prendre des mesures et nous avons agi et veillé à ce que les meilleurs traitements soient fournis à ces enfants afin qu'ils puissent mener une vie heureuse, saine et épanouie. Nous n'hésiterons pas et nous ferons tout ce qu'il faut pour fournir les soins et les traitements nécessaires à nos enfants. À cet égard, tous les enfants jusqu'à l'âge de 17 ans, chez qui un cancer est diagnostiqué, recevront des soins et des traitements dans des hôpitaux étrangers dotés de la meilleure expertise. Le coût total de ces traitements sera pris en charge par le gouvernement.

M. le président, pour d'autres maladies complexes présentes chez les patients pédiatriques, nous avons renoncé à la subvention maximale d'un million de roupies pour ces patients qui ont besoin de traitements médicaux qui ne sont pas disponibles localement dans le cadre du programme de traitement à l'étranger.

En outre, nous avons également revu la limite des revenus du ménage de 100 000 roupies pour les patients pédiatriques. Le gouvernement couvrira ainsi la totalité du coût du traitement à l'étranger de ces patients.

Toujours sur le sujet central de la santé et afin de faciliter la vie de quelque 1 000 patients atteints de diabète de type 1, nous prévoyons une aide financière pour leur permettre d'avoir accès à des soins de qualité.

Pour les patients atteints de diabète de type 1, nous fournissons un moniteur de glucose en continu. Parmi eux, quelque 450 patients diabétiques à haut risque recevront également une pompe à insuline.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, l'allocation mensuelle pour incontinence de 1 800 roupies sera étendue aux patients souffrant d'un cancer de la prostate, d'un cancer de la vessie, de la maladie d'Alzheimer et d'un accident vasculaire cérébral.

M. le président, j'en viens maintenant à la question de l'éducation. Nous voulons que nos enfants bénéficient d'installations et de services performants pour l'ensemble de leur scolarité, et que cette dernière soit la plus longue et riche en apprentissages possible. Et cela afin qu'ils démarrent leur vie active dans les meilleures dispositions.

Afin d'offrir à nos enfants un environnement propice à l'apprentissage, toutes nos écoles publiques seront ainsi modernisées, réaménagées et repeintes au cours des cinq prochaines années. En fait, rien que cette année, quelque 70 écoles sont en cours de rénovation.

Nous avons également annoncé une mesure historique pour nos jeunes adultes au travers du Budget 2023-2024 dans le cadre des 55 ans de Maurice. Nous accordons ainsi une allocation de 20 000 roupies aux jeunes éligibles à l'*Independence Scheme* qui ont ou auront atteint l'âge de 18 ans à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2023.

Il s'agit d'une reconnaissance du rôle qu'ils sont sur le point de jouer en tant que jeunes adultes dans notre société. Cette mesure témoigne de notre confiance dans nos jeunes et dans leur capacité à construire un pays plus prospère et plus solidaire.

Cette aide financière permettra à plus de 15 000 jeunes chaque année d'acquérir l'équipement et le matériel nécessaires pour poursuivre leurs études ou même envisager une vie professionnelle en tant qu'entrepreneur.

À mon grand regret, mais sans trop d'illusions, nous avons entendu beaucoup de sarcasmes sur cette mesure de la part de l'opposition. Nous devons nous demander s'ils se soucient de la population ou s'il s'agit simplement pour eux de pots-de-vin électoraux. Tout ce qui est donné à la population est contesté devant les tribunaux. Il est devenu clair que pour eux, rien ne devrait être attribué à la population.

M. le président, il est de plus regrettable et insupportable que nos jeunes soient obligés d'entendre de pareilles inepties. C'est un manque de respect, un manque de confiance à leur égard. Je ne comprends pas que ce qui était si brillant pour eux à l'époque ne le soit plus aujourd'hui. À moins que ce ne soit encore qu'une posture politique ?

M. le président, ce gouvernement est tout aussi convaincu que c'est en accordant aux femmes les moyens de leur pleine émancipation que nous donnons à la famille et à la société dans son ensemble les meilleures conditions de développement.

Sous la direction du Premier ministre, nous avons ainsi introduit ces dernières années plusieurs réformes centrales et extrêmement concrètes en faveur de l'égalité des genres.

Nous pensons que des changements doivent intervenir à tous les niveaux de notre société, et cela commence dans les plus hautes sphères des organisations si nous voulons briser le plafond de verre de la mobilité professionnelle.

La *Companies Act* est, à ce titre, en cours d'amendement afin de rendre obligatoire la présence d'un minimum de 25 % de femmes au sein des conseils d'administration des sociétés cotées à la Bourse de Maurice.

Il s'agit d'une évolution attendue depuis longtemps dans le monde de l'entreprise, qui a été largement saluée par les milieux d'affaires et la société civile.

Mme S. Ujoodha, Directrice générale de l'Institut mauricien des administrateurs, a ainsi déclaré –

« C'est un signal fort qui pousse les sociétés cotées en bourse vers cet objectif ».

Les rôles de direction ne devraient en aucun cas être genrés.

En parallèle, sur le front de la création d'emplois, le programme Prime à L'emploi sera renouvelé pour la période allant du 1^{er} juillet 2023 au 30 juin 2024 et s'adressera désormais aux femmes et aux personnes handicapées.

Le gouvernement versera donc une contribution mensuelle de 15 000 roupies pendant une période de deux ans aux femmes nouvellement employées ou à celles qui ont été au chômage pendant au moins un an dans le cadre du programme Prime à L'emploi.

En outre, les employeurs pourront bénéficier d'une double déduction fiscale sur le montant des émoluments versés aux femmes employées dans le cadre de ce programme.

M. le président, alors que nous nous lançons dans le programme de construction de logements sociaux le plus ambitieux jamais entrepris dans ce pays, nous encourageons aussi les Mauriciens à acquérir et à construire leurs propres maisons.

Afin de promouvoir l'accès à la propriété pour tous, les deux programmes, à savoir le *Home Ownership Scheme* et le *Home Loan Scheme*, seront prolongés jusqu'au 30 juin 2024.

Au cours de l'année écoulée, quelque 2,7 milliards de roupies ont été déboursées au profit de 25 300 propriétaires ayant acquis un logement ou contracté un prêt pour l'achat ou la construction d'une habitation.

En outre, nous avons mis en place un *House Loan Relief Scheme* pour soulager les ménages touchés par la hausse des taux d'intérêt.

En vue de soutenir encore davantage le pouvoir d'achat de la population, la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* versera 1 000 roupies par mois aux individus ayant contracté des prêts d'un montant maximum de 5 millions de roupies garantis par une hypothèque ou une charge fixe sur un bien immobilier et utilisés pour l'achat, la construction ou l'agrandissement de leur maison.

Dans le même temps, les subventions maximales dans le cadre du *Casting of Roof Slabs Grant Scheme* et du *Purchases of Building Materials Scheme* ont été augmentées et s'élèvent désormais à –

- 130 000 roupies pour les ménages gagnant jusqu'à 15 000 roupies par mois ; et

- 100 000 roupies pour les ménages gagnant jusqu'à 20 000 roupies par mois.

M. le président, afin de protéger les emprunteurs, le gouvernement tient à ce que la question de la vente par prélèvement - le *Sale by Levy* - soit réglée avec justesse, droiture et empathie une fois pour toutes.

Pour ce faire, la *Sale of Immoveable Property Act* sera modifiée pour rendre obligatoire le fait que le prix d'un bien saisi soit au moins égal à 90 % ou 80 % selon les cas de la valeur du marché libre du bien lorsque ce dernier est respectivement la seule résidence de l'emprunteur ou bien un bien secondaire.

M. le président, dans le contexte de la guerre en Ukraine, le gouvernement a pris des mesures audacieuses pour soutenir le pouvoir d'achat des individus et des familles à faibles et moyens revenus. Et cela pour lutter inlassablement contre les inégalités de revenus dans notre société.

Pour soutenir davantage les ménages, l'allocation de revenu CSG sera ainsi prolongée jusqu'en juin 2024 et augmenté pour les bas revenus. Quelque 200 000 personnes ayant un revenu inférieur ou égal à 25 000 roupies recevront désormais 2 000 roupies par mois au lieu de 1 000 roupies et quelque 150 000 personnes continueront à recevoir 1 000 roupies par mois au titre de l'allocation de revenu de la CSG. Je rappelle que l'allocation de revenu CSG n'est pas soumise à l'impôt sur le revenu.

Permettez-moi de souligner que nous avons étendu la date butoir pour l'enregistrement des travailleurs indépendants afin qu'ils soient éligibles à cette allocation jusqu'au 7 juillet 2023 au lieu du 7 juin 2022. Cela permettra ainsi à quelque 40 000 travailleurs indépendants supplémentaires de bénéficier de cette aide directe et mensuelle.

M. le président, car la réduction des inégalités est au cœur de la philosophie de notre Premier ministre, nous introduisons également une mesure historique au travers du vote de ce projet de loi de finances. Il s'agit du "Revenu Minimum Garanti" de 15 000 roupies par mois, qui sera applicable à partir du 1^{er} juillet 2023.

À partir de ce jour, en votant ce projet de loi, je suis fier de pouvoir annoncer qu'aucun individu à Maurice ne gagnera moins de 15 000 roupies par mois à temps complet.

M. le président, rappelons-nous que c'est ce gouvernement, sous la direction du Premier ministre, qui avait introduit le salaire minimum en 2018. Nous savons tous

pourtant que sous le gouvernement Travilliste, beaucoup de Mauriciens ne recevaient que 1 500 roupies par mois. Un monde de différence, celui de l'empathie, de la solidarité et du courage politique. Voilà quel est ce monde qui nous différencie !

M. le président, dans le cadre de nos efforts pour soutenir le segment le plus vulnérable de notre population, les taux de la pension de retraite de base, de la pension de veuve, de la pension d'invalidité et de la pension d'orphelin ont tous été augmentés de 1 000 roupies par mois. Ainsi, une personne âgée de 60 et 65 ans recevra désormais une pension mensuelle de 11 000 et 12 000 roupies respectivement, contre 3 623 roupies en 2014, soit le triple.

En augmentant progressivement les pensions, nous tiendrons notre promesse d'allouer une retraite de 13 500 roupies par mois à nos aînés d'ici la fin de notre mandat. Car, de ce côté-ci de la maison, nous croyons fermement que nos personnes âgées ont besoin d'une pension décente pour leur permettre de vivre décemment et payer leurs dépenses quotidiennes.

