



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2023

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 29 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 14 November 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)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY – MR NARENDRAJ VIRAHSAWMY

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with deep regret that we have learnt of the demise of Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy, former Member of Parliament, on Tuesday 07 November 2023 at the age of 81.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy, commonly known as Mr Dev Virasawmy, was born on 16 March 1942 in Quartier Militaire. He pursued his studies at the St Joseph College in Curepipe and after his School Certificate, he attended the Royal College of Port Louis to complete his secondary education. Thereafter, he proceeded to Scotland to pursue his tertiary studies in languages, literature and linguistics at the Edinburgh University and became holder of a Diploma in Applied Linguistics and a Master of Art in English.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Virahsawmy started his career in the teaching profession. Later, he joined active politics and in 1969, he became one of the founding members of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien*.

In 1970, Mr Virahsawmy contested the by-Election for Constituency No.5 - Pamplémousses and Triolet under the banner of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* and was returned to serve as Member of the then Legislative Assembly. He became the first Member of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* to be elected to serve the then Legislative Assembly.

In early 1972, Mr Virahsawmy was jailed for refusing to pay a fine for ‘contempt of court’ after making public comments regarding the then Labour-PMSD-CAM regime's handling of strike actions.

In 1973, Mr Virahsawmy founded his own political party, namely, the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien Socialiste Progressiste*. He also co-founded the trade union movement called *Fédération des Travailleurs Unis*.

In 1976, Mr Virahsawmy contested the General Election for the same Constituency No.5 - Pamplémousses and Triolet under the banner of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien Socialiste Progressiste* but was not returned.

After the breakup of the MMM in 1983, Mr Virahsawmy was one of the founders of the MSM-LABOUR-PMSD alliance which won the general elections. Mr Virahsawmy was subsequently appointed as Cultural Advisor to serve the then Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Virahsawmy was well-known for his literary work; as playwright, novel and poem writer. He was, above all, one of the fervent advocates of the Mauritian Creole in which language he wrote regularly and translated a number of English and French texts. He composed songs in Creole, some of which are today part of the Mauritian cultural and artistic heritage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few days before his demise, I had the opportunity to meet Mr Virahsawmy and we candidly discussed on a broad number of subjects including the future of the Mauritian Creole language and of the Republic of Mauritius. I can say he impressed me by his lucidity although he was very much weakened by illness and age.

The country will remember Mr Virahsawmy as a passionate militant who dedicated his life to promote and defend his ideas and ideologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request you to kindly direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the spouse and the children of Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy and to the close members of his family.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I associate myself to the tribute made by the hon. Prime Minister to late Dev Virahsawmy, former Member of Parliament and a well-known and well-loved personality in Mauritius.

Dev Virahsawmy was born in the village of Goodlands. When he turned three, there was an outbreak of polio which caused him to lose mobility in his left arm. Despite this setback, he completed his School Certificate with flying colours and through a turn of events, Dev Virahsawmy got admitted to the Royal College of Port Louis to complete his Higher School Certificate which got him admitted into Edinburgh University.

He obtained diplomas, including a diploma in higher linguistics for a dissertation entitled: "Towards a re-evaluation of the Mauritian Creole".

Dev was married to Loga and through this beautiful relationship of over 60 years came two lovely daughters, Saskia and Anushka.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after a hard fought political career, Dev focused on his love for the Mauritian Creole language making it his objective to get Mauritian Creole to be recognised not only as a language but also as an identity. Throughout his career, Dev has translated and written over 4000 literary works, be it poems, plays, books and translation of the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Holy Quran amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Dev Virahsawmy was a good friend of mine and many politicians consider him not only as a friend but also as a mentor.

On behalf of the Opposition, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to his wife Loga and daughters, Saskia and Anushka. May I also request the Acting Clerk to convey our deepest condolences to the bereaved family.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself to the tribute paid to the memory of late Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy, former Member of Parliament, by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Thank you.

Hon. Members, I have two announcements to make.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM - HOSTING

Firstly, I have to inform the House that the National Assembly will be hosting the 54th Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum from 22 to 26 November 2023 in the Sir Harilal Vaghjee Memorial Hall under the theme – “The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Coordination for Enhanced Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery Planning in the SADC Region”.

Some 110 delegates from 15 Member countries of the SADC region, including Mauritius, are expected to participate in the Plenary Assembly.

As Speaker, I will be leading the Mauritian delegation comprising the following designated hon. Members –

- (i) Hon. Ms Tour, Vice-President of the SADC PF;
- (ii) Hon. Ittoo, and
- (iii) Hon. Ms Anquetil.

In addition, five hon. Members, from both Government and the Opposition side will be nominated to attend the Plenary Assembly Session as Observers. Moreover, I have also invited the Chairperson and two Members of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to attend the said conference as Observers.

Hon. Members, I am pleased to announce that the hon. Prime Minister has kindly agreed to grace the function as Chief Guest and will deliver the opening address on Wednesday 22 November 2023.

**RULING OF TUESDAY 07 NOVEMBER 2023 – UNFOUNDED
STATEMENT**

Mr Speaker: Secondly, hon. Members will recall that on Tuesday last, I gave a ruling requesting hon. Juman to tender his unreserved apologies to the House following an unfounded statement he made to the Press on 05 November 2023 regarding the use of one of the Committee rooms of the National Assembly.

Later, after my ruling, during a Press conference, hon. Shakeel Mohamed expressed the view that I ought to have referred the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action under the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act.

I wish to bring the following clarifications.

Hon. Members, for the House to proceed under the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, the Speaker must be in presence of a Notice of Privilege Complaint under Standing Order 74(1) from a hon. Member requiring the intervention of the Speaker thereon and I must point out that no such notice had been given.

However, having regard to the serious misrepresentations of the facts by the hon. Juman, I was bound to take immediate action in view of the responsibilities conferred upon me under Standing Order 78 and I could not allow this matter to remain unattended which would otherwise bring Parliament into disrepute.

Hon. Members, I must also draw the attention of the House to the fact that during the said Press conference, hon. Shakeel Mohamed further made certain unwarranted remarks towards the Chair.

I thank you for your attention.

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

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):

- (i) The Combating of Trafficking in Persons (Amendment) Bill (No. XVII of 2023)
- (ii) The Trade (Anti-Dumping, Countervailing and Safeguard Measures) (Amendment) Bill (No. XVIII of 2023)
- (iii) The Construction Industry Authority Bill (No. XIX of 2023)

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

The Private Secondary Education (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2023.
 (Government Notice No. 168 of 2023)

C. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

The National Minimum Wage (Review) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 169 of 2023)

D. Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

The Annual Reports and Audited Financial Statements of the Irrigation Authority for the years:

- (i) 2016-2017;
- (ii) 2017-2018;
- (iii) 2018-2019, and
- (iv) 2019-2020.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

QUATRE BORNES, OLD MOKA ROAD - ST JEAN CEMETERY - FLOODING

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to cases of flooding along Old Moka Road, Quatre Bornes since January 2022 to date causing the collapse of part of the wall of the St Jean Cemetery on Wednesday 08 November 2023 and the subsequent damages caused to a number of tombs as well as to houses situated along Colville Avenue and the adjoining roads, he will state the action undertaken, if any, indicating if contingency plans have been drawn up for the evacuation of residents thereat in case of need.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition to give me the opportunity to shed light on measures being taken to mitigate the problem of flooding and accumulation of water. Indeed, there has been torrential rainfall around the island on 08 November affecting the region of St Jean, but not only at St Jean, also at Mare Tabac, Souillac, St Felix, Old Mosque Road of Chemin Grenier and some other villages in the South. However, since the question is specifically on Old Moka Road, Quatre Bornes, I will stick to it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the flooding at Old Moka Road, Quatre Bornes on 19 January and 13 March 2022, a conceptual design for preliminary measures was worked out. It comprises the construction of a retention basin within the green space along Old Moka Road in view to limiting the flows towards the cemetery. However, after further survey, it was felt that the construction of the basin could create a structural instability to the foundation of the piles of the Metro project at that locus. Accordingly, this solution was not retained.

Another alternative solution envisaged was the rehabilitation and upgrading of the existing network which would imply increasing the amount of storm water being discharged into La Ferme Reservoir via the Trianon Grosses Roches Feeder Canal. However, the Water Resources Unit was not agreeable to this solution given that the amount of water stored at La Ferme Reservoir is controlled. Accordingly, this alternative too was not retained.

Eventually, the construction of a detention basin together with an outlet along Old Moka Road was considered as a preferred solution and further studies were required with respect to its capacity and feasibility.

The project was, consequently, entrusted to the NDU. In view of the complexity of the works, the NDU appointed a consultant, Desai & Associates Ltd, under its Framework Agreement to carry out the study and design. However, due to its contractual commitments, the latter could not carry out the study within the prescribed time.

Subsequently, the NDU had no choice, but to appoint a new consultant, namely VYYAASS Consulting Engineer Ltd, to assess the optimum solution in view to mitigating the flooding at St Jean.

The consultant submitted an Urgent Works Design Report on 06 April 2023 followed by a Preliminary Design Report on 17 April 2023. On 24 April 2023, the LDA again gave its agreement to proceed with the preparation of the Detailed Design Report. On the other hand, the Water Resources Unit conveyed its no objection to the proposed design on 2 June 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the consultant submitted a first draft Detailed Design Report on 22 June 2023. Thereafter, investigative works were subsequently carried out to confirm the corridor for the construction of the proposed drain as recommended by the draft DDR. These works required an excavation of 17 trial pits along the alignment, including the excavation across the A1 Road.

The contract for the investigative works was awarded on 19 September 2023 to Gamma Construction Ltd for an amount of Rs700,000. These works started on 29 September 2023 and were completed on 27 October 2023.

I am informed that two telecom ducts of diameter 75 mm were found at a depth of 650 mm. One CWA DI pipe of diameter 300 mm was found at a depth of 1,300 mm. Accordingly, the proposed drain alignment has been maintained and the Detailed Design Report was approved on 06 November 2023.

The works comprise mainly –

- (i) raising of the road with Reinforced Concrete (RC) retaining wall along Old Moka Road over a stretch of 190 metres;
- (ii) construction of a Reinforced Concrete covered drain of dimension 2 metres by 2 metres along the green space adjoining Old Moka Road;
- (iii) construction of a culvert of size 1.5 metres deep by 2 metres wide across A1 Road, and

- (iv) construction of a drain along Motorway M1 over a stretch of 570 metres of size 1.5 metres deep by 2 metres wide which eventually discharges into Rivière Sèche.

The scope of works is being finalised and the contract for implementation is expected to be issued on the first week of December 2023 at latest. The expected duration of works is six months.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to inform the House that yesterday itself, that is, on 13 November 2023, a meeting was held under the Chair of Monseigneur Durhône at L'Evêché de Port Louis in the presence of hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Mayor of Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, the representatives of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the NDU and the LDA. The following recommendations have been agreed to –

- (a) immediate reconstruction of the boundary wall of the St Jean Cemetery in reinforced concrete by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes;
- (b) the National Infrastructure Division of my Ministry will carry out a structural assessment of the boundary wall along Old Moka Road and Broad Avenue to determine the stretch of the wall that has to be pulled down, reconstructed or reinforced;
- (c) installation of a flood gate at the main entrance of the cemetery along Old Moka Road by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes;
- (d) construction of a swale by the NDU along the green space crossing A1 Road leading towards Rivière Sèche;
- (e) in view of the historical nature of the cemetery, the L'Evêché will undertake the cladding of the reinforced concrete wall by the existing stones to maintain its original cache;
- (f) a committee chaired by the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and comprising all concerned stakeholders will meet initially on a weekly basis at the seat of the L'Evêché to monitor the progress of the works;
- (g) an assessment of the sanitary conditions of the St Jean Cemetery and its vicinity will be carried out by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and
- (h) a communiqué has been issued to inform the public of the short and medium-term measures being undertaken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the fencing of the cemetery has already been erected by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change to secure the site pending the reconstruction of the wall. Cleaning of the tombs and the cemetery will be undertaken by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and Mauri Facilities Ltd.

Moreover, the Paroisse of St Jean will undertake the rehabilitation of the tombs. I seize this opportunity to express my solidarity with the families who have been affected by this unfortunate event, including those whose relatives are buried in the St Jean Cemetery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the houses along Colville Avenue, Broad Avenue and De La Faye Avenue, there has been water ingress in the yards and few houses located in low lying areas. However, there has been no structural damage to any building thereat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to a contingency plan for the evacuation of residents, I am informed that the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act of 2016 provides for the safeguard of life of persons in danger, including evacuation of persons at risk. This measure is activated by the National Emergency Operation Command (NEOC) whenever required.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come to the last part first. On 08 November, hon. PPS Diolle gave a declaration to Radio Plus, and this is the verbatim –

“La ponpie bizin stand by ek nou pou esey inform bann dimounn ki ena posibilite zot bizin evakuer. Se parski vreman ena enn danze. Se pa parski nou envi zot evakuer.”

This is the PPS of your own Ministry stating that on 08 November. This is why I am asking you what is the plan that your Ministry is obviously considering on the evacuation of the poor inhabitants of that region. What is your plan?

Mr Hurreeram: I have already replied, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think the PPS has been very proactive and we should thank and congratulate her for being on the site at the material time. Yes, she has taken all required measures. Yes, the NEOC activates the evacuation plan whenever it is required, but there is also what we call the LEOC, that is, the Local Emergency Operation Command, which is under the purview of the local authorities, which acts whenever it is required. So, I do not think we need to have something more. There is already an established protocol and we go according to that established protocol. This is exactly what the PPS has been doing.

Mr X. L. Duval: The Minister will agree that this is the main body of my question. So, I expect him to be prepared to answer. How many people are likely to be evacuated? Where will you evacuate them? Have you prepared for them to be received somewhere, to be fed, and what are the conditions? How much rainfall is going to fall millimetre-wise for you to activate this evacuation plan? This is in the main body of the question. So, I expect the hon. Minister to be prepared with a decent answer.

Mr Hurreeram: I do not see what was indecent with my answer so far, Mr Speaker, Sir, but since the Leader of the Opposition wants some more details, let me give him some more details.

According to a survey carried out by the Local Disaster Management Coordinator of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, five houses at Colville Avenue, three houses at Broad Avenue, five houses at De La Faye Avenue, four houses at Doomun Lane were impacted. Some had ingress of water in their houses and some were only concerned with water in their yard.

Mr X. L. Duval: Did you understand my question? What are the provisions that you have made to evacuate? But leave it; if it is too difficult for you, we move on to another question.

Since January 2022, 22 months ago, this whole saga has been a proof of incompetence and slackness. I want to ask the hon. Minister, now that he has told us he is going to go for a drain – I understand now the drain across Old Moka Road. Only in April, the same PPS and the Municipality of Quatre Bornes in June were talking about construction of a pond. Now, that was a few months ago. Did you now leave - for more than a year you were on the construction of a pond it would seem, according to your PPS - and move to the construction of a drain? Is that the situation now?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, we could have gone with a quick fix solution, but this is not how we operate. The region of St Jean...

Mr X. L. Duval: Hahaha!

Mr Hurreeram: *Riye decouyone apel sa!*

The region of St Jean could not afford a quick fix solution due to the dense population of St Jean. Yes, we have taken time to find a long-term solution, a sustainable solution to resolve the problem for good and working in a holistic manner, which is the recommendation of the Land Drainage Master Plan. So, as I have said in my main reply, the pond would have put to task the structural credibility of the Metro structures. Then, we could not discharge the water into Canal La Ferme, and we could not take that volume of

water and bring it in a built-up area. So, we had to find an optimal solution that will be able, in the face of climate change, to take any amount of water that will eventually come.

So, there is a difference between a retention pond and a detention pond. A retention pond is a pond that will fill and then will overflow. A detention pond is a pond that will be filled and there is a drain at the bottom of the pond, that is, it fills and evacuates at the same time.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, you uttered one unparliamentary word. Would you please be kind to withdraw that word?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, I withdraw. I hope he will not provoke.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that there was never flooding on that road before; never before, and certainly not to this extent. It is undoubtedly that it is since the construction of the Metro Express, the redesigning of a number of drains from Phoenix down to St Jean and the blocking, I am told, of some drains to Pellegrin that this situation has called, in the words again of the hon. PPS, the doubling of the water in the huge pipe that comes to St Jean. Therefore, I am going to ask you who is going to pay for the damages to the tombs, to the houses because the houses have been soiled by water coming from the cemetery, people have lost furniture, electrical appliances, etc., with water coming from the cemetery, which is not a very pleasant thing. Therefore, who is going to pay for all these? Is it going to be the taxpayers or is it going to be the Metro Express? Because never has this existed before 2022.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think this question relates more to the Ministry of Social Security and the Ministry of Finance, which look into the compensation of people who have suffered damages. My Ministry is more the Ministry of Infrastructure. What we build are drains, roads and buildings. This is what we are concerned with and this is what we are doing. The Government, being a caring Government, will surely look at eventual solutions of how to help. Regarding the rehabilitation of the tombs, I think there has been a meeting – I have replied already – with the Minister of Environment, with L'Évêché de Port Louis and it has been agreed who is doing what.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, what has been agreed?

Mr Hurreeram: I have replied already, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am firstly shocked that he, himself, didn't attend the meeting at L'Évêché. So, he cannot tell us also what has been agreed, that something has been agreed.

Mr Hurreeram: I replied already, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: And the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that flooding never occurred before Metro Express. That is a fact! Secondly, the EIA Report has never been published, only a summary has been published and neither has the Land Drainage Management Plan. Therefore, I will formally ask the hon. Minister, now that people are affected, even *kapav mor*, as your colleague has said, to publish the full EIA Report now. I think it was done by Singapore Corporation Enterprise – the full one, not the one by Larsen and Toubro – and also table the Land Drainage Master Plan.

Mr Hurreeram: Was that a question, Mr Speaker, Sir? We take note of what the hon. Leader of Opposition has said.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to another one of his famous report, that is, the SUEZ Report on Flood Prone Areas, would he be surprised to note that none of these roads appear on the SUEZ Flood-Prone Area Master Plan? In fact, it shows a lot of doubt as to the reliability of the famous SUEZ Master Plan. Again, it's not public. I have a copy, it's not public. I would ask the Minister to make the third report public, to please table the SUEZ Flood-Prone Area Master Plan because people are buying property and selling property not knowing that they are in flood-prone areas.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the question relates very specifically to St Jean and Old Moka Road. It will be good if we stick to Old Moka Road and St Jean.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I apologise if the questions are too complicated for my friend, but I thought it was normal as this is a flood-prone area and as it is not in your SUEZ Report, what are you going to do about it? Mr Speaker, Sir, I come back now to this EIA Report. Now, this was exempted from the EIA requirement through a specific decision by the Government of the day, at that time, in 2017, I think. Will the Minister seriously consider tabling a copy of this EIA Report because it seems that the works have been done *bric-à-brac*?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the EIA of the Metro, I think this is not under the purview of my Ministry and I cannot reply for another Minister regarding the EIA Report. But we will take note of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying and I will convey the message.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister agree with me that what has actually paralysed the whole situation along Old Moka Road to the detriment of the population of Quatre Bornes has been the ongoing conflict between the Minister of Environment and his own PPS who cannot seem to agree on anything and never attend a

meeting together. This, I can show you, prove to you that meetings are held at the Municipality and at L'Évêché only by one and the other, never the two together although both have important responsibilities. Isn't it, in fact, the truth that this comes from a conflict between these two personalities?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied in detail how my Ministry, my very competent team of the LDA, my competent engineer under the purview of my Chief Project Manager, the engineers of the RDA are qualified engineers who are working for the Government of Mauritius. I stand guided by their expert advice. As far as the conflict the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about, I don't think I will have to get into that.

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware – I have it from information, I didn't go under the road myself – that there was a drain which took part of the water from Phoenix down to Pelgrin and on to Rivière Sèche, has that drain been blocked since the construction of Metro Express?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, today, it is a fact that Mauritius is buzzing with infrastructural development north, south, east, west and centre and it is a matter of fact that any construction does bring some kind of change in the drainage pattern. That's a normal thing. But what is more important is today, our engineers are doing what needs to be done to mitigate. We should know that when we talk about flooding, we are not talking about eradicating the problem; we are talking about mitigating. There is no dry feet policy.

For instance, what happened in Souillac – I know that's not your constituency – Souillac was not a flood-prone area, it was not under the purview, but it got flooded. What is happening is because of climate change today, because we got 300 mm of rain in 12 hours. What type of drain infrastructure will we have to build to take that amount of water, especially when we are operating in very built-up areas? We have to build according to the required space available.

So, no, there was no drain blocked. I need to check, but there could have been reorientation of few drains here and there, that's normal in construction, that's normal when we are building new roads, that's normal when we are building new bridges. So, it's definitely not one element that will cause a change in pattern. We are building roads, we are building Metro, we are building houses, we are building boundary walls, they all contribute. It will be difficult to put your hand on one specific element. Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I met the Minister there on a site visit – it was fortuitous, it was not planned – about a year ago. He was looking at the big drain coming

from Phoenix and at the smaller drain going under the cemetery. So, wasn't it obvious to your Ministry that the Land Drainage Authority – specialised agency, the Metro Express. This is why we ask for EIA Report – that this drain under the cemetery was far too small in diameter to cater for the water coming out of the huge drain? You can walk inside from Phoenix coming to St Jean. I am sure you saw it! Did you not, hon. Minister, see that there was smaller drain and bigger drain? I mean why at that time, more than a year ago, when you were on site visit there, was nothing done to sort out the situation?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, when we are talking about building drains, you can't do it overnight. Studies have been done; we have had a holistic approach regarding the whole region of St Jean. The hon. Leader of the Opposition maybe is trying to say we should have upgraded or make a bigger drain that will go through the cemetery of St Jean, but that would have been tantamount to bringing a large amount of water into a built-up area, into the residence of people. This is not what we want to do. We want to take out the water. What we are doing now is the solution.

It has taken time to come to that solution, but I will also agree it's a challenge sometimes to get the engineers to agree among themselves because they sometimes have opposing opinions, which I think is good and healthy for the running of our institutions. But, at the end of the day, we have agreed on one solution and that will now be implemented in the days to come.

Mr X. L. Duval: My last question because I will pass on to my colleague. My last question is this: it's quite clear that it is the fault of Metro Express, the Government itself, maybe the Wastewater Authority, whatever else it is, the RDA, the under-staffed LDA; it is their fault. So, I will ask the Minister formally to say that he will organise for compensation, not only to the church, for the wall and to the poor relatives of the dead whose tombs have been disturbed, destroyed, moved by the water and the poor inhabitants of Colville and the adjoining streets. They need compensation because nobody would like to be in this situation. They need compensation, and will Government take its responsibility towards the inhabitants of Quatre Bornes? That is my question.

Mr Hurreeram: We are a Government that has always taken its responsibility towards the citizens of the country and the citizens know better, and this Government will always do what is best for the population. Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. My question has to do with procedure. With regard to all the deviations that the Leader of Opposition has mentioned just now - he is MP in Quatre Bornes - with respect to the Metro Express, deviations of drains, can I ask

the hon. Minister whether the LDA has approved all those deviations? And if he doesn't have the answer, the officers are here.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, everything that concerns drains in the country is done under the purview of the LDA.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a last question.

Mr Speaker: No, wait, wait a minute.

Mr X. L. Duval: No...

Mr Speaker: No, I am the Speaker. You have a last question? Put your last question.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are the Speaker. You found that out; very good, very good.

Mr Speaker: This is your privilege.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was talk of a construction of an absorption drain along Colville Avenue of 56 metres. I have not picked it up from his answer. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether this construction of absorption drain along Colville Avenue is still *d'actualité* or has it now been cancelled?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are some projects. Let me tell the Leader of the Opposition and inform the House that we are not encouraging, at the LDA level, to do absorption pits because it works once and then it doesn't work again; it's a waste of money. This is why we are into a more holistic approach. We want to take the water to a discharge point, but, sometimes, I do understand the local authorities. When there is urgency, they try and they come to make an absorption pit that would eventually take the water to a safe outlet. But I will also say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I do understand my officers. Sometimes, when they go too quickly, this is also being questioned. Why you went quickly? Why you have given this contract? Why this, why that, and then they go through this mud-slinging exercise that they are now a bit used to. So, I understand sometimes they try to be overcautious, and this is why the project tends to take a bit longer to be executed. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Prime Minister's Question Time! I now call hon. Ms Tour.

The Prime Minister: We have to recall the floods in Port Louis.

Mr X. L. Duval: *Pan tap lame pou twa Bobby! Pan tap lame pou twa. Beze mo frer, move sign, move sign.*

The Prime Minister: It is good to recall the floods in Port Louis at that time.

Mr Ganoo: *Godam.*

Mr X. L. Duval: And what we did after! And what we did after!

The Prime Minister: But how many died?

Mr X. L. Duval: And what we did after!

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: How many died and what was the stance of Government at that time? What did you do?

Mr X. L. Duval: And what we did after!

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: What did you do to compensate? People passed away!

Mr Speaker: Both sides of the House! Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the House, please. It's Prime Minister's Question Time. Carry on.

The Prime Minister: I am just reacting to what he said. There was no compensation. People's lives, you know; people passed away.

Mr X. L. Duval: Well, you should learn from this.

The Prime Minister: Oh, we learn from people who passed away!

Mr Speaker: Please!

The Prime Minister: *Dimounn in mort!*

Mr Speaker: Again, this is Prime Minister's Question Time!

Hon. Members: Shame on you!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members! Leader of the Opposition! Leader of the House! Both Leaders! It's Prime Minister's Question Time, please carry on.

The Prime Minister: We have to learn from! Anyway!

POLICE FORCE – PROMOTION & RECRUITMENT

(No. B/1441) **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 Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of –

- (a) officers promoted since January 2020 to date, from the grade of Police Constable to Police Sergeant, and
- (b) Police Officers recruited since June 2023 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Police Force (MPF) is unique in nature and its challenges and priorities differ from other law enforcement agencies as it is the only agency responsible for both internal and territorial security. It also plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order, preventing crime, addressing gender-based violence, the protection of the environment, intervention during natural disasters and ensuring the safety and security of the citizens in Mauritius, Rodrigues and the Outer Islands, as well as foreign nationals on visit or residing on our territory.

The Mauritius Police Force is organised into various Divisions, Branches and Units, each having distinct roles and responsibilities to provide specific services to the community. In order to fulfil its mandate, the Police require a multi-talented workforce with the required traits, knowledge, skills and experience to provide the highest level of service delivery to the nation.

The Police Force thus considers its human resources as its most important asset. In view of the continuous development of the Mauritian policing landscape and given the complex nature of policing, it is essential that the human resource capabilities of the Force are realigned so that the organisation meets the present and upcoming challenges efficiently and effectively. There is a need to have an adequate number of trained and experienced Police Officers at every operational level to deliver service to the community in an effective and efficient manner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, recruitment and promotion are two fundamental components of the management of human resources in any organisation, including the public sector and the Police Force. Recruitment in the Police Force pertains to the need to continuously sourcing adequate number of Officers, as per budgetary provisions, to enable the Police Force to deliver effectively its mandate to enforce and maintain law and order in Mauritius. On the other hand, promotion which is associated with higher responsibilities and increase of salary, provide Police Officers with a career development which positively influence their motivation, performance and commitment to the job for better public service delivery.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that prior to the year 2014, promotion to the grade of Police Sergeant in this vital sector, which is responsible for the security of Mauritius, has been low in numbers, and during the years 1995 to 2000, was nil. This led to demotivation

and low morale of Officers, impinging on service delivery and efficiency. The Police Force, which was facing new and serious challenges to maintain law and order, was poorly manned. It is precisely for this reason that in our Government Programme 2015-2019, we undertook to provide the Police Force with, *inter alia*, a more conducive environment, in addition to modern equipment and state-of-the-art technology. New incentives were proposed to be introduced to reward performance and encourage degree holders to join the Force.