Alors qu'en 2014, la pension de retraite de base n'était que de 3 623 roupies, le gaz ménager était à 330 roupies la bonbonne. Aujourd'hui, il est à 240 roupies. Le pain maison était à 2,70 roupies, aujourd'hui à 2,60 roupies, tandis que la farine était à 11,70 roupies auparavant, et aujourd'hui à 9,70 roupies.

M. le président, le gouvernement mauricien se tient aux côtés de la population et des plus vulnérables de notre société. Au cours des dernières années, ce même gouvernement a apporté davantage de soutien et d'assistance aux personnes vulnérables de notre société qu'aucun autre gouvernement. Et cela à la fois en combinant des objectifs de développement économique et social.

Nous avons fait un pas de plus en augmentant le seuil de revenu maximum des ménages pour pouvoir bénéficier d'une aide financière, de 10 500 roupies à 14 650 roupies pour les personnes inscrites au Registre social de Maurice et à 18 860 roupies pour les personnes inscrites à la Base de données nationale pour les groupes vulnérables.

En outre, nous aidons les ménages les plus vulnérables à se pourvoir de fauteuils roulants, de lunettes, d'appareils auditifs et de prothèses dentaires en augmentant le seuil d'éligibilité du revenu mensuel de 30 000 à 35 000 roupies. Car c'est cela l'équité et la solidarité nationale.

M. le président, le gouvernement est également pleinement conscient des défis des agriculteurs, des éleveurs et des planteurs qui ont contracté des emprunts depuis longtemps. Dans le contexte d'une inflation importée, de nombreuses familles mauriciennes sont aujourd'hui confrontées à un fardeau financier et incapable de rembourser ces prêts. Parfois même alors que l'emprunteur est déjà décédé. Pour mettre fin à ces insupportables situations, nous avons mis au point un système d'amnistie pour les prêts à la *DBM*. En effet, la *DBM* annulera les prêts en souffrance depuis plus de 20 ans et les prêts d'emprunteurs décédés pour un millier de familles de micro-entrepreneurs, de petits planteurs, de pêcheurs et d'éleveurs.

M. le président, en plus de ce qui précède, le Projet de loi de finances 2023 apporte de nombreuses nouvelles mesures pour soutenir les PME, améliorer le climat du *Doing Business* et faciliter l'embauche des travailleurs. Afin d'aider les PME à faire face aux coûts des augmentations salariales, le projet de loi prévoit en effet l'extension de l'allocation mensuelle de 500 roupies par employé pour financer la compensation salariale de 1 000 roupies par mois applicable à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2023. En outre, la subvention maximale accordée dans le cadre du *SME Support Scheme* passera de 200 000 roupies à 250 000 roupies. Enfin, la *DBM* prolongera jusqu'en juin 2024 le *SME Interest Free Loan* et le *COVID-19 Special Support Scheme*.

M. le président, en tant que gouvernement qui soutient les petites entreprises, nous sommes conscients que de nombreuses PME ont éprouvé des difficultés à payer leurs impôts, en particulier pendant la période de la covid-19. L'année dernière, nous avons introduit le *Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme* qui a permis à quelque 8,850 particuliers et entreprises de bénéficier d'une exonération des pénalités et des intérêts afin de pouvoir rembourser quelques R 2.4 milliards d'impôts au gouvernement. Compte tenu du succès de ce programme, je suis heureux de pouvoir confirmer qu'avec le vote de ce projet de loi, le *Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme* sera prolongé pour une période d'un an, avec une exonération totale des pénalités.

M. le président, depuis des années, les entreprises mettent en avant la lourdeur administrative des demandes de *Work Permit* et d'*Occupation Permit*. Grace au Projet de loi de finances 2023, le processus de demande ou de renouvellement de ces deux permis est accéléré.

La demande se fera ainsi par l'intermédiaire du *National Electronic Licensing System* de l'*EDB* et le système permettra de suivre l'état d'avancement de la demande. Le principe du « *silence vaut pour acceptation* » sera alors appliqué.

Une demande pleinement conforme sera alors considérée avoir été acceptée si elle n'est pas examinée dans un délai de 30 jours ouvrable à compter de la date de la demande.

En outre, nous prévoyons une autre réforme majeure. À partir du 1^{er} juillet 2023, le seuil d'éligibilité d'*Occupation Permit* pour les professionnels sera réduit à 30 000 roupies par mois. De plus, ce permis pour les jeunes professionnels sera ouvert à plusieurs domaines d'études.

M. le président, ce gouvernement croit au secteur agricole et à l'industrie de la canne à sucre en tant que moteur clé d'une croissance durable et inclusive de notre économie. Non, ce ne sont pas des activités d'un autre temps. Non, ce ne sont pas des « *sunset industries* ». Elles ont même toute leur place dans l'économie d'aujourd'hui et de demain.

Dans ce sens et sans le cadre du Budget 2023-2024, nous prévoyons des incitations pour les planteurs de canne à sucre afin qu'ils maintiennent et augmentent leur capacité de production. Le gouvernement augmente ainsi le prix minimum garanti du sucre de 25 000 à 27 500 roupies par tonne pour les planteurs produisant jusqu'à 60 tonnes de sucre.

Il convient de rappeler que c'est l'honorable Premier ministre qui, en 2019, avait introduit pour la première fois le concept d'un prix minimum garanti de 25 000 roupies pour les planteurs de canne à sucre. Il s'agissait d'une décision novatrice visant à apporter plus de visibilité et de confiance à la communauté des planteurs à un moment donné. Cette vision était la bonne. Juste et efficace, les résultats de cette stratégie sont incontestables.

M. le président, en tant que gouvernement responsable, nous n'avons pas seulement pris soin de nos planteurs, mais aussi des pêcheurs. En 2014, l'indemnité pour mauvais temps n'était que de 210 roupies. Aujourd'hui, grâce aux mesures que nous avons prises, un pêcheur qui ne peut pas aller en mer à cause des conditions météorologiques bénéficiera d'au moins 650 roupies par jour. En seulement deux mandats, nous avons augmenté l'indemnité de mauvais temps pour les pêcheurs de plus de 210 roupies par jour en 2014 à 650 roupies maintenant.

M. le président, dans le cadre de notre transition écologique, le gouvernement va lancer un programme de plantation d'un million d'arbres à travers l'île. L'Agence Nationale

de Nettoyage Environnemental, la *NECA*, et *Mauri-Facilities* planteront ces arbres dans les espaces publics.

La réhabilitation des zones côtières face à l'élévation du niveau de la mer et au réchauffement climatique est une stratégie prioritaire d'adaptation au climat.

Des travaux d'assainissement seront ainsi entrepris à Bain Bœuf, Mont Choisy, Le Morne, Grand Sable et Baie du Cap. Des mesures d'adaptation seront aussi mises en œuvre au cimetière de Souillac.

M. le président, afin de lutter contre la pollution plastique et de donner un coup de pouce à l'économie circulaire, le gouvernement propose plusieurs mesures qui visent à inciter les consommateurs et les ménages à recycler et à réutiliser davantage.

Un système de consigne sera donc mis en place. Le gouvernement double également le taux de remboursement qui passe de 15 à 30 roupies par kilo les bouteilles de PET recyclées localement. L'objectif est de recycler localement toutes ces bouteilles usagées. Actuellement, seulement 40 % de ces bouteilles usagées sont recyclées localement. Nous devons aller plus loin.

M. le président, je vais maintenant répondre aux critiques de l'opposition. L'opposition s'est en effet efforcée de dénigrer le budget et par la même occasion ce projet de loi de finances en affirmant qu'il ne s'agissait pas d'un budget progressiste et qu'il ne protégeait pas les personnes vulnérables de notre société. Permettez-moi de répondre. Qu'est-ce donc d'après cette opposition, donneuse de leçons, un budget socialiste et progressiste pour la population ? Est-ce le budget travailliste de 2006 ? Un budget qui est venu effacer en deux heures des décennies d'acquis sociaux durement combattus. Un budget qui avait frappé les pauvres et les classes moyennes au profit des plus riches. Un budget qui avait introduit une fiscalité injuste en imposant les revenus moyens et les riches au même taux. Un budget qui avait mis fin à la subvention des frais d'examen *SC* et *HSC*. Un budget qui a introduit la taxe nationale sur les propriétés résidentielles, un impôt rural déguisé - alors que le gouvernement d'aujourd'hui a aboli la taxe municipale pour les ménages et est en train de l'abolir pour les lieux d'organisations religieuses.

Un budget qui a mis fin au programme de distribution de pain dans les écoles, qualifié de gaspillage par le Parti travailliste et son ministre des Finances de l'époque.

Leur argument était, je cite –

« De même, pourquoi acceptons-nous un programme d'alimentation des écoles primaires connu pour son gaspillage et son iniquité ?

Ou encore, M. le président, un budget qui a taxé l'épargne de la classe moyenne alors que nous avons réduit la facture fiscale de milliers de personnes à revenus moyens grâce au régime d'impôt progressif sur le revenu. Un budget qui a démantelé le tripartisme et l'a remplacé par un mécanisme injuste, le *National Pay Council*. Sans parler de l'introduction de nouvelles lois du travail permettant des licenciements abusifs.

M. le président, face à la gravité des actions et mesures mises en place par cet ancien gouvernement, il est important de rappeler que le budget de 2006 n'était pas une simple parenthèse dans le parcours idéologique de ce gouvernement. Il en a dévoilé son ADN. Il était, en fait, le fondement même d'une philosophie économique brutale qui a exacerbé le fossé entre les riches et les pauvres dans notre pays. Dénonçant avec la plus grande justesse et sévérité, cette soif sans fin pour dépecer les plus démunis et engraisser les plus riches, Mahatma Gandhi disait –

« Il y en a toujours assez pour les nécessiteux, il n'y en a jamais assez pour les avides. »

Cette même philosophie prévaut toujours pour le Parti travailliste que nous voyons devant nous aujourd'hui. Avec beaucoup de discernement, la population a été répugnée par l'acharnement avec lequel ils ont combattu notre décision d'augmenter les pensions de vieillesse.

Ils ont fait de cette question - qu'ils qualifient de pot-de-vin électoral - l'argument central de leurs pétitions électorales devant les tribunaux d'ici à Maurice et au Royaume-Uni.

Je suis sûr que la population en prend bonne note et qu'elle fera un choix éclairé en temps voulu. La population sait bien que c'est le leadership de l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, notre Premier ministre, qui a traversé, l'une après l'autre, toutes les politiques régressives et antisociales du régime précédent. Elle anticipe également que ces réalisations et ces acquis seront balayés d'un revers de main par le régime travailliste dès qu'ils en auront l'occasion.