In the same vein, in our manifesto of 2019-2024, we pledged that Police Corporals and Police Constables both (male and female) reckoning at least 20 years of service would be promoted to the grade of Police Sergeant upon vacancies occurring. This measure was meant to strengthen the Police Force by providing more officers at supervisory level for better control and at the same time as recognition for good performance in the delivery of quality service at the frontline. It is an undeniable fact that such exercises contribute immensely to maintain high morale and keep a dedicated and motivated workforce impacting positively on our quest to enhance security and preserve social harmony in our country.

In this endeavour, the Government is providing all the necessary support to meet the staffing needs of the Police in order to provide a quality service to the community. In the Budget Speech 2021-2022, it was announced that over the next three years, 4,000 Police Officers would be recruited and some 1,457 Police Officers would be promoted to the rank of Police Sergeants.

Moreover, on 19 January 2022, I launched the Police Strategic Plan 2022-2025 which lays down nine strategic priorities, each comprising a host of activities and projects which are currently under implementation. Strengthening Human Resource Management and Enhancing Motivation and Morale of Personnel are two main pillars of our strategy in the maintenance of law and order.

Mr Speaker, Sir, recruitment and promotion of Officers in the Police Force rest on the Disciplined Forces Service Commission (DFSC) which has been established under section 90 of the Constitution and vested with powers in relation to the function conferred upon it under section 91.

Accordingly, recruitment of Police Officers in the Mauritius Police Force is made at two levels –

- (a) Entry at the level of Temporary Police Constables (male and female), and
- (b) Entry at the level of Cadet Officers.

Whenever vacancies for the posts of Police Constables/Women Police Constables are reported to the DFSC, the latter, after approval, carries out the selection exercise in all transparency, among candidates having the required profile and attributes.

The criteria for the appointment of Police Constables/Women Police Constables, as per their Schemes of Service, are that candidates should, *inter alia*, –

- (a) possess a Cambridge School Certificate with at least a pass in English Language, French Language and Mathematics or Principles of Accounts or passes obtained on one certificate at the General Certificate of Education “Ordinary Level” either (i) in five subjects, including English Language, French Language and Mathematics or Principles of Accounts with at least Grade C in any two subjects or (ii) in six subjects, including English Language, French Language and Mathematics or Principles of Accounts with at least Grade C in any one subject or an equivalent qualification acceptable to the Disciplined Forces Service Commission;
- (b) not be less than 18 years and not more than 30 years, and
- (c) have a good physique and they should be able to undergo strenuous physical exercise. They should have a normal eyesight and also satisfy the minimum height requirement of 1m70 cm and Chest Measurement of 84 cm for males and a height of 1m63 cm for females.

The recruitment and selection process also comprises –

- (a) a Height Screening Test (HST);
- (b) a Physical Measurement Test (PMT);
- (c) a Physical Aptitude Test (PAT);
- (d) a Medical test (including drug test);
- (e) a background check to ascertain whether they have a clean criminal record, and finally
- (f) an Interview by the DFSC.

With regard to Cadet Officers who are required to be degree holders, different criteria apply for their recruitment depending on where they have to operate at a higher level in the different specialised Units of the Police Force, such as pilots in the Helicopter Squadron, Engineers in the SMF or Mechanical Workshop.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that previously, applications for the post of Police Constables/Women Police Constables were made directly to the DFSC via the prescribed form, P.S.C. Form 7, but, as from May 2014, potential candidates wishing to apply for enlistment in the Police Force are requested to call in person at the Gymkhana Grounds under the supervision of the Special Mobile Force and a team of officers from the DFSC, in alphabetical order, to register themselves as candidate and to fill in the prescribed application form for the Height Screening Test.

After passing the Height Screening Test and verification of their educational certificates, on the same day, they undergo a Physical Measurement Test for the purpose of ascertaining as to whether they satisfy the physical requirements. Qualified candidates are thereafter convened for the Physical Aptitude Test (PAT) followed by medical tests and interview. The Physical Aptitude Test involves –

For male candidates –

- (a) stamina test of 2 km in 12 minutes;
- (b) abdominal curl of 15 repetitions;
- (c) heaving of 6 repetitions; and
- (d) vertical jump of 35 centimetres difference.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: He has to circulate the reply! Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister is making an abuse of privilege time. He has to stop reading. *Enfin!*

An hon. Member: Standing Order!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, this is not the way to address the Chair!

(Interruptions)

Quiet!

Hon. Member, this is not the right way to address Parliament, the Chair. You should ask for a point of order!

Dr. Boolell: It is a point of order, but you never listen to the point of order!

Mr Speaker: And I should allow the point of order!

Dr. Boolell: But you never allow it!

Mr Speaker: You never ask! Sit down! Quiet!

Prime Minister, continue!

Dr. Boolell: Is this the way to talk to an MP?

Mr Speaker: You are wasting the time!

(Interruptions)

You are wasting the time!

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I have a point of order?

Dr. Boolell: You are shouting for nothing!

Mr Speaker: I have no other point of order to reply to!

Mr Mohamed: Can I raise a point of order?

Mr Speaker: No point of order! I have said no point of order!

Mr Mohamed: Why?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Dictature sa !*

Ms Anquetil: *Inédit !*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Guillotine !*

Mr X. L. Duval: Why?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: For female candidates –

- (a) Stamina test of 1 km in 6 minutes 30 seconds;
- (b) Abdominal curl of 12 repetitions, and
- (c) Vertical jump of 25 centimetres difference.

(Interruptions)

There is no barbell...

(Interruptions)

Do not worry, there is no lifting, *barbel pena!*

Mr Speaker: Continue with your answer.

(Interruptions)

Order!

The Prime Minister: So, qualified candidates are thereafter interviewed by the DFSC. After the selection exercise, the DFSC submits the list of successful candidates to be offered appointment as Police Constable/Woman Police Constable to the Commissioner of Police.

The successful candidates are consequently offered temporary appointment by the Commissioner of Police and are requested to assume duty at the Police Training School. They are subsequently offered substantive appointment if they successfully complete the training.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to recruiting the best qualified officers in the Police force, a new scheme of service was introduced on 25 June 2019 for Police Constable and Woman Police Constables under Regulation 16 of the Disciplined Forces Service Commission Regulations, whereby candidates have to undergo medical and psychological test including blood and urine tests to detect drug misuse prior to selection as well as during their training period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, promotion to the post of Police Sergeant in the Mauritius Police Force is governed by Regulations 14 and 19 of the Disciplined Forces Service Commission (DFSC) Regulations and is made by way of –

- (a) competitive examination;
- (b) promotion in specialised unit, or
- (c) seniority.

As such, Police Constables/Woman Police Constables who have completed five years' service in a substantive capacity are eligible to sit for the competitive examination for appointment to the grade of Police Sergeant/Woman Police Sergeant. Police Corporals/Woman Police Corporals are also de facto eligible to sit for the competitive examination. Where vacancies occur within the approved structure of a Specialised Unit and subject to the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police, the DFSC may promote the recommended Officers...

Mr X. L. Duval: Time is over.

The Prime Minister: Is there a point of order from the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, be polite!

Mr X. L. Duval: Time is over.

The Prime Minister: No, you have a point of order?

Mr Speaker: Be polite! Do not stop the proceedings of the House! We are in a civilised Parliament. Please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Can I raise a point of order, please?

Mr Speaker: No point of order.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: In a civilised way!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No point of order!

(Interruptions)

No point of order! Prime Minister, continue with your reply!

Mr Mohamed: In a civilised way!

Mr Speaker: I do not allow fraudulent point of orders!

(Interruptions)

Continue!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Can you hear it first?

The Prime Minister: So...

Mr Mohamed: Can you please hear it first?

Mr Speaker: Continue! Do not disrupt the proceedings of the House! Continue!

Mr Mohamed: I am asking for your permission!

Mr Speaker: I have said no point of order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Why?

Mr Juman: *Aret kriye ta!*

Mr Speaker: Continue!

The Prime Minister: So, where vacancies occur within the approved structure of a Specialised Unit and subject to the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police, the DFSC may promote the recommended officers in a substantive capacity if no supersession is involved. However, in cases of supersession of qualified officers in the regular force, the

recommended officer will, in the first instance, be considered for an assignment of higher duties before promotion in a substantive capacity, either –

- (a) in his normal turn, or
- (b) after having satisfactorily completed a minimum period of six months' assignment, whichever is the earlier.

Mr Speaker, Sir, promotion to the grade of Police Sergeant/Woman Police Sergeant is also made, as and when vacancies arise, on the basis of experience, merit, suitability and seniority from Officers from the grade of Police Corporal/Woman Police Corporal and Police Constable/Woman Police Constable reckoning an aggregate of at least 20 years' service in a substantive capacity in the grade of Police Corporal/Woman Police Corporal and Police Constable/Woman Police Constable provided they –

- (1) are physically and mentally fit;
- (2) have a clean record, and
- (3) have been awarded the President Long Service Medal and Good Conduct Medal.

This new mode of appointment was introduced by my Government in the year 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2020 to 10 November 2023, 83 Police Constables and 607 Police Corporals have been promoted Police Sergeants on the basis of seniority and merit, making a total of 690.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that procedures have already been initiated for the recruitment of 1,000 temporary Police Constables (male and female). The vacancy for the post was advertised on 17 April 2023 for Mauritian candidates and on 3 May 2023 for candidates domiciled in Rodrigues. The selection procedure is in the process of being completed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to inform the House that since January 2015 to 09 November 2023, 2,804 Trainee Police Constables, that is, 2,402 males and 402 females and 28 Cadet Officers, that is, 22 males and 6 females, have been enlisted in the Mauritius Police Force.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia conflict which have adversely impacted on the world economy during the past years, my Government has continuously invested in areas which are essential for the effective

functioning of the public service including the Police Force. In spite of limited financial resources, we have consistently invested in our human resources through judicious recruitments and promotions to keep alive the legitimate aspirations of our Police officers. We are committed to provide quality policing service to ensure that Mauritius is safe and secure for all our citizens and foreigners alike.

Thank you.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned the need for degree holders to operate at higher levels. May I ask him to inform the House of the measures that have been initiated to encourage degree holders to join the Police Force?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a special scheme has been put in place in the Mauritius Police Force for candidates holding degree in specialised fields such as Law, Information Technology, Communication, Journalism and Civil and Mechanical Engineering amongst others in order to encourage them to join the Police Force.

Once enrolled in the Force, they are provided with tailor-made training in renowned Police academy or training institutions abroad and upon successful completion thereof and satisfactory performance during the on-the-job training in different branches and units of the Force, they are eligible for promotion to the rank of Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police.

They are equally given the opportunity to follow local and overseas courses in leadership and management and in the relevant field of their qualification with a view to enabling them to improve their knowledge and sharpen their skills, and such trainings are aimed to enable them to discharge the duties efficiently.

Ms Tour: Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you. In view of the allegation made in some quarters with regard to the competitive examination carried out prior to promotion in the Police Force, can the hon. Prime Minister provide assurances concerning the integrity of those examinations?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, examinations in relation to promotions in the Police Force, first of all, are carried out by the Disciplined Forces Service Commission, which is an independent institution of the Republic. The integrity of those examinations cannot be challenged by frivolous allegations, and it is deplorable that some people, including, of course, some Members of the Opposition, are systematically disrespecting and throwing mud at our institutions. I am sure they will have to bear the consequences of

their acts and comments. Our institutions are assuming their responsibilities diligently and are delivering as per their respective mandate, and that is in itself an assurance for the population.

Need not for me to remind this House that there was a time, under the Labour and PMSD Government, when we had one well-known former Member of Parliament by the name of Dhiraj Singh Khamajeet, who had stated publicly that for recruiting people, he would see to it that even on holidays, they would make applications and they would tamper with all these applications. I do not need to remind them what was said at that time.

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Job dan pos!*

The Prime Minister: That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I took time to give all the details with regard to how recruitment and promotions are done by the DFSC.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister state whether consideration is being given to test Police Officers on drug misuse on a regular basis? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is also new because previously, there was no such kind of test. I am informed that, now, we are going to give consideration to try to introduce the testing of Police Officers on a continuous basis because we want those Officers, of course, not only to be physically fit, healthy, but that they should themselves comply with the laws of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since the hon. Prime Minister has stated the number of Police Constables and Police Corporals being promoted to the rank of Police Sergeants, can he state the procedures for promotion of Police Constable to Police Sergeant?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police as follows –

The vacancies, first of all, are reported to the Disciplined Forces Service Commission together with the recommendation on a number of funded vacancies that are to be filled and a draft advertisement. A statement of vacancies is also submitted. The DFSC then will consider the recommendation and request the Office of the Commissioner of Police to advertise the post by way of publication in Routine Orders.

The DFSC carries out the selection exercise under Section 17 of the DFSC Regulations which stipulates that the Commission shall determine the procedure to be followed in dealing with applications for promotion, including the proceedings of any selection board appointed by the Commission to interview candidates and the forms to be used in connection with the discharge of its functions.

In case of Police Constable to Police Sergeant, the selection exercise consists of a written examination under an approved syllabus and the date of the examination is published in the Routine Orders. After the examination, the DFSC submits the list of successful candidates for promotion together with the pro forma offer of promotion, and the successful candidates are notified by the Office of the Commissioner of Police and they will be requested to assume duty to their respective Division.

Promotion may also occur now based on seniority from Police Officers from the grade of Police Corporals, including for both male and female and Police Constables for both male and female reckoning an aggregate of 20 years of service in a substantive capacity, in the grades that I have just mentioned, provided they are physically and mentally fit, have a clean record and have been awarded the President Long Service Medal and Good Conduct medal.

The DFSC may also promote Officers in a substantive capacity within the approved structure of the specialised units should, of course, vacancies occur and upon the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/1445, B/1446, B/1448, B/1449, B/1451, B/1452 and B/1453.

Time over! Parliamentary Questions! I now call hon. Armance.

PAILLES – HEALTH TRACK CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1454) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction of a health track at Pailles, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it does not have any project for the construction of health track at Pailles. However, recently, a new health track has been constructed at the corner of Conde No. 1 and Perruche No. 4 near Pailles State Secondary School by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, by in-house labour.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the National Development Unit that it has a project for the construction of a health track at Bonnefin, Pailles for this financial year and the approved project value is Rs5 m. However, on the advice of the Ministry of Environment, the former Parliamentary Private Secretary of the constituency has made a request for the project to be replaced by four other projects for a total amount of Rs5 m., namely –

- (i) at boundary wall, Beethoven Street, Richelieu;
- (ii) fixing of outdoor gym at St Louis;
- (iii) fixing of outdoor gym equipment at Leisure Park, Richelieu, and
- (iv) fixing of outdoor gym equipment at Borstal, Grand River North West.

The approval of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has already been obtained by the National Development Unit on 08 November 2023.

Mr Armance: Could the Minister inform the House about the project that was abandoned on Bonnefin Road, has there been a feasibility study before the previous PPS abandoned the project?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been told that at the place which was initially identified for the health track, we have some problems there, like rock fall on the side of the mountain. Just like on the Signal Mountain near Marie Reine de la Paix, on the other side of the Signal Mountain, we have the same problem of rock fall. That is why we could not start that project at that particular time.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

ACTIVE MAURITIUS STRATEGY – SPORTS ACTIVITIES

(No. B/1455) 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 Mauritius Sports Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the programme of activities organised to encourage the population to engage in physical activities since the launching of the Active Mauritius strategy.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Active Mauritius strategy, initiated by my Ministry in July 2019, in alignment with the National Sport and Physical Activity Policy 2018-2028, extends over a five-year period. The Mauritius Sports Council (MSC) has been entrusted with the task of implementing a key pillar of the Policy, which is, the

fostering of a culture of community sports and physical activity to contribute to a fitter and healthier nation.

The primary objective of Active Mauritius, operating under the purview of the MSC, is to engage at least 35% of the population to meet the World Health Organisation's recommended levels of physical activity by 2025.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in order to achieve this ambitious goal, the MSC has established various programmes, including –

1. Move It, targeting individuals aged five to 13 years old;
2. Youth on the Move, catering to those aged 14 to 24 years old;
3. Ageing Well, tailored for individuals aged 25 to 64 years old;
4. Elderly Fitness, geared towards citizens aged 65 years and older;
5. National Events, including celebration of the World Walking Day;
6. After School Sports and Fitness Programme; encompassing both primary and secondary students;
7. Outdoor Education programme;
8. Vulnerable Youth Programme, conducted in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations, and
9. *Natation Scolaire*; targeting all Grade 4 students.

I am further informed by the MSC that as at October 2023, some 600,000 beneficiaries of the above-mentioned programmes have been recorded since the launching of Active Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am delighted to share with the House that the commendable efforts of the MSC in promoting Sports for All have gained global recognition. At the beginning of November 2023, the Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) honoured the MSC with the prestigious 'TAFISA Mission 2030 Policy Award', acknowledging the commitment of the latter to advancing the Sport for All Movement. Thank you.

Ms Tour: Merci, M. le président. Pourrais-je demander à l'honorable ministre quelles sont les actions qui sont mises en place pour encourager les femmes à faire plus de sport par rapport au programme ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, la Commission nationale du Sport féminin (CNSF) existe depuis plus d'une vingtaine d'années et depuis la mise en place de *Active Mauritius*,

la CNSF collabore étroitement avec le *Mauritius Sports Council* pour développer et aussi mettre en pratique plusieurs programmes qui visent à encourager les dames à pratiquer une activité physique et sportive. Et pas plus loin qu’au mois d’octobre, en même temps aussi pour contribuer dans la campagne de prévention contre le cancer du sein, la CNSF et *Active Mauritius* avaient organisé une grande rencontre de dames pour les encourager à pratiquer une activité physique et cela a vu la participation de plus d’un millier de dames à Côte d’Or.

Ms Tour: Merci, M. le président. Je voudrais demander à l’honorable ministre si depuis le lancement de la stratégie d’*Active Mauritius*, il a pu noter s’il y a une augmentation, c’est-à-dire, s’il y a plus de personnes grâce au programme proposé qui pratiquent plus de sport aujourd’hui ?

Mr Toussaint: Oui, M. le président, je cite le *survey* de 2021, donc *Mauritius Non-Communicable Diseases Survey 2021*, –

“There has been an increase in the percentage of persons undertaking physical activity.”

Bien sûr, on ne s’arrête pas en si bon chemin. Nous continuons à encourager toute la population à pratiquer une activité physique et sportive. Et d’ailleurs, cet exemple vient de la tête même du pays, c’est-à-dire l’honorable Premier ministre qui lui-même ne manque jamais dans des discours, d’encourager la population à pratiquer une activité physique et sportive et que lui-même et toute l’équipe, nous donnons l’exemple en participant régulièrement dans des activités telles que le *World Walking Day* et bientôt le *12 Hours Run*. Donc, on encourage tout le monde à venir pour le *12 Hours Run* en novembre. Donc, c’est de cette façon-là que nous, de notre côté, nous encourageons la population à pratiquer une activité physique et sportive. Il va sans dire, M. le président, que nous savons très bien qu’il y a beaucoup de membres de l’opposition aussi qui essayent de pratiquer des activités physiques et sportives...

(Interruptions)

Lev deux lamok vide ! Merci.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Léopold!

RODRIGUES – IN-PATIENTS MATERNAL DEATHS – INQUIRY

(No. B/1456) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to in-patients maternal deaths in

Rodrigues, he will state if he has been made aware of an increase in the number thereof since January 2022 to date and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the number thereof, and
- (b) if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto to determine the causes thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for the last 23 years, that is from the year 2000 till 2023, out of around 18,000 deliveries conducted, Rodrigues has registered 9 cases of maternal deaths –

- a) 1 in 2000;
- b) 1 in 2001;
- c) 2 in 2002;
- d) 1 in 2010;
- e) 2 in 2015;
- f) 1 in 2022, and
- g) 1 in 2023.

The most common cause being postpartum hemorrhage.

Other causes of maternal deaths are antepartum hemorrhage, cardiomyopathy, complications of abortion, ectopic pregnancy and pulmonary embolism. Since maternal death in Rodrigues has a sporadic pattern, it will need to be closely monitored and assessed further.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question on maternal deaths which occurred in 2022 and 2023, the personal details of the patients cannot be revealed. However, suffice it to say that both patients had issues during the antenatal care follow up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has elaborated a Maternal and Child Health Handbook in 2021 which has been reviewed in 2023. The Maternal and Child Handbook is a booklet containing information on safe pregnancy, delivery and child health and serves as a health record. It ensures continuity of care and provides health education to parents.

Moreover, Preconception care clinics have been implemented in Primary Healthcare Centres, namely, in Area Health Centres and Mediclinics. Preconception care is the optimisation of the health of women and couples before conception, thereby reducing behaviours of individual and environmental factors that contribute to poor maternal and child health outcomes.

Furthermore, my Ministry is currently reviewing clinical guidelines for gynecologists, obstetricians and pediatricians to further improve the quality of care.

My Ministry is also conducting sensitisation sessions in Maternal and Child Health in Community Centres and Social Welfare Centres to create awareness among the population on the importance of antenatal follow-up and support to pregnant women.

Additionally, regular CME and refresher courses are organised by health professionals to improve knowledge and skills in better managing obstetrics cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is also in the process of implementing the concept of Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MDSR), which is recommended by the WHO. This project will be extended to Rodrigues Island as well.

Mr Léopold: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the two women who died this year have predisposing factors which might have caused their deaths?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, just not to be very specific on the personal issues of these patients, as I said in my reply, they had a lot of issues during their antenatal follow-up.

Mr Léopold: Yes, it is a little bit common now that the causes of death of those people, doctors always put pulmonary embolism. Would the hon. Minister consider doing postmortem on all women who die with complication of maternal death?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, unless the cause of death is not clear, then these patients are referred to the Police Medical Officer for post-mortem examination and report. So, if the cause of death is already cleared by the treating doctors, then there is no reason to go for a post-mortem examination. Unless this is a recommendation/a guideline from some agency, then we can conduct post-mortem examination.

RIVIÈRE DES ANGUILLES DAM – CONSULTANTS & COSTS

(No. B/1457) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the project for the construction of the Rivière des Anguilles Dam, he will state the number of consultants appointed therefor as at date, indicating the total amount of money paid thereto in each case.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/1457, B/1501 and B/1508 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Members, I now suspend the Sitting for one hour and a half.

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

On resuming at 2.48 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated! I am given to understand that question B/1458 has been transferred to hon. Minister Ramano.

Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

VALE & POINTE AUX CANNONIERS PUBLIC BEACH – GROUND LEVELLING WORKS

(No. B/1458) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to works for the levelling of ground at the Vale and the Pointe Aux Cannoniers public beach, he will state in each case the –

- (a) costs, and
- (b) terms and conditions of the contract awarded therefor.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vale public beach is of an extent of 0.32 hectares is, in fact, located at Pointe aux Cannoniers and the public beach was initially partly covered with grass and was partly sandy and sloppy. The difference in level from one end to the other exceeded 1 metre. Further to the request received from hon. Teeluck and hon. Dr. Ramdhany and from nearby inhabitants and beach users, for levelling of the ground thereat, funds were allocated for same to the Beach Authority through the National Development Unit under the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund.

The Beach Authority launched bids on 25 January 2023 for the project with closing date for bid submission on 13 February 2023. After bid evaluation and approval of the Board of the Authority, the contract was awarded to Laurel Construction Ltd and the contract agreement was signed on 19 May 2023.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the contract value at Vale public beach was Rs1,677,350 including VAT and the duration was 90 days. The scope of works include mainly –

- cutting and feeding of the existing ground to make it level;

- construction of 85 metre retaining wall with in-fill reinforced block wall on three sides;
- associated works with a retaining wall, including construction of reinforced concrete bases;
- casting of a tie beam at the top and rendering and painting;
- supply and fixing of plastic coated chain-link fencing and associated galvanised poles of height 1.75 metres on the retaining block wall;
- laying of geotextile and levelling of the beach around the 150 mm to 200 mm thick layer of spalls and 200 mm thick layer of imported sand over an area of 606 m²;
- planting of grass on the public beach area;
- supply and fixing of kerbs in the parking area over a length of 22 metres, and
- minor levelling of the parking space over an area of 620 m² to smoothen the vehicular access.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the contractor mobilised on site on 26 May 2023 and work started on the same day. The project was completed on 18 May 2023 to the satisfaction of the Beach Authority.

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the hon. Minister inform the House what provisions have been made in the contract regarding the materials to be used for the levelling of the parking space you just mentioned, found adjacent the football pitch which has been built on the beach?

Mr Ramano: According to information which has been communicated to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that the hon. Member is speaking about the parking area. For the maintenance works carried out on the beach area was for a period of two months – just as a matter of information – to allow the grass to grow, to enable inhabitants to use the area for playing football.

Some additional works in the pipeline on the same public beach are for instance, the parking area that shall be leveled through the laying of crusher run at an estimated cost of Rs68,000. This will also mitigate the effect of dust emanating from vehicular movement on the parking space.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. It is good that you are answering this question. Will the hon. Minister initiate an enquiry to find out whether the company has violated the Environment Protection Act by using a thick layer of rock dust, not crusher run, causing serious health issues to the inhabitants living in the vicinity of that construction site?

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not in presence of such information. I will surely enquire.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Aumeer!

RÉDUIT & MOKA – STATE LAND LEASE – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/1459) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the lease of State land in Réduit and Moka since January 2023 to date, he will table a list of the beneficiaries thereof.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in regard to the lease of State land in Réduit and Moka since January 2023 to date, there are no beneficiaries.

Mr Speaker: Hon. David!

POINTE AUX SABLES – WASTE WATER LEAKAGE – HEALTH RISK

(No. B/1460) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether he will state if he has been made aware of leakage of waste water on the main road at Pointe aux Sables and, if so, indicate if officers of his Ministry effected a site visit thereat and made any health risk analysis related thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate of my Ministry attended to the problem of leakage at Pointe aux Sables on 07, 10, 11 and 24 July 2023, respectively, whereby the following were observed –

- Six improved pits were found to be sufficiently full;
- A distribution pipe of the Central Water Authority was found to be leaky, and
- Seepage of waste water was noted on the road side, giving rise to odour nuisances and growth of algae.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per provisions under the Public Health Act, six legal notices were issued upon responsible parties to cause sufficiently improved pits to be emptied. Moreover, a statement of nuisance was issued upon the Central Water Authority to repair leaky state of potable water pipe.

Follow-up visits were, thereafter, carried out wherein it was observed that all the six notices issued were complied with by responsible parties and receipts issued by authorised cesspool emptiers were produced to evidence emptying process.