Ce budget, comme les trois précédents, résume notre vision socialiste. Jamais, je dis bien, jamais, un gouvernement n'a fait autant pour renforcer l'État-providence en si peu de

temps, surtout dans le contexte des crises économiques les plus graves auxquelles notre pays n'ait jamais été confronté.

Lorsque l'opposition critique les mesures sociales du budget, elle prouve qu'elle n'a jamais eu de considération pour les plus vulnérables et la classe moyenne. Pour eux, ces groupes ne sont que des banques de votes qu'il s'agit de manipuler, de diviser et de monter les uns contre les autres pour de simples gains politiques et électoraux. Tout cela fait partie d'une vaste stratégie politique qu'ils préparent depuis le jour même où ils ont perdu les élections générales de novembre 2019. Mais la démagogie ne tient pas longtemps. Les masques sont en train de tomber. La vérité triomphe toujours.

M. le président, l'opposition est prise en flagrant délit d'auto-contradiction. Avant la présentation du Budget, elle avait réclamé à cor et à cri des mesures visant à alléger le coût de la vie pour la population. Lorsque nous avons présenté une série de mesures destinées à améliorer le pouvoir d'achat de la population, nous sommes accusés d'être les budgétaires électoralistes.

Lequel des deux, M. le président ? Ils ne sont pas crédibles et ils nous disent que l'économie va mal. Rien de plus faux selon les institutions internationales. Je vais citer des extraits des rapports de Moody's de mai 2023, de *UN Economic and Social Council* de décembre 2022 et du FMI avec le *World Economic Outlook* en avril 2023.

Selon Moody's –

“Mauritius economy recorded very strong growth in 2022 with real GDP increasing 8.7%.”

Je dis bien, *Real GDP*.

The authorities have established and leverage an investment friendly climate in Mauritius with measures that go beyond the simple advantages that double taxation agreements afford. As a result, the economy is competitive particularly compared with African peers. Mauritius benefits from a high degree of social stability. The country has almost non-existent poverty rates and a relatively even distribution of income while the Government offers universal free access to education and healthcare; all of which reduce the risk of social unrest. Mauritius continues to benefit from a strong institutional framework and prudent policy-making which have supported high growth rates, resilience to economic shocks and the sovereigns investment grading.

Mauritius governance stands out at the regional and global levels as reflected in a number of international surveys.

Selon *UN Economic and Social Council* à travers la Commission Economique pour l'Afrique des Nations unies, UNECA, dans son rapport en date du 23 décembre 2022 a indiqué que –

“Central Banks in Africa currently have a major challenge in balancing the trade-off between preventing inflation and promoting growth. Responses that emerge due to recent crises could be sustained and scaled up. For example, the Bank of Mauritius created the Mauritius Investment Corporation in June 2020 with a seed capital of \$2 billion. It proved to be a decisive tool in safeguarding the financial sector and protecting livelihoods by creating a domestic investment portfolio and by providing critical financial support to large corporate organisations during difficult times. The corporation which has been an associate member of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds since September 2022, helped to maintain financial stability and mitigated the impact of downturn in key economic sectors.”

S’agissant du FMI, ils ont amélioré notre performance économique de 36% dans leur dernier *World Economic Outlook*, de 6.1% en octobre 2022 à 8.3% en avril 2023. Ce qui prouve la validité de notre reprise économique.

Notre pays, M. le président, est classé parmi les 20 pays avec des taux de croissance les plus élevés au monde. Les Mauriciens sont aujourd’hui rassurés d’avoir un gouvernement stable, ambitieux et bienveillant qui écoute les préoccupations de la population et qui répond à ses aspirations. Ce sont les conditions essentielles pour un environnement propice au développement économique et social.

Contrairement à ce que prétend l’opposition qui pense que les mesures sociales compromettent l’économie, notre politique en action en est juste la démonstration. La reprise de l’après-covid est là et a pris de l’ampleur au-delà des attentes de beaucoup. L’économie mauricienne a connu une croissance de 8,8 % en 2022, soit le taux de croissance le plus élevé de ces 35 dernières années. Nous entrons maintenant dans une nouvelle phase de transformation et prévoyons une croissance de 8 % pour l’année fiscale 2023-2024. Ensemble, nous y parviendrons.

M. le président, pour conclure, permettez-moi de réaffirmer qu’avec ce projet de loi, nous apportons les amendements nécessaires pour rendre notre économie plus résiliente, plus inclusive et plus durable.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

(No. XI of 2023)

Clauses 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Bank of Mauritius Act Amended).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 8—

“in clause 8, by adding the following new paragraph, the full stop at the end of paragraph (c) being deleted and replaced by a semicolon —

(d) in section 52A —

- (i) in subsection (1A), by inserting, after the word “agency”, the words “or body corporate”;
- (ii) in subsection (1B), by inserting, after the word “agency”, the words “or body corporate”.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 to 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24 (Economic Development Board Act Amended).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 24 —

“in clause 24(a)(i)(B)(II), in the proposed new subparagraph (iiiB), by inserting, after the word “held”, the words “, directly or indirectly,”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 24, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 25 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 27 (Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2019 Amended).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 27—

“in clause 27(b), in the proposed new subsection (1A)(a)(ii), by deleting the words “Mauritius Qualifications Authority” and replacing them by the words “Higher Education Commission”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 27, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 28 to 37 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 38 (Income Tax Act Amended).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in Clause 38—

“in clause 38(c)(v), in the proposed new section 27K—

(i) in subsection (1), by inserting, after the words “an animal from”, the words “the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare or”;

(ii) in subsection (3), by inserting, in the appropriate alphabetical order, the following new definition—

“Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare” means the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare established under the Animal Welfare Act”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 38, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 39 to 43 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 44 (Local Government Act Amended).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 44 –

“in section 44(b)(ii), in the proposed new subsection (1A)(b), by deleting the word “Minister” and replacing it by the words “Minister after consultation with the member’s appropriate registration body”.”

Mr Collendavelloo: Mr Chairperson, can I intervene since we are at committee stage, to ask whether the hon. Minister of Finance would consider rewording his amendment so that his additional members be appointed by the member’s appropriate registration body and so that we leave it to the professional bodies to appoint independent members to the Committee?

Mr Nazurally: May I also propose, Mr Chairperson, that the Minister of Finance considers that it is the councillors that appoint the two members in consultation with the Ministry?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Chairperson, we, on this side of the House, fully endorse the proposal made by hon. Collendavelloo and seconded by the hon. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Padayachy: We are not agreeable to this. We cannot!

Mr Chairperson: Hon. Minister, do you agree with the proposals?

Dr. Padayachy: No, we are not agreeable with the amendments proposed by the hon. Members.

On question put, amendments defeated.

Clause 44, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 45 to 93 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The First to Eleventh Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and the 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 Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023 (No. XI of 2023) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 21 July 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Adjournment matter?

At 11.25 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 21 July 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PORT RESTRICTED ZONE – HON. M. E. J. PRESENCE – INQUIRY

(No. B/1074) 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 the inquiry initiated into the presence of Honourable M. E. J. in a restricted zone in the port area on or about 05 January 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

Reply: In my reply to Parliamentary Question B/376 at our Sitting of 18 May 2021, I informed the House that Police had initiated an enquiry into two cases reported by the Port Police, involving the hon. M. E. J for the following offences in breach of the Port (Operations and Safety) Regulations 2005 –

- (i) entering port restricted area without a valid access pass, and
- (ii) bringing motor vehicle into port restricted area without a valid access pass.

I am informed that on 12 May 2022, after completion of the enquiry, Police had forwarded the case file to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice with suggestions for prosecution against the hon. M. E. J for the following offences –

- (i) entering a port restricted area without a valid Mauritius Ports Authority Access Pass in breach of Regulations 226(1)(a) and 252(1) of Port (Operations and Safety) Regulations 2005, and

- (ii) bringing a motor vehicle into port restricted area without a valid access pass in breach of Regulations 226(1)(b) and 252(1) of Port (Operations and Safety) Regulations 2005.

On 23 June 2023, the Director of Public Prosecutions advised no further action into the matter.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVING LICENCE – VALIDITY & APPLICATION REVIEW

(No. B/1075) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the International Driving Licence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if consideration will be given for the –

- (a) extension of the validity period thereof from one year to three years and
- (b) application to be made online and at other test centres at Curepipe and Flacq.

Reply: An International Driving Permit is valid for a period of one year in line with Article 4 of the Paris International Convention relative to Motor Traffic of 1926. However, upon expiry of such permit, the holder may apply for a new one.

The validity period of one year of the International Driving Permit cannot be extended to three years unless Mauritius ratifies the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic 1968.

In view of the far reaching implications that the ratification of the Convention would entail, a Committee chaired by the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail and comprising representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Attorney General's Office, Mauritius Police Force, Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and the National Land Transport Authority has been set up to look into the matter.

The process for the ratification of a Convention is long and tedious whereby each and every Articles/Clauses have to be assessed and details thereof have to be examined carefully. Hence, consultations by Members of the Committee are under way.

With regard to part (b) of the question, it is to be noted that since January 2017, with a view to avoiding undue hardship to Mauritians living abroad, the procedures for

obtaining an International Driving Permit has been reviewed so as to allow them to apply for International Driving Permits without personally calling at the Licencing Office, Line Barracks, as was the case previously. For such applications, the applicant has to elect a proxy living in Mauritius who has to produce all the required documents on his behalf.

Furthermore, since September 2022, online applications for International Driving Permits can also be made via the MauPass Digital Platform by applicants, including those Mauritians who are abroad.

As regards applications to be made at Curepipe and Flacq test centres, the Commissioner of Police has informed that same is under consideration and will be implemented shortly when proper logistics (computers, IT equipment, etc.) and appropriate infrastructure are made available.

DEEP SEA ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION – DEEP SEA DIVING – ACTIONS & REGULATIONS

(No. B/1076) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) 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 deep sea ecosystem, he will state the actions Government proposes to take for the protection thereof and, in particular, to regulate deep sea diving to prevent deep sea devastation having regard to the vital role thereof in our global life support.

Reply (The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping): I wish to inform the House that the deep-sea ecosystem refers to the deeper parts of the ocean, especially those beyond the edge of the continental shelf. The deep-sea is the largest habitat on earth. The area reaches over 4,000 metres in depth and covers 53% of the sea surface, which in turn covers 71% of the world's surface. It is a predominantly dark and cold environment, with much lower productivity than shallower ones.

The Albion Fisheries Research Centre of my Ministry conducts deep-sea scientific research activities including, research on deep-sea hydrothermal vents, which are authorised with specific conditions that include the protection of the marine environment.