I am further informed that the problem of leakage of waste water occurred anew after three days along the road side as the region is not sewerred. Consequently, on 06 November 2023, a request was made by Dr. the hon. Mrs Chukowry to the Wastewater Management Authority to attend to wastewater nuisance occurring on the main road at Pointe aux Sables.

Upon site visit effected, it was found that effluents from two separate on-site wastewater disposal were overflowing on the main road at Point aux Sables. In the interest of public health and in an effort to also prevent a potential public outcry, the Wastewater Management Authority carried out pumping of the on-site systems to prevent over spilling of wastewater on the road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards health risk analysis, environmental and public health risks arise as a result of accumulated wastewater. Health risks relate to disease-causing organisms such as bacteria, viruses, protozoa, and helminth eggs. These pathogens cause diarrhoea, cholera, hepatitis, dysentery, and helminth egg infections. Toxic chemicals and other hazardous substances in wastewater also pose health concerns. Psychological stress is another frequent health risk for inhabitants exposed to such nuisances.

To address and mitigate the associated health risks, the Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate would continue to issue such notices, as and when required, to abate the nuisances associated with the overflow of wastewater on the road in view of the present difficult existing circumstances in relation to the poor soil permeability, site characteristics and space constraints, and pending connection to the forthcoming public sewer. Furthermore, larviciding and disinfection processes are being carried out to contain risk of spread of mosquitoes and proliferation of odour nuisances as palliative measures.

Mr David: M. le président, cette question a déjà été abordée auprès d'un autre ministère, à savoir celui des Utilités publiques, mais je vais me focaliser sur le risque sanitaire dont le ministre a évidemment parlé.

Suite à ces visites sur site, ces *notices* qui ont été servis et le suivi visiblement que le ministère de la Santé effectue, que compte faire le ministre pour mettre fin à cette prolifération de bactéries qui proviennent de ces eaux usées qui contiennent des matières fécales et de l'urine en permanence sur la route côtière de Pointe aux Sables ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the provision of the Public Health Act, the Ministry of Health only has the means to serve notices and to obviously give advice to improve sanitary conditions. It is not possible for the Ministry to go beyond the provisions of the Act. So, this is the mandate of the Health Inspectorate to act according to this Act,

and I believe, the Ministry also has to make the necessary provision to solve this issue, to palliate the issue.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. L'honorable Ministre est-il au courant que ce problème de fuite d'eau a endommagé la route principale qui n'est plus carrossable et donc, constitue des risques d'accidents? *Could he, therefore, impress upon his colleague Ministers so that needful be done as soon as possible?*

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, I am sure my colleague ministers are very much aware of this problem. Hon. Dr. Dorine Chukowry has already conducted two or three visits and again conducted some meetings to try to look for all the solutions that are possible to alleviate this problem as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

BANK OF MAURITIUS – GOVERNOR AND DEPUTY GOVERNORS – MOTOR VEHICLES

(No. B/1461) 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 motor vehicles acquired by the Bank of Mauritius for use by the Governor and Deputy Governors thereof since 2019 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to the –

- (a) make and description thereof;
- (b) costs thereof, indicating the purchase price and insurance premium paid in relation thereto, and
- (c) procurement method used therefor.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la Banque de Maurice m'a informé que, conformément à sa pratique interne, les véhicules motorisés mis à la disposition du gouverneur et des sous-gouverneurs sont remplacés tous les quatre ans.

Je suis également informé qu'au moment de prendre leurs fonctions respectives en 2020, le gouverneur a continué à utiliser le véhicule qui avait été acheté par le gouverneur précédent en 2018, à savoir une Audi A8, tandis que les deux sous-gouverneurs ont eux aussi continué à utiliser les véhicules qui avaient été achetés en 2016 pour les sous-gouverneurs précédents, à savoir deux Mercedes E200.

La direction de la Banque avait, à cette période, décidé de ne pas remplacer les véhicules officiels, en raison de la pandémie.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la question posée, je suis également informé qu'à la suite d'un exercice de passation de marché au cours duquel des devis ont été demandés à des concessionnaires automobiles à Maurice, les véhicules suivants ont été achetés pour l'usage exclusif du gouverneur et des sous-gouverneurs.

Concernant la procédure de passation de marchés pour l'acquisition de voitures à la Banque centrale, bien que la Banque de Maurice ne soit pas soumise à la *Public Procurement Act*, la Banque dispose depuis janvier 2002, et conformément aux pratiques de bonne gouvernance et de transparence, de politiques et de procédures de passation de marchés qui ont été approuvées par son conseil d'administration pour l'acquisition de biens et de services.

Cette politique couvre, notamment la procédure d'appel d'offres, la demande de propositions, la mise en place d'un comité d'appel d'offres, la mise en place d'un comité d'évaluation et les recommandations.

Conformément aux politiques et procédures de passation des marchés de la Banque, un minimum de trois offres est demandé aux fournisseurs potentiels en fonction des besoins de la Banque.

Concernant l'achat de la voiture du gouverneur, des offres ont été demandées à quatre concessionnaires automobiles pour la fourniture d'une voiture. Les quatre concessionnaires ont soumis leurs propositions.

Conformément aux procédures, les offres ont été ouvertes par le comité d'appel d'offres et transmises au comité d'évaluation. Pour cet appel d'offre, le comité d'évaluation a remis son rapport en juillet 2022.

Le comité d'évaluation a procédé à une évaluation des offres reçues, sur la base de critères techniques et financiers, et a recommandé l'achat de la Mercedes S 450 *Mild Hybrid* comme option favorite. La Mercedes S450 a été achetée pour un coût de 7 millions de roupies. La prime d'assurance de la Mercedes S450 est de 84 002 roupies par an. Pour information, l'Audi A8 achetée en 2018 a coûté à la Banque R 7 455 000 avec une prime d'assurance de R 73 684 par an.

En février 2008, la Mercedes S Class achetée par la Banque de Maurice pour le gouverneur avait coûté 7 076 325 roupies et en août 2012, la Mercedes S Class avait été achetée au montant de 7 millions de roupies. Depuis 2005, tous les gouverneurs ont droit à un véhicule de la même catégorie qu'une Mercedes S Class, une BMW 7 ou une Audi A8.

Pour les deux sous-gouverneurs, des demandes de propositions et de devis ont été envoyées aux quatre mêmes concessionnaires automobiles de Maurice, selon les mêmes

procédures en vigueur. Un comité d'évaluation a donc été mis en place pour évaluer les offres et une recommandation a été faite pour que les voitures des deux sous-gouverneurs, des Mercedes E200, soient remplacées par deux Mercedes CLS 350.

Les Mercedes CLS 350 ont été achetées pour un coût de 3 950 000 roupies par voiture. La prime d'assurance de la Mercedes CLS 350 est de 61 932 roupies par an et par voiture. Pour information, les Mercedes E200 achetées en 2016 avaient coûté à la Banque 3 995 000 roupies par voiture avec une prime d'assurance de 81 233 roupies.

Je suis également informé que le conseil d'administration de la Banque avait approuvé l'achat des véhicules utilisés respectivement par le gouverneur et les sous-gouverneurs. Merci.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister just mentioned that the purchase of these cars has been approved by the Board of the Bank of Mauritius. May I know from the hon. Minister of Finance whether, the Governor General and his two Deputy Governors participated in the meeting where the acquisition of these vehicles was discussed?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, que ce soit le gouverneur et les deux sous-gouverneurs, ils font partie du conseil d'administration. Je ne peux pas répondre, mais j'estime qu'ils n'ont pas fait partie de cette prise de décision pendant ce conseil d'administration.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister whether according to their Scheme of Service (employment contract), the Governor and Deputy Governors are entitled to a certain category of car or is it left to the Board of Directors to determine the type of car that is allocated to the Governor and Deputy Governors?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est une pratique établie à la Banque centrale concernant la catégorie des voitures, que ce soit pour le gouverneur et les deux adjoints. C'est pour cela que j'ai donné une description des différentes voitures qui ont été achetées pour les différents gouverneurs et sous-gouverneurs pendant les 10-15 dernières années.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

DRAINS – STRUCTURAL CONDITION SURVEY

(No. B/1462) 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 drains, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to if a survey has been carried out to

monitor the current structural state thereof in view of the forthcoming rainy season and, if so, the outcome thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Land Drainage Authority is responsible for the inspection and monitoring of all drainage infrastructures across the island. This exercise, which is undertaken in consultation with local authorities and the Road Development Authority, is carried out on a regular basis prior to rainy seasons to ascertain the cleanliness, structural state and effectiveness of the drains.

In view of the forthcoming rainy season, the LDA has already carried out a survey of the drains almost around the island and has recommended remedial measures which will be undertaken by the local authorities and the RDA.

Moreover, the LDA has devised a maintenance plan for the cleaning of drains and desilting of rivers by the local authorities as it is crucial to ensure that the rivers and natural watercourses are not obstructed and have adequate carrying capacity to convey the peak flow to mitigate the impact of riverline flooding. As such, the Municipal and District Councils are requested to ensure that cleaning and desilting of rivers particularly along residential zones are completed prior to the start of rainy seasons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to ensure compliance as regards to the maintenance of drains, the LDA has been empowered through the Land Drainage Authority (Enforcement Notice) Regulations 2022, to issue enforcement notice to public bodies and other stakeholders for non-maintenance of the drainage infrastructures falling within their respective jurisdiction. As at date, four enforcement notices have been served.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that some 416 kilometres of drain have been cleaned so far across the island and an amount of Rs58.7 m. has been disbursed under the National Environment and Climate Change Fund for these works. Thank you.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May we know from the hon. Minister to whom these notices were served?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, all four notices were served to the Road Development Authority in the year 2022.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the staff and equipment at the disposal of the LDA to conduct such surveys?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, three Land Drainage Inspectors have been recruited and three Land Drainage Officers already in post at the LDA have been tasked with carrying out the surveys. The equipment being used are drones and Global

Positioning System (GPS) and cameras with geo tag applications. Given the increasing work load, the LDA is currently working on its restructuring and a new organigram is being finalised before recruitment could be initiated. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

GENERAL PRACTITIONER SCHEME – SETTING UP

(No. B/1463) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, he will state if consideration will be given for the setting up of a General Practitioner Scheme aligned with innovative Artificial Intelligence technologies with a view to –

- (a) ensuring a better treatment of patients, and
- (b) establishing a link through the use thereof with public hospitals and private clinics.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the sustainability of any healthcare system is dependent on having the right digital foundations in place, and so digital transformation is crucial in achieving and delivering reforms. With a view to ensuring better treatment of patients, my Ministry has worked out clinical guidelines for each area within medical specialities and published same on the Mauritius Institute of Health Virtual Library. These guidelines are accessible to all medical practitioners and have the objective to standardise treatment through common clinical practice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has, in parallel, been working on the implementation of a wide-ranging digitalisation of health services through the E-Health system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has, in parallel, been working on the implementation of a wide-ranging digitalisation of health services through the E-Health System. It is expected that award will be made to the successful bidder by the UNDP by the end of November 2023.

The E-Health System will digitalise all the five regional hospitals in the country and will, in the long run, extend to all health institutions. It is anticipated that when the system is in its implementation stages, training would be provided to all health professionals who would be required to use generic or specific skills to address the increased role of digital technology in our health institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the use of Artificial Intelligence Technologies, my Ministry is planning to fully embark on its use at a second stage following the full implementation of the E-Health System.

However, taking into consideration the non-communicable disease profile of Mauritius and the need for early detection of cardiovascular diseases, my Ministry has already introduced the Artificial Intelligence Electrography known as Cardisiography. This new technology encompasses an advanced state-of-the-art 3-Dimensional ECG for the detection of cardiovascular disease. Usage of this new technology will no doubt improve detection of cardiovascular diseases and decrease morbidity as well as mortality.

Dr. Boolell: The question is specific. The hon. Minister has stated that there will be a timeframe. Can he apprise us as to when there will be a report submitted in the light of ongoing activities at the Ministry to digitalise the whole system and with a view to the setting up of a GP Scheme?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the E-Health Project also is being worked in parallel. Even the E-Health has 2 or 3 phases of implementation. Once this digital scheme is implemented in the service, then, we can move to the other level.

Now, about the timeframe. So far, we know that for the E-Health, the first phase of implementation is within 18 months, and likely, the second and third phase will be shortened. The UNDP is conducting all the due diligence on these companies which will be awarded the contract. Obviously, that will take some additional time. We are hopeful that by end of this year, the contract will be awarded to one company, and we will start implementing the first phase of the E-Health at the beginning of next year. So, the timeframe for the first phase will be within 18 months. So, it is expected that it should start early.

Mr Speaker: MP Quirin!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 - FLOOD-PRONE AREAS - DRAINS - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1464) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood-prone areas in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin and Petite Rivière, namely, Phases 1 and 2 at *Morcellement Les Vues d'Albion* and *Splendid View*, respectively, in Albion, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the construction of new drains thereat, indicating –

- (a) if the alignment of a cut-off drain upstream of the impacted regions has been finalised, and
- (b) expected starting date of works thereat.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ B/322 on Tuesday 25 April 2023, I provided detailed information on the catchment under study at Albion being then carried out by the Land Drainage Authority (LDA) with a view to mitigating flooding in the whole region thereat.

I am informed that the LDA has now finalised a design for the construction of a cut-off drain upstream of the impacted region of Albion as an urgent measure with a view to mitigating the flooding problems being encountered downstream in the residential areas, including *Morcellement Les Vues d'Albion* and *Splendid View*.

The design proposal was submitted to the National Development Unit (NDU) on 28 April 2023 for implementation and comprises two main sections, namely –

- (i) Section 1 involving of a trapezoidal cut-off drain over a length of 675 metres with a top width of 7 metres, a bottom width of 4 metres over a depth of 2 metres which would carry the stormwater flow towards Albion Approach Road to the natural watercourse, and
- (ii) Section 2 which refers to a trapezoidal cut-off drain over a length of 1,600 metres with a top width of 7 metres, a bottom width of 4 metres over a depth of 2 metres which would convey the stormwater flow towards a drain at *Morcellement Cerenus*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a site visit was carried out to assess the feasibility for the construction of the project on 11 July 2023 with officers of the NDU, the LDA, the Water Resources Unit (WRU) and the Medine Ltée. The following constraints were observed and had to be taken on board for implementation of the works –

- (i) the pivot irrigation system and the provision of temporary access for machinery and harvesting which would require a revision in the drain alignment;
- (ii) there was the need for a concrete support structure for Magenta Canal at two locations over a span of 7 metres at the crossing of the cut-off drain to be included in the specifications;
- (iii) the overflow from an existing basin upstream of the cut-off drain which would need to be intercepted and channelled through the drain, to be included in the specifications;

- (iv) the reconstruction of the culvert across Albion Approach Road and the channelling of the stormwater beyond the existing culvert to a safe outlet, to be included in the design, and
- (v) there was the need for wayleave and land acquisition from Medine Ltée and from one private land owner.

Due to the complexity of the project, a Consultant would be appointed for both, the design and the supervision of the works, for which appropriate actions have been initiated accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the NDU is initiating action for the appointment of a Consultant under its Framework Agreement. The Detailed Design Report is expected to be completed within 10 weeks upon appointment of the Consultant.

A bidding exercise for the construction works will, thereafter, be carried out which is expected to last around one month and upon identification of a successful bidder, physical works on site would start. Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, certes, il y a eu des visites qui ont été effectuées par les autorités concernées dont la NDU, la RDA, dont a fait mention l'honorable ministre, mais le constat est que les travaux d'aménagement de drains ne vont pas débiter d'aussitôt. Donc, cela a pris du retard. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que tout retard dans la construction de drains appropriés pourrait être hautement préjudiciable pour les résidents dans ces régions et cela en prenant en compte que le canal de Magenta qui déborde lors des pluies diluviennes ?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, my hon. colleague will appreciate that we would have loved to start the work tomorrow itself, but then, we have the studies that need to be conducted; we need to make sure that the whole area is being studied. And as I have mentioned here, it is falling under a site where you have for instance, the pivot irrigation system which has to be taken care of; you have water flow coming from the land of Medine; and we have land acquisition issues; we have wayleave issues that we have to deal with. We are trying to start as soon as possible but then, those studies are important so as once the work is done, we do not have to come on the same site again for mitigating measures. I understand the qualm of the hon. Member, *son inquiétude*. Yes, we are with you in this. We are doing the best we can but we have to put a consultant on this. As I am telling you, we are giving it to our framework contractor. The work will start immediately

and it is going to take a maximum of another 10 weeks to have a complete design of the whole area.

Mr Quirin: Comme le ministre d'habitude dispose de toutes les informations nécessaires, peut-il, par rapport à la Circonscription numéro 20, nous dire s'il y a d'autres travaux de construction de drains en cours, si oui, peut-on savoir où, et de nous indiquer les coûts y relatifs et si ce n'est pas le cas, pourquoi ?

Mr Hurreeram: Well, unfortunately, my hon. friend will understand that I need a notice of this question, but definitely we have projects everywhere. In fact, we have a total cost of project of around Rs101 m. that is being implemented in the region of Gros Cailloux, Canot and Albion.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

WOMEN'S CENTRES – POLICY

(No. B/1465) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to women's centres, she will state if a new policy for the operation thereof has been devised and, if so, give details thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the operational strategies of our Women Empowerment Centres (WECs) are *de facto* aligned with the policy objectives of empowering our women and girls in the fields of social, economic and political development across the Republic. As such, a number of activities pertaining to information, education and communication programmes are organised on a continuous basis around these themes in line with international and regional events. Furthermore, activities to build capacity of our women and girls, such as workshops, seminars, symposium, talks, outdoor activities are also being offered at the level of Women Empowerment Centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I should acknowledge that Women Empowerment Centres have provided our women and girls not only solely with opportunities for capacity building and self-empowerment, but have also served as a network for women to regroup in associations, forming clubs and informal groups as well.

Over the years, there have been changes and an evolution in the socio-economic landscape of Mauritius. The strategic needs of our women and girls have evolved. Today, most of our young women and girls have joined the workforce and therefore are not able to attend the Women Empowerment Centres' activities which are mainly held during office hours only, as they used to in the past. This is one of the main reasons as to why

there has been, over the years, a gradual decline in the participation of women and girls in activities being conducted in our centres across the country.

However, given our continued commitment to Women Empowerment and our unflinching commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Goal 5, activities at Women Empowerment Centres have been extended to Social Welfare Centres and Community Centres which usually operate until 21.00 hrs so that we can enable our women to continue from benefitting from these courses being dispensed at Centres after working hours.

A more focused attention to the economic empowerment of our women and girls is being ensured by the National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWECC), while the National Women Council (NWC) focuses more on the social and political empowerment of our women and girls.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to also recognise the fact that there has been a feminisation of our ageing population. I am informed that since August last year, activities for elderly women, such as the 65 plus exercises have been introduced so that we can enable them to boost their cognitive skills to develop and maintain their memory skills and to reduce the feeling of loneliness while at the same time, empowering the elderly women.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while we acknowledge that we need a paradigm shift in the way that our centres have been operating in the past, we need first to thoroughly assess the evolving strategic needs of our women and girls before we implement a nationwide standardisation of a more effective operational strategy. The strategic goal of my Ministry to empower our women and girls in the social, economic and political fields remains constant. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: *Je vous remercie, M. le président.* Would the hon. Minister inform the House if the officers of the Social and Community Centres are well equipped and trained in women empowerment and gender equality issues?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would reassure the hon. Member and the House that yes, indeed, the officers of the various social division of my Ministry are very well versed whether it is to do with adult literacy, beauty care, gym, sustainable development, food security. One thing that should be brought in mind, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that those courses are not only dispensed by the officers of my Ministry. For example, if we are giving courses in food security, those are dispensed by our relevant stakeholders; we have our solid engagement with the Mauritius Sports Council and hon. Minister Toussaint's Ministry, where we organise collaborative events for empowerment of our

women. So, it does not only rest on the officers of my Ministry for the delivery of such courses, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Anquetil: *Je vous remercie, M. le président.* Is the hon. Minister satisfied in terms of the outreach programmes for women's social and economic empowerment in view that there are only 9 women centres, *sachant que cinq centres de femmes ont fermé depuis qu'elle est en poste, une situation sans précédent qu'elle a délibérément oublié de mentionner ?*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have responded to the specific question put to me, there is not deliberate *esquiver quoi que ce soit*. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just stated in my main reply that the implementation of policies pertaining to the advancement of women and girls remains my Government's priority and it should have been previous government priority as well, but anyway, let's not venture into that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been panoply of measures and again women empowerment is not limited under the roof of a Women Empowerment Centre. Like I have just mentioned, for example, during COVID period, activities were maintained at the level of Social Welfare Centres whenever they reopened and also at the level of Community Centres.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been so many measures, so many events, so many decisions that have been taken by this Government to encourage the advancement of women's right and gender equality. I would invite the hon. Member who put the question to me to refresh her memory about the various budgetary measures: 25% of directors of companies must be women, a provision of free day care facilities around the island for listed companies which has more than 250 employees, to bring that into a better perspective for the hon. Member to have a better picture and the House as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no other government that has done as much for the right and advancement of the women folk of the Republic of Mauritius than the MSM-led Government, including this one!

Ms Anquetil: Il ne faut pas exagérer!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that...

Ms Anquetil: Cinq centres fermés!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I have just answered...

Ms Anquetil: Cinq centres fermés!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: The House will recall that the first woman Chief Whip was nominated by this Government!

Ms Anquetil: Cinq centres de femmes fermés!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: The first woman Speaker was under the MSM-led Government. The first woman President of the Republic!

Ms Anquetil: Cinq centres de femmes fermés!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: The first woman Vice-Prime Minister of this Republic! The first female Chief Judge of the Republic of Mauritius! So, we need to compare like with like. We cannot insinuate that the women folk of the Republic of Mauritius are not being empowered because the hon. Member is insinuating because there are centres that are closed. Centres might be closed; empowerment does not happen only under the roof of those centres.

The policy of this Government is, in fact, to maintain, to further the empowerment. Things have changed. I have just answered in my initial reply that we need to carry out a thorough survey. We need to be able to make evidence-based policy decisions. For that to happen, *une étude est demandée* and that has to happen first. We are talking about the digital era; we are talking about Artificial Intelligence, our women in bit coin, our women in Fin-Tech. So, empowerment is not limited under the roof and the four walls of an Empowerment Centre.

Ms Anquetil: *Aret transfer officiers!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening there?

(Interruptions)

Mr Toussaint: *Kalme! Kalme twa! Trankil!*

Mr Speaker: I told you earlier. We are having debate in a very civilised context. When the Minister is answering, let her answer. You put your question; put your question.

You can't mix issues. MP Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Donc, vous permettez que je pose une question supplémentaire sur la question qui a déjà été posée ?

Mr Speaker: Non, non! La question que j'ai ...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Une simple question.

Mr Speaker: Non, j'ai dit non, c'est non ! Même la moitié.

DR. A.G. JEETOO HOSPITAL – POST-MORTEM PHOTOGRAPHS – LEAKAGE

(No. B/1466) **Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to photos of a post-mortem examination taken in the mortuary room of the Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital and made public on or about 19 October 2023, he will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 18 October this year, an entry was opened in the Occurrence Book of Line Barracks Police Station to the effect that the Chief Police Medical Officer took cognizance that several photographs of himself and his team carrying out an autopsy upon a charred body of a victim at the mortuary room at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, were in circulation on a social media platform without his consent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the CID Metro (North) Division has started an investigation into the matter and that, as at date, the enquiry is still ongoing.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. L'honorable ministre est-il au courant que le constable suspecté d'avoir pris des photos à la *Mortuary Room* de l'hôpital Jeetoo a déjà quitté le pays ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an enquiry as stated. Whether the suspect has left the country or not is not for me to reply because the enquiry is still on-going.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: L'honorable ministre pourrait-il nous dire quand est-ce qu'il pense que l'enquête va être complétée?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as you know the enquiry is on-going and it is not possible for me to give any details.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS – CHILDREN IN SHELTERS – ACTIVITIES & ENTERTAINMENT

(No. B/1467) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the end of year school holidays, she will state the actions being taken by her Ministry in terms of activities and entertainment for children admitted in Shelters.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to activities and entertainment for children admitted in Residential Carer Institutions, I am informed that there exists a mandatory requirement on all managers to submit a monthly calendar for both indoor and outdoor activities to my Ministry. The Enforcement Officers of my Ministry regularly monitor the implementation of these activities. They also ensure that all outdoor activities proposed by the managers of the RCIs are according to different criteria like age group and number of caregivers required to supervise the activities and taking care of all security and sanitary measures.

The outdoor activities include but are not limited to outings to the seaside, visits to leisure parks, museums, only to name a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, furthermore, in the context of the Universal Children's Day that is celebrated on 20 November every year, my Ministry, in collaboration with the National Children's Council, is organising a recreational fun day at Gros Cailloux Leisure Park whereby 200 children, aged between 8 years and above, from different RCIs, would be participating in a number of recreational activities such as Tyrolienne, Pedalo, etc.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that children admitted in the RCIs, especially those aged between 7 and 15, will be participating in the much laudable programme '*Nager, C'est Vital*' organised by the Mauritius Sports Council that is going to be held throughout November and December. My Ministry will be providing the necessary equipment for that purpose. The children will also be participating in the '*special vacances*' organised by my good colleague, the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Minister mentioned activities organised for the Universal Children's Day, good enough but I would like to know for the other days during the school holidays. Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister tell us whether the list of activities is being prepared by the RCI's or it's your Ministry that provides the list of activities? Thank you.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, the list is not prepared by my Ministry. The list is submitted by the management of every RCI that houses our children. We have a list, my Ministry is in possession of a list, in fact we call it the *calendrier d'activités* for each and every month, and I do have the one for November and December but there is some information herein which is quite confidential and I would rather not table this.

Mr Doolub: Thank you. I heard from the Minister that special arrangements are being made for these children for the end of year holidays. Can we know what these special arrangements are?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned and the House will appreciate, the children who are housed in our RCI's are housed there and they are protected within a legal framework. So, when I speak about special arrangements, I am mentioning specific security arrangements, specific sanitary measures that have to be addressed, the health check that has to be carried out and authorisation obtained from relevant authorities before we can allow our children to participate in different specifications activities.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

**VACOAS-PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – *SALLE DES FETES* –
RENOVATION**

(No. B/1468) 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 renovation of the building *La Salle des fêtes* of the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix located within the premises of the Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) costs incurred in the procurement and installation of a lift thereat;
- (b) date of the commissioning thereof, and
- (c) total costs incurred therefor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made on 23 May 2023 to Parliamentary Question B/620 on this issue. I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix that the cost for the design, construction, installation and commissioning of the lift shaft and passenger lift at the municipal reception hall was 4.2 million. The works were completed and commissioned on the 22 June 2022.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware that in the total sum of Rs6 m. that have been spent for the renovation of this municipal hall, the kitchen, the electrical appliances, wiring, have not been subject to the renovation and it is in a very deplorable state? Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm same? Whether he has got report from the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix to that effect?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is on the lift, it's not on the kitchen.

Mr Speaker: There is no supplementary question. We move on.

Mr Lobine: Part (c) of my question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: He answered.