These conditions include –

- no harmful substances and/or explosives should be used;
- no drilling should be undertaken;
- all research activities should be carried out in such a way that no ‘collateral’ damage is caused to the marine environment;

- no marine organism should be harmed, stressed or harassed during the research;
- no discharge or dumping of any waste should be permitted at any time;
- no bottom trawling and dredging should be allowed in the EEZ of the Republic of Mauritius, due to its negative impact on the marine ecosystem. This is in line with the Fisheries and Marine Resources (Exploratory Fishing) Regulations 2022;
- collection of any marine organism or coral is not allowed unless authorised for specific purposes, and
- collection of any marine organism from historically important wrecks and archaeological sites that may result in irreversible damage is not allowed.

With regard to deep-sea development projects, all of these projects need to go through the Environmental Impact Assessment process, so that all mitigation aspects are taken into consideration to protect the marine environment.

With regard to part (b) of the question namely, regulating deep sea diving, I presume the hon. Member is making reference to recreational scuba diving which is a highly demanded activity, especially by tourists seeking underwater adventures.

I am informed that off-lagoon recreational scuba diving activities are mostly conducted in depths ranging from 12 to 20 metres and which are regulated by the Tourism Authority based on international standards.

As part of the Guidelines for off-lagoon recreational scuba diving, I am informed by the Tourism Authority that –

- (i) every craft meant for recreational diving activities should hold a valid pleasure craft licence issued by the Authority and the licensee should adhere to the Environmental Guideline No. 21 Nautical Centres of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change;
- (ii) when anchoring the craft, the skipper should take all necessary precautions to avoid any damage to coral reefs by faulty anchorage;
- (iii) a pre-dive briefing is conducted with all participants, informing the latter of the characteristics of local marine life of the site, amongst others;
- (iv) no corals, shells or marine organisms should be removed from the site unless prior authorisation has been sought from relevant authorities;

- (v) no marine organism, dead or alive should be imported to the site except where coral farming projects are underway and authorised by relevant authorities;
- (vi) feeding of fish is not allowed;
- (vii) all measures should be taken by the licensee to ensure that the marine ecosystem is not disturbed or damaged;
- (viii) divers should test their buoyancy over sandy areas, not on corals or reef;
- (ix) precautions should be taken to avoid coral trampling;
- (x) participants should never walk on reef surfaces;
- (xi) participants should avoid kicking up sand from the bottom;
- (xii) participants should not pick up or handle reef flora and fauna (or relocate for photographic purposes) unless prior authorisation has been sought from the relevant authorities;
- (xiii) participants should refrain from using carelessly noise emitting devices above or below water except calls for attracting attention in case of emergency, and
- (xiv) participants should stay clear of organisms and should not block or alter their natural path.

I am also placing the complete set of Guidelines issued by the Tourism Authority with respect to recreational Scuba diving in the Library of the National Assembly.

I am further informed by the Tourism Authority that, as at date, 70 commercial pleasure craft licences for scuba diving have been granted to diving instructors.

The Tourism Authority ensures that the diving instructors are holders of recognised Scuba Diving Certificates, such as the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) Certification which provides evidence that they are themselves trained in sustainable and responsible diving, to protect the deep-sea ecosystem.

It is good to point out that the tourists are more environmentally conscious, be it on land or at sea.

Besides, on 26 July 2023, we are celebrating the World Mangrove Day, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, where a hundred of tourists will be participating in the plantation of mangrove.

CHAMP DE MARS RACING TRACK – ALLEGED SABOTAGE

(No. B/1077) 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 inquiry initiated into the alleged sabotage of the racing track of the Champ de Mars on the eve of the Maiden Cup Day last year, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to PQ B/1074 at the Sitting of Tuesday 15 November 2022, wherein the facts and circumstances of the case relating to the alleged sabotage of the racing track of the Champ de Mars on the eve of the Maiden Cup Day in 2022 had been elaborated.

During the course of inquiry by the Police, three persons were arrested. One of the accused was released on the same day after enquiry and the other two were provisionally charged for the offence of “Attempt to torture animal”. One of them was subsequently released upon furnishing a surety of Rs10,000 and a recognisance of Rs50,000.

Regarding the second accused, the provisional charge was subsequently struck out as no *prima facie* evidence had been established against him.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that inquiry by the Central Crime Investigation Department had been completed and the case file was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice on 18 April 2023. Subsequently, on 26 June 2023, the Director of Public Prosecutions referred the case back to the Police with queries and requested for further clarifications. On 05 July 2023, the Police resubmitted the case file to the Director of Public Prosecutions anew after addressing the issues.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that in a bid to prevent any such recurrence, Police has increased vigilance at the Champ de Mars through frequent patrols by local Police and the Emergency Response Service (ERS).

MBC – RADIO EQUIPMENT – TENDER EXERCISE – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/1078) Mr N. Bodha (Second 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 recent acquisition of a radio equipment by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the –

- (a) date for the launching of the tender thereof, indicating the –
 - (i) number of bids received;

- (ii) name of the successful bidder, and
- (iii) contract value thereof, and
- (b) number of overseas missions effected by the management of the Corporation in relation thereto.

Reply: In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that a tender exercise for the supply of New Hardware for Live Radio, Studio Automation Software and Transmission RDS System, including Supply, Installation, Configuration and In-House Training, both operational and technical as well as Commissioning of the MBC Moka Mauritius and MBC Citronelle Rodrigues, was carried out through open international advertised bidding on the e-Procurement System. In this context, invitation for bids was launched by the MBC on 21 April 2022. Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade was, on 22 April 2022, requested to disseminate a Notice of Advertisement to all missions accredited to the Government of Mauritius. In addition, publication to the local written Press was made by the MBC on 23 and 24 April 2022.

In regard to part (a)(i) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that, as at the closing of the bids on 07 June 2023, three bidders responded to the exercise, namely –

- (i) Auditech SA of Switzerland;
- (ii) Multimedia Conseil and Win-Group of France, and
- (iii) AEQ of Spain.

I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that bidder AEQ did not submit the Technical Compliance Sheet which is considered as a mandatory requirement as per the Procurement Policy Office and was therefore not retained. Thus, there were only two responsive bidders with Multimedia Conseil and Win-Group being the lowest one.

In regard to parts (a)(ii) and (iii) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that the Bid Evaluation Committee and the Tender Committee recommended the award of the contract to the Joint Venture Multimedia Conseil and Win-Group, which, I have indicated, was the lowest bidder, for the sum of Euro one million, one hundred and eighty-nine thousand, eight hundred and thirty-eight and thirteen cents (Euro 1,189,838.13), approximately Rs56.9 m., based on the exchange rate as at 07 June 2022.

However, as the quoted price of the lowest evaluated responsive bidder exceeded the approved estimated cost of the project, and as recommended by the Tender Committee, a negotiation panel was set up by the MBC, in line with Directive 61 of the Procurement Policy Office to discuss with the responsive bidder in order to obtain a better offer and to reduce the percentage deviation to a lower value.

Following successful negotiation, the contract was awarded to Multimedia Conseil and Win-Group at a discounted price of Euro 1,188,000, approximately Rs56.8 m., based on the exchange rate as at 07 June 2022. Furthermore, the bidder also proposed to include in the contract on site training for two MBC technical staff at a cost of Euro 6,018, excluding air tickets.

I am informed by the MBC that this procurement exercise for the acquisition of the new radio equipment has been undertaken in full compliance with the Public Procurement Act, Procurement Regulations and Directives issued by the Procurement Policy Office.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the MBC that no overseas mission was effected by the management of the Corporation in relation to this radio project. However, as part of the tender requirements of the project, two technical officers of the Corporation attended a factory training in Germany and France from 24 to 28 April 2023.

According to the implementation plan, the project is expected to be completed by September 2023.

MR R. P. M. – FATAL ROAD ACCIDENT – INQUIRY

(No. B/1079) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the death of Mr R. P. M. which occurred on Sunday 02 July 2023 at Union Park resulting from a fatal road accident, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that enquiry into the case is proceeding.

MBC – VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT SCHEME

(No. B/1081) Mr N. Bodha (Second 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 Voluntary Retirement Scheme recently implemented by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the number of employees who have –

- (a) opted therefor, and
- (b) been re-employed on a contractual basis, indicating the new responsibilities assigned thereto, if any.

Reply: I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that with a view to improving the financial situation of the Corporation, the MBC has embarked on a series of cost saving strategies, one of which was precisely the implementation of a Voluntary Retirement Scheme for the staff of the MBC who are aged 55 years and above.

An exercise was accordingly carried out by the MBC in order to obtain the exact number of officers in post who would be eligible to proceed on voluntary retirement. The exercise revealed that there was a total of 128 MBC officers, that is, 100 in the age bracket 55 to 60 years and 28 officers in the age bracket 60 to 64 years.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that following this exercise, 58 officers, that is, 46 officers in the age bracket 55 to 60 years and 12 officers in the age bracket 60 to 64 years, expressed their willingness and the MBC Board agreed to allow them to proceed on voluntary retirement.

It is apposite for me to point out that those officers expressed their willingness to proceed on voluntary retirement on their own volition and several of them were Officer-in-Charge of Departments and seasoned officers. Furthermore, this VRS exercise will enable the MBC to make a total saving of around Rs357.9 m. representing payment of their salaries and benefits that the MBC would have had to pay up to their retirement.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that, out of the 58 employees who opted for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, five have been re-employed by the MBC on a contractual and project-based basis for a period of one year on new terms and conditions. I am further informed that four of the officers are being required to perform the same duties and one of them has been entrusted with additional responsibilities.

I must also point out that the services of these five former employees have been enlisted as a temporary measure to ensure the smooth operation of a few Departments of the MBC during the transition period.

ALLEGED CONSTITUENCY CLERK EMPLOYMENT – ENQUIRY PROGRESS

(No. B/1082) 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 inquiry initiated into the statement made by Mrs S. K. against Mr Y. S., for the alleged fictitious employment of the former as Constituency Clerk of the latter, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand, indicating when Mr Y. S. was last interviewed by the Police.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to Parliamentary Question B/1082 of Tuesday 15 November 2022 on the same subject matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Thursday 24 December 2020, following instructions from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, an enquiry was initiated in connection with alleged fictitious employment of Mrs S.K., by hon. Y.S.

On Saturday 09 January 2021, a statement was accordingly recorded from Mrs S.K. and on Tuesday 11 February 2021, the case file was submitted to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice. Queries raised by that office were attended to by the Police.

Thereafter, as requested by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on Friday 16 September 2022, the Police recorded a statement from hon. Y.S. on Monday 07 November 2022 in the company of his barrister, and the file was again referred to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on Friday 11 November 2022 for advice.

On Thursday 23 March 2023, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions submitted additional queries to the Police which were addressed and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions was accordingly informed on 06 April 2023.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions submitted its advice on 19 May 2023, and the Police recorded a statement from hon. Y.S. on Monday once again on 29

May 2023 in the company of his barrister. The file was referred anew to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on Tuesday 30 May 2023.

On Tuesday 06 June 2023, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions reverted back to the Police with additional queries. On Friday 23 June 2023, a further statement was recorded from hon. Mr Y.S. with respect to the queries raised and the file has been submitted anew to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS – 5 CREDITS – 2015-2022

(No. B/1108) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether in regard to the School Certificate Examinations, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examination Syndicate, information as to the number of students who sat therefor for each of the year 2015 to 2022, indicating the number thereof who obtained 5 or more credits, including a credit in the three core subjects.

Reply: I am placing a copy of the information regarding the results of SC Examinations from 2015 to 2022 obtained from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate in the Library of the National Assembly.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF DISABLED PERSONS BOARD - COMPOSITION

(No. B/1109) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board, she will state the –

- (a) current composition thereof, indicating the –
 - (i) name of the Chairperson, and
 - (ii) total allowances paid to each member thereof since their nomination to date;
- (b) number of disabled persons trained and placed in employment since January 2020 to date, gender wise, and
- (c) budget allocated thereto for the financial years 2020 to 2023.

(Withdrawn)

CAMP MARCELIN - FOOTBALL GROUND -CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1110) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a football ground at Camp Marcelin, he will state where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): I am informed by the District Council of Flacq that the proposed construction of a football ground at Camp Marcelin was earmarked in Budget 2022/2023 as Project Under Preparation. The project consists of a football ground and a sub hall and is within the jurisdiction of the Village Council of Camp Ithier.

A plot of land to the extent of 3A48 has been vested into the District Council of Flacq on 12 June 2023. Upon vesting of the plot of land, financial clearance was sought on 13 June 2023 to enable the District Council of Flacq to proceed with the procurement exercise for the construction of both the football ground and the sub hall.

On 04 July 2023, financial clearance was received and the District Council of Flacq is now finalising the bidding documents.

The District Council of Flacq has invited bids for the project on 12 July 2023 and the closing date for submission of bids has been scheduled for 14 August 2023 and bid opening would be done on 15 August 2023.

If successfully awarded, the works are expected to start by October 2023 and completed in 10 months' time.

PORT – FISHING VESSELS – FIRE OUTBREAK

(No. B/1111) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the recent fire outbreak on fishing vessels anchored in the Port, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number of reported incidents thereof, indicating where matters stand as to the inquiries initiated thereinto, and
- (b) cost of damages sustained as a consequence thereof.

Reply: (The Prime Minister): I take it that the hon. Member is referring to fire outbreaks on fishing vessels which occurred during the years 2022 and 2023.

In accordance with Section 62 of the Ports Act, in the event of a fire outbreak, the Mauritius Ports Authority is mandated to provide fire and emergency service as it deems

necessary for the purpose of extinguishing fires and preserving or protecting life, property and the environment.

I am informed by the Acting Director General that on 23 July 2022, at 10.37 hours, the Port Emergency Services of the Mauritius Port Authority was notified of a fire outbreak at the premises of Taylor Smith Co Ltd. A response team was mobilised immediately on the incident site and it was noted that fishing vessel Ruey Chien Tsai 112, which was already declared as a wreck, was on fire in the dry dock at Taylor Smith Co Ltd.

A team from the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service was also mobilised on site at 10.46 hours to assist the response team of the Mauritius Ports Authority in the firefighting operation. The fire was subdued at 17.30 hours.

Based on a preliminary investigation, it was found that the fire occurred during a dismantling operation of the wreck at the dock yard of Taylor Smith Co Ltd.

It was reported that there was no casualty and damage to property.

CWA – REFORM & GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

(No. B/1112) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the proposed in-depth reform of the Central Water Authority, he will state where matters stand, indicating the measures envisaged to improve good governance practices thereat.

Reply: As the House is aware, several institutional reforms have been proposed for the Central Water Authority over years with limited success. I am informed that on the basis of strategic priorities of the organisation, including *inter alia* water efficiency, modernisation, infrastructure development and financial sustainability, a transformation plan containing a number of reform initiatives have been implemented at the CWA.

In September 2020, a Non-Revenue Water Management Cell was set up at the CWA with the objectives *inter alia* of reducing the current Non-Revenue Water to an economically acceptable level, improving the network efficiency through active leakage management and improving the management and monitoring of the water network. Several actions have been initiated including the replacement of defective meters to reduce commercial losses, more regular leak detection exercises and replacement of defective production meters, among others.

In the same vein, the funds have been provided in the current budget, to the tune of Rs900 m., to the CWA to implement pipe replacement programmes over the island on a priority basis. This is expected to enhance the assets of the CWA, reduce the Non-Revenue Water level and improve service.

In order to modernise its operations, the CWA has embarked on the development of a comprehensive Telemetry System covering all water production, transmission and storage facilities and centralising basic operational data at a control centre. A final design report has been submitted. It is expected that the *Agence Francaise de Développement (AFD)* would finance the implementation of the Telemetry System which will, among others, allow for remote monitoring and controlling of any abnormal water flow.

In addition, CWA is also working on the appointment of a Transaction Advisor in respect of a PPP project for the digitalisation and automation of its operations and for smart meters across the island. It is further expected that more functions at the CWA would be computerised in the near future.

Several measures have been taken to improve operations at CWA, whether in terms of strengthening of the human resource team, acquisition of new equipment and facilities, or decentralisation of services. As for infrastructure development for improved water services, projects are ongoing regarding the construction and upgrading of Water Treatment Plants, construction of Service Reservoirs and installation and commissioning of Containerised Pressure Filtration plants, among others. Notwithstanding the above, a request has also been made to the World Bank to revisit its initial institutional reform proposal of the CWA.

My Ministry is finalising the preparation of a Water Resources Bill, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, which has as main object to provide a legal framework for the sustainable integrated management, protection, development, efficient use and conservation of water resources in Mauritius. The Bill will also bring amendments to other related enactments and to the role and functioning of the agencies operating in the water sector.

With regard to governance issues, it is to be highlighted that the CWA is governed by its Board set up in accordance with the CWA Act and the Board follows the principles of good governance laid out in the Code of Corporate Governance. I am informed that relevant sub committees have been set up under the Board, namely the HR Committee, Finance Committee, Audit and Risk Committee and Corporate Governance Committee which are functional.

**MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE STANDING COMMITTEE - MR L. N. -
RESIGNATION**

(No. B/1113) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee, he will state –

- (a) the reasons for the resignation of Mr L. N., former Chairperson thereof, indicating the date he last met him, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for a reform thereof with a view to making its findings public.

(Withdrawn)

**SUBRAMANIA BHARATI EYE HOSPITAL – HEALTH CARE
ASSISTANT’S DEATH – INQUIRY**

(No. B/1114) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the death of one Health Care Assistant on 21 June 2023, posted at the Subramania Bharati Eye Hospital, he will state if an inquiry has been initiated to ascertain the circumstances thereof and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: I seize this opportunity to convey my deepest sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

My Ministry has not initiated any inquiry in regard to the demise of the Health Care Assistant.

I am informed by the Regional Health Director of Jeetoo Hospital, who is also responsible for the Subramania Bharati Eye Hospital, that the Medical Superintendent, the Nursing Administrator and the Nursing Supervisor do rounds in different departments twice daily to ensure the smooth running of the units. Any request made by the staff is dealt by the respective supervisor or referred to higher authorities, if need be.

It is to be noted that at no point in time, the said staff or her colleagues approached the Medical Superintendent with any request or complaint from the Department where she was working.

Recently, as per existing practice, several meetings have been held at the said hospital allowing Heads of Departments the opportunity to inform of any difficulty being faced in the respective departments. Any such issues have been dealt with promptly.

MOGAS & GAS OIL – IMPORTATION – PRICING DETAILS

(No. B/1115) **Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the importation of petroleum products since January to June 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information for each consignment as to the –

- (a) actual price paid for Mogas and Gas Oil;
- (b) account into which the gain realised, if any, between the Platt reference and the actual price, has been credited, and
- (c) freight paid therefor, giving details thereof.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, information on the actual price paid for Mogas and Gas Oil for each consignment from January to June 2023 has been placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards part (b) of the question, any gain made between the actual price paid for a tanker and the approved reference price in the price structures of Mogas and Gas Oil is credited into the Price Stabilisation Account.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the State Trading Corporation has a supply contract for the procurement of petroleum products on a Delivery-At-Place basis. The eventual price to be paid to the supplier is the Platts price plus the premium which is inclusive of the freight element.

The Delivery-At-Place premium is an all-inclusive charge comprising the freight costs, the supplier's margin, insurance and other ancillary costs such as port charges, bunkers, tank cleaning and preparation, security team fee/armed guards if necessary, and contamination risk among others.

As mentioned earlier, the premium element comprises several items and the quantum for each item is not detailed in the tender document and the premium is quoted as one cost item and for the current contract, the premium paid is USD164.05 per metric ton of Mogas and USD18.22 per barrel of Gas Oil.

CASINOS DE MAURICE – REDUNDANCY PLAN – PRIVATISATION

(No. B/1116) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the *Casinos de Maurice*, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to –

- (a) if the sale thereof is being envisaged and, if so, indicate if a redundancy plan has been worked out for the 700 employees thereof, and
- (b) the amount of consultancy fees paid to KPMG in the context of the proposed privatization thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 3 – PUBLIC ROADS – ABANDONED VEHICLES – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/1117) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to abandoned vehicles on public roads, in Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East, he will state if he has been made aware of the increasing number thereof and, if so, indicate the urgent remedial measures to be taken to address same.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police informed that for the period May 2022 to 30 June 2023, 8 complaints have been received on abandoned vehicles on public roads in the Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East. After preliminary actions taken to identify the owners, five abandoned vehicles were removed by the owners themselves, one by the Police and two were under enquiry to establish ownership. Moreover, a survey conducted on 13 July 2023 throughout the Constituency No. 3 by the *Police de L'Environnement* and the Municipal City Council of Port Louis revealed abandonment of a total of 26 vehicles.

The latter also informed that the Police is empowered to remove or arrange for the removal of abandoned vehicles on public roads as per provisions made under the Road Traffic (Removal of Vehicles) Regulations 1962. The *Police de L'Environnement* may serve an eyesore abatement notice, under Section 89(1) of the Environmental Protection Act, requiring the owner to remove the abandoned vehicle within a period not exceeding 30 days from the day the notice is served. The *Police de L'Environnement* is working in collaboration with the Municipal City Council of Port Louis to remove these abandoned vehicles.