Mr Lobine: No, my supplementary question is with regard to the total costs incurred therefore with regard to renovation of building of *La Salle des Fetes*.

Mr Speaker: Okay.

Mr Lobine: I am asking the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware that the kitchen, all the electrical appliances, the wiring, have not been subject to that renovation that has cost Rs6 m. This is my question.

Mr Speaker: Let the VPM reply.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is on the costs incurred in the procurement and installation of the lift shaft. That's the question.

Mr Speaker: So, we move to the next question. MP Ramful!

No, don't discuss anymore. Minister, don't discuss. You don't have the right to discuss here.

2021 WORLD BANK GROUP COUNTRY REPORT

(No. B/1469) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the 2021 World Bank Group Country Report, he will state if he has taken cognizance of the comments made for Mauritius on the growth trajectory, export competitiveness, ageing population and fiscal deficits resulting in rising levels of public debt to GDP and, if so, indicate the measures Government has taken to address same.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, le rapport national 2021 du Groupe de la Banque mondiale ...

Mr Speaker: MP Lobine !

Dr. Padayachy: ... auquel l'honorable parlementaire fait référence est le mémorandum économique national pour Maurice, qui a été publié par le Groupe de la Banque mondiale en mai 2021.

Ce mémorandum présentait les conclusions de la Banque mondiale à un moment où le monde, y compris et surtout Maurice, était gravement touché par les effets néfastes de la

pandémie de la Covid-19. La Chambre se souviendra que tous les indicateurs macroéconomiques fondamentaux au niveau mondial étaient, à l'époque, dans le rouge.

Avec le recul, et à l'appui des chiffres, nous pouvons aujourd'hui dire que ce gouvernement, sous le leadership du Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, a su gérer la crise de manière efficace. Nous avons été proactifs et avons introduit un certain nombre de mesures pour protéger les vies, préserver les moyens de subsistance de la population et maintenir notre capacité de production.

Ces mesures nous ont permis d'éviter les défauts de paiements, les faillites en cascade et les licenciements massifs. En d'autres termes, le chaos et les larmes, M. le président. En effet, dans le mémorandum économique du pays, la Banque mondiale a salué la réponse de Maurice au Covid, qui représente plus de 32 % du PIB, ce qui en fait la quatrième plus importante au monde en termes de la part du PIB, après l'Allemagne, l'Italie et le Japon.

Le rapport reconnaît que le dispositif de réponse Covid-19 de Maurice a été important et efficace pour atténuer l'impact du choc immédiat de la demande d'exportations et du confinement.

Le rapport met en évidence quatre défis rencontrés lors de la dernière décennie, à savoir –

- (a) la trajectoire de croissance ;
- (b) la compétitivité globale des exportations ;
- (c) la démographie, et
- (d) la trajectoire fiscale.

Je suis fier de dire que nous avons été en mesure de relever ces défis apparemment impossibles et que les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes –

- (a) grâce à la stratégie de croissance adoptée par le gouvernement, l'économie mauricienne s'est pleinement redressée.

Le PIB est estimé à environ 650 milliards de roupies en 2023, contre environ 450 milliards de roupies en 2020, soit une augmentation de 44 %.

L'économie a connu une croissance de 8,9 % en 2022, et devrait croître de 6,8 % cette année ;

- (b) Le niveau d'investissement s'est entièrement rétabli et dépasse le niveau d'avant la pandémie.

L'investissement intérieur total des secteurs public et privé est estimé à 112,8 milliards de roupies en 2022, ce qui représente une augmentation de 20,2 % par rapport à 2021.

Le taux d'investissement est passé de 17,1 % en 2021 à 19,7 % en 2022 et devrait atteindre environ 22 % en 2023 ;

- (c) Les entrées d'IDE ont atteint un niveau record de 27,7 milliards de roupies en 2022, contre 18,5 milliards de roupies en 2021, soit une augmentation de 20,2 %.

Les entrées d'IDE pour le premier semestre 2023 se sont élevées à 13,5 milliards de roupies, contre 4,4 milliards de roupies en 2021 ;

- (d) La productivité du capital a augmenté de 7,6 % en 2022 contre 2,3 % en 2021 et un taux négatif de 15 % en 2020 ;

Et la part des exportations, la seule source extérieure de revenus du PIB est passée de 44.1% en 2021 à 56,7% en 2022.

M. le président, le gouvernement a également adressé la compétitivité des entreprises et des exportations avec une croissance soutenue des exportations à la fois en termes nominaux et réels.

Les exportations de biens et services ont dépassé 320 milliards de roupies en 2022, soit une augmentation nominale de 51% par rapport à 2021 et sont estimées à environ 360 milliards de roupies en 2023.

L'année 2022 a été marquée par une performance historique, les exportations dépassant pour la première fois les 100 milliards de roupies. En 2022, le ratio des exportations totales par rapport au PIB s'élevait donc à 56,7 %.

Dans le dernier budget, le gouvernement a affecté une part importante de son budget au soutien du secteur de l'exportation. Il s'agit notamment du *Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme*, du *Freight Rebate Scheme for Africa*, de l'*Export Credit Guarantee Insurance Scheme*, de l'*Africa Warehousing Scheme*, et du *Participation in International Fairs Scheme*. Nous avons également accordé au secteur de l'exportation une aide de 1 800 roupies pour le paiement de la compensation salariale et du salaire minimum. En ce qui concerne l'investissement en capital, les entreprises qui investissent dans des installations et des machines bénéficient d'une déduction de 45 % sur trois ans pour leur investissement en capital.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la question du vieillissement de la population, le gouvernement a, au fil des dernières années, pris des mesures pour ouvrir l'économie et aussi améliorer le taux de fécondité. Permettez-moi de présenter à l'Assemblée quelques mesures que le gouvernement a prises ces dernières années pour ouvrir l'économie aux talents, promouvoir l'emploi des jeunes et des femmes et soutenir les parents afin d'inverser la tendance démographique.

Il s'agit de –

- (1) l'extension du permis de résidence à Maurice pour les professionnels de 3 à 10 ans ;
- (2) l'introduction de la Prime à l'emploi pour inciter les entreprises à recruter des jeunes, des femmes et des personnes handicapées, ou encore ;
- (3) l'introduction d'une allocation mensuelle à l'enfance, la *CSG Child Allowance*, de 2 000 roupies pour quelque 48 000 enfants jusqu'à l'âge de 3 ans, afin de soutenir la parentalité ;
- (4) la mise en place de la gratuité pour les pré-primaires et l'université publique.

S'agissant du taux de chômage selon le rapport, le taux de chômage n'est jamais descendu en dessous de 6,5 % au cours de la dernière décennie. M. le président, je parle là du rapport de la Banque mondiale. Le taux de chômage à Maurice est passé de 9,1 % en 2021 à 6,4 % au deuxième trimestre 2023. C'est le taux le plus bas sur les 25 dernières années. Le taux de chômage des femmes est passé de 10,1 % à 9,1 %. C'est le taux le plus bas depuis 1996. Le taux de chômage des hommes est passé de 8,1 % à 4,5 %. C'est le taux le plus bas sur les 15 dernières années.

S'agissant du taux de chômage des jeunes, il est passé de 27,7 % en 2021 à 18,1 % au deuxième trimestre 2023. La compilation des données relatives au chômage des jeunes a commencé en 2004. M. le président, le taux de 18,1% est le taux le plus faible depuis cette date.

De plus, la population active est passée de 532,800 en 2021 à 591,300. C'est un record. Ces chiffres montrent clairement que les conditions du marché du travail se sont nettement améliorées avec la reprise des activités économiques, démontrant, encore une fois, la pertinence et l'efficacité de cette politique économique.

Je vais maintenant aborder la quatrième question concernant les déficits budgétaires et la dette du secteur public.

Comme la Chambre le sait, la pandémie de la Covid-19 a eu un impact sur la dette publique de l'économie car nous avons choisi de protéger la vie et les moyens de subsistance des citoyens mauriciens. Depuis, des mesures et des stratégies ont été adoptées pour réduire la dette du secteur public. Grâce à ces mesures prises, le déficit budgétaire en pourcentage du PIB a été ramené d'environ 11,4 % en 2019/2020 à environ 3 % pour 2023/2024. La dette du secteur public en pourcentage du PIB a été considérablement réduite, passant de 91,9 % en juin 2021 à 79,6 % à la fin du mois de septembre 2023. Ce résultat a été obtenu grâce à la forte reprise des activités économiques, en lien avec la stratégie du gouvernement. Les bonnes performances économiques, une croissance de 8,9% en 2022 et une projection de 6,8% pour 2023, démontrent clairement que les mesures adoptées par le gouvernement au cours de la période de la Covid-19 étaient appropriées et efficaces. Merci.

Mr Ramful: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Despite whatever the Minister has said, does the Minister not agree that the truth is that not a single concrete measure has been taken to address the four challenges as highlighted by the World Bank? The fiscal deficit has been financed by loans and reserves from our Bank of Mauritius. The trade deficit is at 30%. We have not taken advantage of the trade agreement with India and China. With regard to the consumption, we are heavily reliant on consumption...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me? Hon. Member, excuse me.

Mr Ramful: Yes?

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, let's smile first. It looks like you are rebutting. It is not a debate. Put your supplementary question!

An hon. Member: The question should not be a ...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Ramful: He has taken about 15 minutes to try to convince the population! Give me at least two minutes!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, let's smile again.

Mr Ramful: Okay.

Mr Speaker: This is the reply.

Mr Ramful: So, it does not...

Mr Speaker: The question is simple question, specific question, supplementary-set question.

Mr Ramful: Okay. So, the report talks about it itself. Does not the hon. Minister – at least speak the truth to the population – not agree that nothing has been done *depuis 2021* to address those four serious challenges as highlighted by the World Bank? And I am tabling the report.

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr Ramful: Yes.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne vais pas prendre beaucoup de temps, mais il faut quand même qu'on explique un peu les choses. Le rapport, oui, je l'ai lu aussi, donc, pas besoin de le déposer à la Chambre. C'est disponible sur Internet et on a tous accès à ce rapport.

M. le président, un rapport a été fait en 2021 en pleine crise de Covid. Il nous parle de quatre défis. L'honorable membre est en train de nous dire qu'on n'a pas répondu à ces défis.

Je viens de dire à l'honorable membre que nous avons baissé le taux de chômage à un niveau jamais atteint depuis les derniers 25 ans. Ce n'est rien pour lui, c'est beaucoup pour nous. Nous avons baissé les inégalités à Maurice à un niveau historique. Le coefficient de Gini est passé à 0,41, sous la période du régime Travilliste-PMSD à un niveau de 0,3 et c'est confirmé par les chiffres.

Nous, nous avons fait en sorte d'améliorer les conditions de vie. Nous avons eu la pire crise économique de toute notre histoire, et pourtant nous sommes en train de baisser le niveau de la dette et on est en train d'avoir cette pente descendante. Je ne vois pas où on n'est pas en train de répondre au défi que la Banque mondiale avait dit dans ce rapport.

J'ajoute, la Banque mondiale parle de défi de croissance. Elle nous dit que le taux de croissance n'a jamais dépassé les 4 % à un certain moment. Je viens de parler et je viens de dire qu'en 2022, on a eu un taux de croissance de 8,9 % et qu'en 2023, on aura un taux de croissance de plus de 6,8 %. Cela a été reconnu par le FMI. Je ne l'ai pas dit moi, c'est le FMI dans le rapport du *World Economic Outlook* de 2023. Il reconnaît, il avait titré en octobre 2022, le FMI annonce qu'on va faire 6,7 % et il termine cette année en disant que non, en 2022, Maurice a fait 8,7 %.

Donc, cela veut dire, M. le président, le taux de croissance, on ne l'a pas comme cela en s'asseyant le matin et en se disant qu'on va avoir un taux de croissance élevé.

(Interruptions)

Je dois répondre parce qu'il a dit que je suis en train de mentir à la population. Donc, je reviens là-dessus. Je ne mens pas moi. Je n'ai pas besoin de mentir ! Les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes.

(Interruptions)

Le taux de croissance est à 8,9 ; le taux de chômage est à 6,4. On est en train d'avoir des niveaux d'export qui cassent les records. 320 milliards de roupies, jamais on ne l'a fait...

Mr Ameer Meea: *60 millions inn donn twa!*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Donc, moi je ne mens pas. Ce sont les chiffres ! J'ai été le premier, M. le président...

(Interruptions)

M. le président...

(Interruptions)

M. le président...

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été le premier...

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Ameer Meea!

(Interruptions)

Do not provoke me to ask you to withdraw. Do not provoke me!

(Interruptions)

You are a very good citizen. Do not provoke me!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai l'habitude de dire les choses. J'ai été le premier ici dans cette Chambre à venir dire en 2020 que nous partons, que nous avons un risque d'un chaos social, qu'on était en face de nous, qu'on avait le risque d'avoir 100 000 chômeurs et j'avais dit qu'on est en train de travailler pour éviter ce chaos social, et c'est ce qu'on a fait ! J'attendrai de l'Opposition qu'ils nous disent pas 'bravo', mais qu'ils disent 'bien oui, le taux de chômage maintenant a baissé à 6,4 %. C'est tout ce que je demande à l'Opposition. Pas de me dire qu'on a menti ! Où est-ce qu'on a menti, M. le président ? Sur quel chiffre ai-je menti ? Sur les chiffres du FMI ou bien...

M. le président, vous pouvez demander de l'aide entre vous. Les chiffres parlent dans les rapports. Vous prenez un rapport de 2021 et vous venez nous dire. Prenez le rapport de 2023, M. le député !

Merci !

Mr Ramful: The Minister keeps talking about *croissance*. Does he not agree that it is the depreciation of the rupee and the inflation that has brought this *soi-disant croissance que vous êtes en train d'embêter la population avec?*

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président...