As regard the abandoned vehicles, some 107 vehicles have been collected by the Police and temporarily stored at La Laura Transfer Station to be ultimately disposed of by the Commissioner of Police.

The Solid Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change commissioned a feasibility study with the assistance of European Union's Africa RISE to conduct a comprehensive technical and economic feasibility study for the setting up and Operation of an End-of-Life Vehicle Dismantling and Recycling Facility.

The study highlighted that the operation of such a facility is feasible and has recommended, amongst others, some amendments to be made to the current Road Traffic Act –

- (i) to prevent people from abandoning their end-of-life vehicles on roads causing obstruction and other nuisances on bare lands or other public places;
- (ii) to deal with seriously damaged vehicles that will be declared as “total loss” by insurance companies, and
- (iii) to ensure that the abandoned and “total loss” vehicles are channeled to licenced End-of-Life Dismantling and Recycling Facility which should possess a Preliminary Environment Report.

Furthermore, a Committee has been set up at the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail to bring the necessary legislation for Total Loss Road Vehicles. Officers of the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry, together with other stakeholders, form part of the Committee.

The Solid Waste Management Division is working on the necessary Regulations for the issue of licences regarding the setting up and operation of End-of-Life Vehicle Dismantling and Recycling Facility.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 3 – ROADS & DRAINS PROJECTS – FUNDS

(No. B/1118) 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 projects undertaken by his Ministry in Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East since 2020 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number of roads, drains and amenities projects completed and the amount disbursed therefor, and
- (b) forthcoming projects in current financial year, indicating the funds earmarked therefor.

Reply: Since 2020 to date, 42 projects have been implemented by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development for some Rs814 m. and a project for Rs135 m. is ongoing in Constituency No. 3, that is, for a total amount of Rs950 m.

The National Development Unit implemented –

- (i) 23 road projects for an amount of Rs20 m.;
- (ii) 03 drain projects for an amount of Rs23 m., and
- (iii) 04 amenities projects for an amount of Rs20 m.

The Road Development Authority, on its part, undertook 12 road projects relating to the construction of the flyover at Quay D, construction of an additional lane along M2, milling and resurfacing works along M1, M2, A2 and B32 and construction of a foot bridge – near Nicolay Bridge, for a total amount of Rs751 m.

Moreover, the project ‘Upgrading of Canal Anglais’ for an amount of Rs135 m. has almost been completed. The scope of works comprised, amongst others, the construction of 350 metres of new reinforced concrete drain, construction of new pedestrian walkways, installation of new fencing works, geotechnical investigations, replacement and restoring of damaged concrete surface and sections and general cleaning of the canal. The project is expected to be completed in August 2023.

With regard to part (b) of the question, 12 drain projects, 17 road projects and three amenities projects to the tune of Rs522 m. have been earmarked to be implemented by my Ministry during Financial Year 2023/2024.

CAP MALHEUREUX RELAY SHELTER – ABUSE ALLEGATION – INQUIRY

(No. B/1119) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Cap Malheureux Relay Shelter, also known as *l’Oiseau du Paradis*, she will state if she has been made aware of an allegation of abuse on a six-year-old boy on Saturday 06 May 2023 and, if so, indicate the date the –

- (a) child was taken to the hospital, and
- (b) matter was reported to the Police.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that this matter was only revealed following intervention and enquiry initiated by officers of the Licensing and Enforcement Section of my Ministry on 17 May 2023.

Moreover, the National Children's Council conducted an internal enquiry which revealed that two minors of Cap Malheureux Relay Shelter were subjected to punishment by two caregivers.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the two minors were conveyed to SSRN Hospital on 26 and 27 May 2023, respectively, where they received the necessary treatment. Moreover, my Ministry has provided psychological support to both minors.

As for part (b) of the question, the matter was reported to Grand Bay Police Station on 27 May 2023, bearing OB No. 2195/2023 and 2196/2023.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 07 June 2023 both caregivers appeared before the Rivière du Rempart District Court on a provisional charge of 'causing harm to a child'. They were both granted bail on the same day after furnishing each a surety of Rs2,000 and a recognizance for the sum of Rs15,000.

I am also informed by the National Children's Council that both child caregivers have been suspended from duty as from 11 July 2023.

The enquiry is still under progress.

DRUG CONSUMPTION – MINORS – SURVEY

(No. B/1120) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to drug consumption amongst minors, she will state if her Ministry has conducted any survey thereinto, indicating the –

- (a) actions taken to assist the addicted minors to quit the dependency thereof, and
- (b) support extended to the families thereof.

Reply: No survey with regard to drug consumption among minors has been conducted at the level of my Ministry. However, a National Survey among people who use drugs conducted by the National Drug Secretariat was launched by the hon. Prime Minister in February 2022.

As regards part (a) of the question, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, in close collaboration with other stakeholders, such as the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, support programmes geared towards helping the addicted minors to quit their dependency on drug consumption.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness, through its Harm Reduction Section also known as the Harm Reduction Unit, implements two strategic pillars of the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023 notably the drug demand reduction and harm reduction. The main objective of the Harm Reduction Unit is to fight the drug scourge and all of its adverse effects on drug users, the general public, as well as non-drug users.

Moreover, the Nenuphar Centre which was set up in August 2018 at Long Mountain Hospital, caters for minors and young people under the age of 23 who use drugs. It has a bed capacity of 10 and offers residential treatment and rehabilitation services.

The services are offered in full confidentiality to all People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) and are tailor-made with respect to the type of drug of concern.

Additionally, services such as assistance, medico-psychosocial support which includes detoxification, after-care and involve family, friends and social workers are being offered at 5 Methadone Day Care Centres throughout the island. The Day Care Centres are found at Sainte Croix, Cassis, Mahebourg and the remaining two at Frangipane and Orchidée Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre at Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre, Beau Bassin.

All age groups can attend the centres as per their accessibility to their place of residence and minors/young adults can also be seen first in these centres and referred if necessary to other rehabilitation centres for treatment and care.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness is also conducting an extensive anti-drug campaign throughout the island targeting the youth in and out of school, the workforce and the community at large. These are done through the following –

- Awareness and educational sessions at schools;
- Sensitization programmes in the community and workplace, and
- Radio and TV programmes.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness is in charge of the Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drugs in collaboration with a number of stakeholders, including my Ministry, the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, the Police Department, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, the Mauritius Sports Council, and Non-Governmental Organisations and the National Drug Secretariat is in charge of overseeing the project's overall cooperation. As at date, the Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drugs has reached 672 participants in 26 regions around the island.

As regards part (b) of the question, this Ministry recognises the critical role that families play in the recovery process of individuals struggling with drug addictions and

officers of my Ministry provide an array of support to families of drug users which include counselling, psycho-social support and supportive counselling to parents in cases where conflict arises due to minor's behavior and provision for legal advice when required. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare also refers cases to the Ministry of Health and Wellness for treatment and to the Police Department in cases of theft and violence by addicted minors.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness, through the Addiction Unit, set up in each Health Region provides assistance to all categories of age group including minors and young adults who can attend these units as accessible to their place of residence.

The Drug Addiction Units are found at Long Mountain Hospital, Dr. B. C. Hospital, Flacq, Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, Victoria Hospital and Mahebourg Hospital. In year 2022, the five regional Addiction Treatment Units reported an attendance of 5,693 patients and 56 cases where the major drug of concern was reported to be New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) known as synthetic drugs.

CHILD ILL-TREATMENT – CASES REPORTED & INVESTIGATION

(No. B/1121) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child ill-treatment, she will state the number of –

- (a) reported cases thereof since 2020 to date, indicating the –
 - (i) number thereof investigated, and
 - (ii) outcome thereof, and
- (b) officers of the Child Development Unit attending to the cases thereof.

(Withdrawn)

AMCCA – MRS Y.B.R – CONTRACT TERMINATION – ENQUIRY

(No. B/1122) Mr F. David (First 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 Mrs Y. B. R., President of the Air Mauritius Cabin Crew Association, he will state if her contract of employment has been terminated and, if so, indicate if an enquiry has been initiated by his Ministry to ascertain compliance with the legislation regulating termination of employment.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that, in an e-mail dated 11 July 2023, the Secretary of Air Mauritius Cabin Crew Association (AMCCA) informed my Ministry that the contract of employment of Mrs Y.B.R. was terminated on Monday 10 July 2023 on

grounds of misconduct and a copy of the letter of termination dated Monday 10 July 2023 from management of Air Mauritius Ltd was also submitted.

The Secretary of AMCCA has, in that correspondence, requested "the views and advice" of my Ministry "on the legality of such a letter where trade union activities are being used to fire employees".

Allow me first of all to draw the attention of the House that, by virtue of section 64 (2) (a) of the Workers' Rights Act 2019, no employer shall terminate a worker's agreement for reasons related to an alleged misconduct, unless the worker is given an opportunity to answer any charge made against him in writing and in an oral hearing.

I am informed that, through a letter dated 03 May 2023, management of Air Mauritius Ltd had requested Mrs Y.B.R. for written explanations regarding statements she had given on live radio and social media platform on 25 April 2023. I am further informed that Mrs Y.B.R. was also convened to a disciplinary hearing on Wednesday 05 July 2023.

Air Mauritius Ltd has therefore complied with the section 64 (2) of the Workers' Rights Act before terminating the employment of Mrs Y.B.R.

Following the request for advice and upon the request of my Ministry, Mrs Y.B.R. called at the Conciliation and Mediation Section of my Ministry on Wednesday 12 July 2023. During the meeting, Mrs Y.B.R. was informed of the various options available to her following her termination of employment. Mrs Y.B.R. informed that she will not require any intervention of my Ministry at this stage.

During the meeting at my Ministry on Wednesday 12 July 2023, Mrs Y.B.R. was also apprised that, pursuant to her termination of employment, she could make an application for the Transition Unemployment Benefit (TUB) under the Workfare Programme, in accordance with section 84 (1) and (2) of the Workers' Rights Act 2019.

I am also informed that, on Friday 14 July 2023, Mrs Y.B.R. registered a complaint at Vacoas Labour Office regarding her alleged unjustified dismissal and her claim for reinstatement. However, she also requested to stay action thereon since she intends to consult her legal counsel on her future course of action. She also filed an application for TUB, which is being processed.

My Ministry is following up the matter.

NATIONAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION – EXAMINATIONS –

PASS MARK

(No. B/1123) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the National Certificate of Education

Examinations, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to the pass mark for each subject therefor for each cohort that has been examined annually since its inception in 2021.

Reply: The National Certificate of Education (NCE) is awarded following the end of cycle assessment for the lower secondary level (Grade 9) and is pitched at Level 2 on the National Qualifications Framework.

I am informed by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) that since its inception, the minimum pass mark for NCE Examinations for all subjects has been 30 marks.

UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS – FINANCIAL SITUATION – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/1124) 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 University of Mauritius, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the financial situation thereof, indicating if it is in deficit and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) quantum thereof over the past three financial years, and
- (b) remedial measures envisaged.

Reply: I am informed that for the last three financial years, 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the UoM did not have any financial difficulty from a cashflow perspective.

The UoM had a closing balance of Rs376.1 m., Rs335.1 m. and Rs337.4 m. for financial years 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, respectively.

The audited financial statements of the UoM depict the following –

- (i) 2019/2020: Surplus of Rs2.5 m.;
- (ii) 2020/2021: Deficit of (Rs27.2 m.), and
- (iii) 2021/2022: Deficit of (Rs149.5 m.)

This is highlighted at page 4 of the Audited Financial Statements already tabled at the National Assembly.

The deficits for the two years (2020/2021 and 2021/2022) can be explained by the fact that financial statements are prepared in compliance with the International Public

Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and provisions stipulated in the Statutory Bodies (Accounts and Audit) Act which requires the inclusion of the following items –

- (i) Retirement pension obligations;
- (ii) Accumulated vacation leave;
- (iii) Accumulated Sick Leave;
- (iv) Passage Benefits and others.

These are book accounting principles for which provisions must be made but which may not be incurred in the same financial year.

An example to explain the above is as follows –

Every staff is entitled to yearly passage benefits of 5% of their annual salary but there is no certainty that all will indeed avail of the passage benefits entitlement in any financial year. However, this amount has to be accounted for, as it represents a financial commitment.

The same principles apply for other items mentioned previously.

JADOO BRIDGE, CONGOMAH – UPGRADING

(No. B/1125) 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 Jadoo Bridge in Congomah, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: The NDU had appointed VYYAASS Consulting Engineer Ltd in 2017 for the design and supervision of the project ‘Upgrading of Jadoo Bridge in Congomah.’ A draft Detailed Design Report (DDR) was submitted by the Consultant in February 2018 which warranted, *inter alia*, the demolition of the existing narrow bridge and construction of a new one of a larger width and requiring diversion of the river as well as the acquisition of private land, amongst others.

The Consultant proposed a twin box culvert structure for the new bridge in its DDR. However, the LDA was not agreeable to the proposal and instead, requested for a review in design with a single span structure. The Consultant did not agree to review its design and as such, the consultancy contract of VYYAASS Consulting Engineer Ltd was terminated in April 2022.

Subsequently, on 19 April 2022, Luxconsult (Mtius) Ltd was appointed as new Consultant for the project by the NDU. The latter submitted a Preliminary Design Report

(PDR) on 08 June 2022 and recommended that a geotechnical investigation be carried out prior to finalising the design. In this respect, following a bidding exercise carried out by the NDU, a contract for undertaking the geotechnical investigation was awarded to Water Research Co. Ltd in December 2022 for an amount of around Rs950,000. The investigative report was received on 20 March 2023 and the Consultant submitted its DDR on 12 July 2023. This is currently being examined by the LDA.

The scope of works for the project include –

- (a) demolition of existing drains and existing culvert;
- (b) construction of a new reinforced concrete bridge of 10 metres span, height of 4 metres and width about 11.5 metres, including footpath on both sides with provision for handrails;
- (c) vertical and horizontal realignment of existing road profile inclusive of asphalt works over about 125 metres;
- (d) construction of retaining wall on either side of the road;
- (e) cleaning and desilting works over about 30 metres along existing river, and
- (f) construction of 500 metres of reinforced concrete drain leading downstream of river.

Since the project has extensive components, the cost estimate is quite substantial. Accordingly, after obtaining financial clearance, the NDU is expected to proceed with the bidding exercise for the implementation of the project before the end of the current financial year.

CUREPIPE – MARKET PLACES – RODENT CONTROL

(No. B/1126) 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 proliferation of rats in the market place and other commercial areas of Curepipe, he will state if consideration will be given for a deratisation campaign to be undertaken thereat.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that market places and other areas whereat food is being sold are places where rats normally breed. There are two markets in the township, namely the Curepipe Market and Le Forum Fair. The

Curepipe market is surrounded by shops, commercial buildings and a network of drains which are also prone to rodents.

I am further informed that the Curepipe market accommodates 217 stallholders including tea hotels whereas Le Forum Fair has 565 stallholders, where victuals are also sold. The Council has put in place the following measures to prevent the proliferation of rats at the Curepipe Market and Le Forum respectively –

- (i) rodent control is carried out on a weekly basis by a private contractor whereby baits stations are placed and the baits used are regularly changed to avoid adaptation and immunisation;
- (ii) collection of refuse generated in the market such as food remains and vegetable leaves is done twice daily;
- (iii) washing of the market premises is effected on a daily basis, and
- (iv) every three months a thorough washing and disinfection is carried out including the flushing of drains.

As regards other commercial areas, the following actions are taken by the Council

–

- (i) rodent control is done by its in-house labour;
- (ii) refuse collection is done daily, and
- (iii) a dedicated team of employees undertakes cleaning of drains and rivers in the township.

OMBUDSPERSON FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES – COMPLAINTS AGAINST BANKS – 2019 TO JULY 2023

(No. B/1127) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to complaints against banks, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Ombudsperson for Financial Services, for each of the year 2019 to 2022 and from January 2023 to date, information as to the number thereof –

- (a) received;
- (b) investigated, indicating in each case the outcome thereof, and
- (c) still under investigation.

Reply: I am informed by the Office of the Ombudsperson for Financial Services that for the year 2019 to 14 July 2023, a total of 738 complaints have been received

against the banks. 313 complaints have been resolved whilst 425 are still under investigation.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the details pertaining to parts (a), (b) and (c) of the question for the year 2019 to 2022 and from January 2023 to date.

MMA – DG & CHAIRPERSON’S APPOINTMENT – DETAILS

(No. B/1128) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Mauritius Meat Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the date of appointment of the Director General and the Chairperson thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (c) terms and conditions of employment, and
- (d) salaries and other allowances drawn.

Reply: I will reply to Parliamentary Questions B/1128 and B/1134 together as they relate to the same matter.

With regard to Parliamentary Question B/1128, I understand that by “Director General”, the hon. Member is referring to the post of General Manager of the Mauritius Meat Authority. Section 8 (1) of the Meat Act 1974 provides for the appointment of the General Manager of the Mauritius Meat Authority (MMA).

Mr Z. Heera had been appointed as General Manager of the Mauritius Meat Authority by the Board on 25 January 2023 for a period of two years and the terms and conditions of his contract of employment are in line with the PRB Report 2021.

Pursuant to Section 8(1) (b) of the Meat Act 1974, the General Manager of the MMA is responsible for the execution of the policy of the Authority, the control and management of its day-to-day business and shall act in accordance with directions as he may receive from the Board.

As for the qualifications for the post of General Manager of the MMA, this is in line with the Scheme of Service.

I have been informed by the MMA on 12 July 2023 that the General Manager of the MMA has tendered a formal notice of his resignation on personal grounds with one month’s notice.

With regard to the post of Chairperson of the MMA, the latter is appointed by the Minister in line with Section 6 of the Meat Act 1974. I wish to inform the House that Mr

Kevin Ragoonath Ragnuth was appointed as Part-Time Chairperson of the MMA with effect from 24 January 2023 for a period of two years.

Coming to his terms and conditions of employment, I am further informed that, as per his contract of employment, he is entitled to a monthly board fee amounting to Rs32,000, as approved by Government following the 2021 PRB Report recommendation in respect of Statutory Boards and Committees.

ACTIVE MAURITIUS – BOARD COMPOSITION

(No. B/1129) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to Active Mauritius, he will state the –

- (a) composition of the board thereof, indicating the –
 - (i) date of nomination of each member, and
 - (ii) allowances paid thereto since October 2018 to date, and
- (b) budget allocated thereto for each financial year since 2020 to date.

Reply: I am not aware of any board set up with regard to Active Mauritius.

NATIONAL BIOMASS FRAMEWORK – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1130) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the adoption of the National Biomass Framework, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) how same will be implemented, and
- (b) if consultation has been held with the small planters to disseminate the impact thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that in Budget Speech 2019-2020, it was announced that –

"A National Biomass Framework will be developed for the use of sugar cane biomass, including cane trash, for electricity generation."

The aim of introducing a Biomass Framework is to contribute towards reaching the targeted goal of sixty percent of the renewable energy in the energy mix of the country and to gradually phase out the use of coal by 2030.

Amendments were accordingly brought to the Sugar Industry Efficiency (SIE) Act and the MCIA Act in 2021 to enable the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (MCIA), a parastatal under the aegis of my Ministry, develop the framework.

In that context, a Steering Committee was set up under my Ministry along with three sub-committees to work out and submit recommendations on the potential sources of biomass from cane, wood and proposed pricing mechanism, respectively.

I am informed that wide consultations were made with all stakeholders during the development phase of this framework, including participation of small and medium planters' representatives.

The National Biomass Framework, which was endorsed by the Government on 26 May 2023, recommends *inter alia* –

- I. that 40,000 hectares be secured for sugar cane production;
- II. a gradual increase of bagasse-based electricity up to 371 GWh by 2030;
- III. importation of wood pellets during the transitional period from coal to local biomass, and
- IV. reaching 773 GWh of electricity from renewable sources from sugar cane, wood and residue-derived fuels by 2030, representing some 22 percent of the total energy to be produced by the country.

With regard to part (a) of the question, my Ministry, in collaboration with the MCIA, is working on the setting up of two main committees, namely –

- I. a Ministerial Committee comprising the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and myself to look into the smooth implementation of all measures under the NBF, and
- II. a Pricing Committee comprising the representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, the MCIA and the Central Electricity Board (CEB) to make proposals for the price of biomass sources and the prices at which they would be passed on to the CEB.

I have also been informed that MCIA has set up an NBF Committee at its level which has started preliminary consultations with the Forestry Department and Land Use Division of my Ministry as well as the Solid Waste Division of the Ministry of

Environment and Solid Waste Management and Climate Change to gather information in connection with the implementation of this framework.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informing the House that the launching of the National Biomass Framework document was held on 26 June 2023 at the MCIA with the participation of numerous stakeholders, including representatives of small planters. The document which has been made public is available on the MCIA's website. The NBF document will also be made available on the Ministry's website.

Furthermore, I am informed that consultative meetings would be held anew with all stakeholders, including small planters' representatives to brief them on the benefits of increasing their cane production by using new or improved techniques for the production of more sugar and bagasse.

Furthermore, demonstrations on partial collection of trash will be organised by the MCIA in small planters' fields the benefits of such practice. In parallel, MCIA would develop other techniques of trash collection.

In addition, small planters, who have abandoned sugarcane production in their marginal lands, would be channelled towards Agroforestry projects where they would be provided technical and financial support for the production of woody biomass.

I wish to inform the House that measures for boosting the production of sugar cane has been put in place since 2021 as follows –

- (a) increase in the remuneration of bagasse which was paid at an equivalent rate of Rs136/ t sugar for crop 2020 to Rs3,300/ ton sugar as from crop 2021;
- (b) the setting up of a Cane Replantation Revolving Fund to the tune of Rs200 m. to ease the cash flow for the replantation of old ratoon to increase productivity. This has been increased to Rs500 m. in the Budget 2023/24;
- (c) the grant for replantation of cane by small planters has also increased from Rs50 m. to Rs75 m. in the present Budget 2023/24;
- (d) the Fertilizer Subsidy Scheme for the benefit of the small planters has been maintained, and
- (e) workshops were also held with stakeholders on soil fertility.

To further boost up the production of biomass, it was announced in Budget 2023/24 that cane trash and woody biomass delivered at the IPP gate would be valorised at Rs3.50

/kwh at par with bagasse to encourage the planters and SME's to engage more into the business of plantation, collection and processing of biomass for delivery at power plants. This means creation of green jobs, circular economy and increase in revenue for the producers.

NEW DOMESTIC WATER CONNECTIONS – PROCESSING & FEES

(No. B/1131) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to application for new domestic water connections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the –

- (a) time frame for the processing thereof, and
- (b) fee charged therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Central Water Authority (CWA) that according to its protocol, the processing of new domestic water connections comprises several stages and the average time frame for the processing thereof, can be around 21 days. It comprises the following steps –

- a) once an application is received, it is recorded in a computerised consumer service system and a reference number is given to the application and a letter is issued for processing fee;
- b) a survey is then carried out by the CWA officer;
- c) an invoice for payment is generated;
- d) the new account number is then registered by the Commercial Department of the CWA;
- e) letter of payment inclusive of deposit payable is issued to the applicant, and
- f) payment for new supply fee is effected by the applicant.

I am further informed by the CWA that the fixing of a new domestic connection takes an average of three weeks from the date of application. However, I had already informed the House in my reply to PQ B/704 at our Sitting of 06 June 2023, of the several issues that impede the processing of new water supply connections, namely, way leave from the Road Development Authority and other local authorities for fixing of new supply connection, delay by the applicant to carry out pipe laying works, bad weather conditions and technical issues amongst others.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the CWA that a non-refundable processing fee of Rs500 and a deposit fee for meter of Rs200 is charged to all applicants. An additional amount of Rs2000 is charged for connection works with

existing communication pipeline not exceeding 7 metres. A further amount of Rs750 is charged to applicants, in cases, there are road reinstatement works to be carried out.

TRESTA STAR GROUNDING – LEAVE AUTHORISATION GRANT

(No. B/1132) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the grounding of the Tresta Star in the coastal areas of Réunion Island in February 2022, he will state if the vessel was authorised by the Shipping Department of his Ministry to leave the Mauritian port area and, if so, indicate the date the authorisation granted therefor.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that Vessel Tresta Star was a double hull oil tanker built by Vijai Marine Shipyard, Vasco-Da-Gama, in Goa, India, under the supervision of the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS), which is a Classification Society for ships.

On 18 March 2019, Tresta Star, owned by Tresta Trading Ltd. based in Mauritius, was issued with a Mauritian Certificate of Registry.

MT Tresta Star was loading bunker fuel (very low sulphur fuel oil and marine gasoil) via pipelines and flexible hoses at our commercial quays. Indian Oil (Mauritius) Ltd. was providing cargo to the tanker from the land-based storage tanks situated at Mer Rouge for onward delivery to client vessels at anchorage or at berth.

Prior to cyclone Batsirai on 02 and 03 February 2022, Tresta Star had no cargo onboard and had approximately 15 cubic metres of diesel oil in her bunker tanks. The vessel was at anchor within Port Louis port limits.

In line with the Safety of life At Sea (SOLAS) Convention 1974, which allows exemptions to be granted to vessels to operate within restricted limits, such as port areas, Tresta Star was exempted from carriage of certain equipment such as anti-exposure suits, thermal protective aids and immersion suits. However, the vessel was allowed to navigate within port limits of Port Louis only.

It is to be noted that in case there is need to leave the port limits of Port Louis, the Master of the vessel should inform the Director of Shipping. At the time of the incident, the Master of the vessel did not inform the Director of Shipping that the vessel had the intention to leave the port limits, and, therefore, did not request for special permission to leave from the Director of Shipping.

Henceforth, the Captain of Tresta Star will not be allowed to work onboard Mauritian ships.

In line with the Mauritius Ports Authority's (MPA) established cyclone procedures for the port, all commercial activities are ceased after the issue of a cyclone warning class II and no tankers nor any bulk carriers are allowed to stay in the port. Vessels at berths are required to leave the port, either for their next port or taking preventive measures and take shelter outside the port, as may be required to avoid the cyclone. Consequently, MT Tresta Star which left port waters (outer anchorage) under her own propulsion on 02 February 2022 at 01.18 hours, was engaged in avoiding bad weather at high seas as a cyclone warning class III was already in force.

On 03 February 2022 at 07.30 hours, the National Coast Guard (NCG) Operations Room/Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) Mauritius informed MPA that they have received an Inmarsat C distress alert relayed by the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) of Australia, regarding vessel Tresta Star which was located between Reunion and Mauritius, at about 54 nautical miles South West of Mauritius. MRCC Mauritius tried to establish communication with the vessel on Very High Frequency (VHF) Channel 16, but there was no response.

Mauritius Radio Services (MRS) was also requested to establish communication, but to no avail. Communication was established with MRCC Reunion, which was requested to establish communication with the vessel. A mail was sent to Tresta Star at 08.00 hours to confirm whether she has any distress on board.

On 03 February 2022, at 08.46 hours, a reply was received from MRCC Reunion, through email to the effect that, according to communication established with MT Tresta Star, the vessel was having an engine failure and it was impossible for her to make course to Mauritius. She was drifting on a bearing 210 and speed 3 Knots and required immediate assistance.

The Director of Shipping contacted Inchcape Shipping, the agent of Vessel Tresta Star, and instructed him to make towing arrangements for the vessel. The agent was apprised of the presence at the material time of tug MCS Lenie off Baie du Cap and was requested to liaise with her agent, Polygreen International for necessary action. Accordingly, a Salvage Agreement was signed between Polygreen International and Tresta Trading Ltd to undertake the salvage operation of Tresta Star. Thus, salvage tug Lenie was engaged for the towing and salvage operation. At that material time, tug MCS Lenie was located off Black River.

It is to be noted that tug assistance was sought by the Director of Shipping from the MPA. However, the latter expressed its regret that no tug assistance could be extended in view of the fact that only two big tugs were in service to cater for port operations as many ships were queuing up for port services due to bad weather conditions.

On 03 February 2022 at 20.36 hours, tanker Tresta Star was found grounded at Sainte Phillippe in Reunion Island. All the 11 crew members were successfully rescued by the Reunion Authorities.

NEGLIGENCE STANDING COMMITTEE – COMPOSITION

(No. B/1133) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee, he will state –

- (a) the current composition thereof, and
- (b) if the Committee is still operational and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

MMA – DG & CHAIRPERSON'S APPOINTMENT – DETAILS

(No. B/1134) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard the General Manager of the Mauritius Meat Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the –

- (a) the name and qualifications thereof, and
- (b) terms and conditions of the employment thereof, including his salary package.

(Vide PQ No. B/1128)

VACOAS & PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – FOOTBALL PLAYGROUNDS AND PITCHES – LIGHTING FACILITIES

(No. B/1135) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the football playgrounds and pitches falling under the administration of the Municipal Town Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to the number thereof having lighting facilities, indicating the –

- (a) annual cost of maintenance thereof, and
- (b) number thereof having defective and broken lightings.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that it has 15 football playgrounds with lighting facilities and 11 mini soccer pitches with lighting facilities.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the annual cost of maintenance is Rs400,000 for both football playgrounds and mini soccer pitches.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, I am informed that –

- (i) there are 22 defective flood lights at the football grounds within the township, and
- (ii) there are 19 defective flood lights at the mini soccer pitches with the township.

I am further informed that maintenance of the lighting system in football playgrounds and mini soccer pitches is carried out by in-house labour and repairs of defective floodlights will be completed within one month's time upon availability of funds.

STATE TRADING CORPORATION – BETAMAX CASE – LEGAL FEES & RELATED EXPENSES

(No. B/1136) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the Betamax case, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the amount of money payable as legal fees and related expenses therefor by Government to date.

Reply: I am informed that, with regard to the legal fees and other related expenses paid by the State Trading Corporation with respect to the Betamax case, the amount paid are as follows –

- (a) legal fees and related expenses incurred at the High Court of India, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, the Supreme Court of Mauritius and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is Rs154,156,785;
- (b) damages paid by STC to Betamax from 2015 to date due to default under the Contract of Affreightment is Rs5.56 billion;
- (c) costs paid by STC on order of the Privy Council to Betamax on costs incurred by the latter from 2015 to date is GBP 579,227.50, and
- (d) fees paid to legal advisor for representing the State Trading Corporation before the Commission of Inquiry on Betamax is Rs832,500.

***LA CONFÉDÉRATION AFRICAINE DE FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS -
FINANCIAL SUPPORT***

(No. B/1137) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to La Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) competitions for national clubs, he will state if financial support is being extended by his Ministry for the participation of GRSE Wanderers and ASPL 2000, in the CAF Champions League and La Coupe de La Confédération de la CAF, respectively and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Reply: I am informed by the Mauritius Football Association (MFA) that the GRSE Wanderers, winners of the Super League 2022/23 and ASPL 2000, winners of the MFA Cup 2022/23, are qualified to participate in the CAF Champions League 2023/24 and CAF Confederation Cup 2023/24, respectively.

I am further informed by the MFA that there are certain mandatory requirements set by Confederation of African Football (CAF) for participation in these competitions, known as the CAF Club Licensing Regulations to which both clubs are not yet fully compliant.

However, if both clubs were to comply with all the aforementioned criteria of the CAF Club Licensing, including having a coach with a minimum qualification of a CAF B License, my Ministry would have seized this opportunity to consider assisting the two clubs in their participation in these CAF competitions.