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Nuckcheddy: It is not a question of...

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the Minister reply!

An hon. Member: Who are you?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: Who are you?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Both sides of the House!

(Interruptions)

Both sides of the House!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ameer Meea! There is only one Speaker!

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Poz to kestion!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Armance, there is...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Uteem, there is only one Speaker!

(Interruptions)

Hon...

(Interruptions)

Quiet!

(Interruptions)

The Minister will reply!

(Interruptions)

Order on both sides!

An hon. Member: There was no question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order on both sides!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je n'ai pas besoin d'embêter la population. Je ne viens pas raconter des histoires. Moi je ne suis pas venu en période de forte croissance enlever le pain et les avantages aux plus vulnérables. Nous, pendant cette période de difficulté, on a payé les salaires. On est en train de tout faire pour améliorer les conditions de vie de tout le monde !

(Interruptions)

Non, M. le président, je dois répondre à cette question! Je ne mens pas à la population !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem, would you please withdraw from the Chamber?

Dr. Padayachy: *Ki ton dir?*

Mr Speaker: Continue!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Hey monn rat enn lepizod!*

Dr. Padayachy: Nous n'avons pas essayé d'enlever les subsides sur le riz et la farine. Nous n'avons pas enlevé les subsides sur le SC. Nous, nous avons travaillé pour la population. C'est pour cela que les inégalités sont en train de baisser. Reconnaissez au moins cela, M. le député! Les inégalités sont en train de baisser! Cela a été affirmé, c'est écrit dans le rapport ! Dans le rapport de la Banque mondiale, M. le député ! Allez lire ce rapport, vous allez voir que les inégalités ont baissé. À ce moment-là, on aura une discussion de nouveau.

Mr Speaker: We move to the next question. MP Juman!

PACK & BLISTER – DEFECTIVE VENTILATORS – REFUND

(No. B/1470) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the 50 defective ventilators delivered by Pack & Blister, he will state where matters stand as to the refund of the amount disbursed for the acquisition thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that my Ministry has been liaising with the Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to –

- (a) obtain quotes from the law firms in Spain for their legal opinion and Court proceedings, and
- (b) secure a space in Spain to store the ventilators in case an expert opinion would be required on the functioning of the ventilators should the Ministry initiate legal actions against Pack & Blister.

On 04 November 2022, the Honorary Consult of Mauritius in Madrid submitted details from three law firms and which were communicated to the Attorney General's Office. Ferran Abogados and Asociados, was selected as law firm and on 24 March 2023, a letter containing a complete set of all documents and correspondences exchanged with Pack & Blister was expedited to it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 31 March 2023, the law firm Ferran Abogados and Asociados informed that it would prepare the legal report with its reliable legal assessment to the points concerned. The legal report was submitted to my Ministry on 29 May 2023. The law firm strongly advised for an Expert Report on the deficiencies in the supplied equipment from a technical point of view as same would be decisive in the legal procedure. On 28 July 2023, a Technical Expert was secured.

The Expert Report was provided to my Ministry on 16 October 2023 for use in Spanish Courts. Ferran Abogados and Asociados provided a translated copy of the report and an updated Legal Opinion on 31 October 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, together with the Attorney General's Office, is further pursuing the matter for a case to be lodged in Spain to recover the amount disbursed to the supplier of the ventilators.

Mr Juman: M. le président, si j'ai bien compris, plus de 40 mois après, toujours pas de respirateur, ainsi pas de remboursement.

In his reply to PQ B/1014 dated 09.11.2021, the hon. Minister undertook to table the amount paid to freight forwarder but he did not. Can we have the detailed amount paid to the freight forwarder and the total legal cost/fees paid to date and also the cost related to the Expert Report to date?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the first part of the question is on the freight forwarder. I am sure that this report has been tabled otherwise, I am going to table it. There are no issues on tabling the report of the freight forwarder.

And, the second part of the question is?

Mr Juman: Legal cost or the fees.

Dr. Jagutpal: Legal cost yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, this also will be tabled. But, at the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, just to remind the Member that in the Director of Audit Report 2005-2006 – and at that time there was no COVID-19 – it was highlighted that digital x-ray machines were awarded some Rs28 m. at that time...

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker...

Dr. Jagutpal: and 20 months after the delivery, the machines delivered were reported...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Point of order.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: ...faulty and as from that time there has been no...

Mr Juman: It is a specific question.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...no action...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: On a point of order!

Hon. Members: There is a point of order!

Mr Speaker: Order! Don't defy my authority, if not, you will walk out.

Continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, why am I stating this is because the hon. Member has asked for after two years or 22 months, where the matter stands. But the audit report at

that time and the years onwards, no action has been taken for those kinds of reports already submitted by the Director of Audit.

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister undertook to table all the costs and documents. He undertook two years ago, in 2021, that is why I am asking him. We are not talking about x-ray machine, we are talking about Pack & Blister and ventilators; a specific question.

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will check whether this report has been tabled, the freight forwarder report. But I have the amount; the Attorney General's Office informed the selected firm, that is, in the first instance, for a legal opinion amounting to 15,000 euros, excluding taxation on the strength of the claim of my Ministry. So, that is what I have at present but I am surely going to table the report of the freight forwarder. That is not a problem today.

Mr Juman: The Expert Report's cost.

Mr Speaker: The next question, MP Joanna Bérenger!

LONG-TAILED MACAQUES – ALLEGED ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING – INQUIRY

(No. B/1471) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to a complaint of an alleged case of illegal trafficking of monkeys against Mr S. J., he will state where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQs B/1168 and B/1257, I had inform the House that the long-tailed macaques seized at Jin Fei were being kept at Biosphere Trading Ltd. pending the outcome of the Court case entered by Hammerhead International Ltd.

I also informed the House that my Ministry, through the Livestock and Veterinary Division and the National Parks and Conservation Service, has entered a case against the company for ill-treatment of animals and for illegal possessions of macaques, respectively.

The Director of Hammerhead International Ltd. has been bailed out in the case for breach of animal welfare by furnishing a surety of Rs15,000 and a recognizance of Rs15,000. The bail has been enlarged up to 23 January 2024. I am informed by the Police that enquiry in both cases are still being pursued.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at our Sitting on 17 October 2023, the hon. Member had informed on a case where the same company was suspected to be involved in another case of illegal trafficking of monkeys.

In fact, during the course of their routine patrol and while accessing forest State land at Bergicourt through land owned by Rose Belle Sugar Estate, Forest Officers were stopped and denied access by three employees of Hammerhead International Ltd. The company's employees informed that they cannot allow officers to trespass on the land and that they should have the approval of the Director. Forest Officers showed their identity cards and explained that the powers are conferred upon them under the Forests and Reserves Act 1983 to have access to private lands, however, access was denied to them. The Forest Officers then proceeded to Cent Gaulettes Police Station and returned to the site with the support of Police, where at that time, they met the Director of the company, namely S. J. The latter informed that no Forest Officer would be allowed access to the land which is under the purview of the Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board, with whom he is currently renting same. The Forest Officers reported the matter at Cent Gaulettes Police Station, Reference OB/264/2023.

On the following day, that is, on 08 September 2023, officers of the National Parks and Conservation Service conducted a site visit and no monkey was seen and no evidence of monkey breeding activity was found. A statement was accordingly made to the Police on 11 September 2023 by officers of the National Parks and Conservation Service. One week later, Forest Officers again went on the site to access State land Bergicourt and found that the site owned by Rose Belle Sugar Estate was vacant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at our Sitting on 24 October 2023, I assured the House that my Ministry will come up with more stringent measures in respect of combating illegal trapping and illegal trafficking of macaques. Following a meeting I chaired on Thursday 09 November 2023, along with the six registered companies, a technical committee has been set up to come up with proposals for implementation along with all implications.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. L'honorable ministre a expliqué à la Chambre que les officiers de son ministère sont revenus sur le site le lendemain après s'être vu refuser le droit d'entrer sur le terrain appartenant à Rose Belle *Sugar Estate*. Le ministre peut-il nous dire si les caméras installées par Monsieur S. J. pour sécuriser son terrain ont été visionnées pour pouvoir confirmer que des singes, des macaques à longue queue étaient bel et bien gardés sur le terrain illégalement préalablement avant le jour où les officiers sont venus constater qu'il n'y avait plus rien ? Est-ce que les caméras ont été visionnées ;

et si ça ne l'a pas été, est-ce que le ministre peut donner la garantie que le nécessaire sera fait pour que ça le soit ? Merci.

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my reply, there was a statement made by the Forest Officers to the Police as regard to the suspicious case, and I can assure the hon. Member that Police enquiry is still ongoing. And in case there is a need to view the camera, we are going to see to it.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Le ministre a mentionné le terrain appartenant à Rose Belle Sugar Estate et le Monsieur S. J. fait visiblement l'objet de plusieurs plaintes. Malgré tout le gouvernement a signé un *pre-lease agreement* avec lui le 28 septembre 2022 pour lui permettre de bénéficier de 234 arpents appartenant à Rose Belle Sugar Estate. L'honorable ministre peut-il dire à la Chambre si un *lease agreement* a été signé le 28 septembre 2023 comme le voudrait le *pre-lease agreement* signé avec Monsieur S. J. à travers sa compagnie Hammerhead International Ltd. pour lui permettre de faire l'élevage et l'export de macaques à longue queue ? Et si c'est le cas, quel permis a-t-il obtenu, s'il vous plaît ? Merci.

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board that in view of the various articles reported in the media on that matter and also which have been informed by the hon. Member, in fact, the lease for one year has elapsed since the issuance of letter of intent to Hammerhead International Ltd. in respect of lease of 234.32 hectares of land at Le Val along with various conditions. Following legal advice, the Board will not proceed with the grant of the lease to Hammerhead International Ltd.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/1482, B/1484, B/1487, B/1489, B/1494, B/1495, B/1496, B/1498, B/1500, B/1503, B/1507, B/1510 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

DIABETES PREVALENCE – MEASURES TAKEN

(No. B/1472) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the prevalence of diabetes and pre-diabetes among the Mauritian population, he will state the measures taken to reduce the incidence thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, to curb the prevalence of pre-diabetes and diabetes among the Mauritian population, strong preventive measures in the form of legislations, policies and action plans have been devised.

In this context, the sugar tax that was introduced in 2013 has been raised in 2022 in order to further discourage the population to consume sugared beverages. In the same vein, the sale of soft drinks in all educational institutions is prohibited to prevent our young ones to consume excessive sugar and thus develop health complications. Moreover, there has been a 10% rise in the price of alcohol and tobacco products during the last two financial years as these are high risk factors for acquiring diabetes in the future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the legislative point of view, the Public Health (Prohibition on Advertisement, Sponsorship and Restriction on Sale and Consumption in Public Places of Alcoholic Drinks) was amended in 2021 and the Public Health (Restrictions on Tobacco Products) was amended in 2022. The new legislation on tobacco is in force since 31 May 2023 with the concept of plain packaging. One of the salient features of the regulation is that no tobacco-vending licences will be delivered to new retailers located within the perimeter of 200 metres of educational institutions, sports and leisure facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has also developed various action plans including the National Sport and Physical Activity Policy (2018-2028) developed in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office and other Ministries, the National Action Plan to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol (2020-2024), the National Action Plan for Tobacco Control (2022-2026) and more recently, the National Integrated NCD Action Plan (2023-2028) to combat diabetes and pre-diabetes and other Non-Communicable Diseases. These action plans have well-defined strategies to further curb the prevalence of diabetes and pre-diabetes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, communication is a key player in the fight against diabetes and pre-diabetes. In this respect, as part of the communicative strategies for prevention, TV and Radio programmes dedicated to health promotion are broadcasted at peak times and much emphasis is laid on lifestyle modification during these programmes. A Facebook page is also available and media contents in relation to healthy lifestyle are regularly posted online to sensitise the population on diabetes and its associated complications.

Apart from traditional and digital platforms, health promotion campaigns are organised in the compound of Commercial Centres, Shopping Malls, District Councils and Municipal Councils across the island, to reach a greater number of persons. Some 4,500 to 5,000 persons have visited the different stands at each session.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the control of diabetes and pre-diabetes, early detection is essential. In this context, so as not to leave anyone behind, strategic measures are undertaken at different levels of the population, namely, at worksites, in the community and in schools. My Ministry carries out the *“Prévention Nationale pour les Maladies Non-*

Transmissible” through its mobile clinic services in the community. On a yearly basis, about 270 communities and 295 worksites are visited and around 40,000 persons are screened for NCDs. These screening programmes are carried out in collaboration with civil societies, the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for vulnerable groups of the population.

Furthermore, screening programmes for students of secondary schools of Grade 7, Grade 9 and Grade 12 (aged between 13 to 17 years) are carried out through the School Health Programme for Secondary Schools for the early detection of NCDs and around 39,000 students are screened annually.

Newly diagnosed cases of diabetes and pre-diabetes are referred to the nearest health facility for prompt management. When diagnosed with associated risk factors such as obesity or tobacco consumption, the participants are referred to a nutritionist or to Smoking Cessation Clinics in the region. On the other hand, students found to be obese and having family history of diabetes are screened for diabetes with HbA1c test.

Mr Speaker, Sir, considerable progress has also been made with regards to management and treatment of patients with diabetes, pre-diabetes and associated risk factors. In NCD Clinics at Primary Health Care points, diabetic patients are regularly assessed by Community Physicians and are referred to a multidisciplinary team depending on the patient’s medical condition. New health facilities comprising of diabetic foot care services have been established since 2020.

An hon. Member: *Otan longue reponse!*

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, because this is an important subject. More than 40% of the population – it’s so important today and it needs your collaboration as well.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: If you are tired of listening about diabetes, tomorrow is the Diabetic Day. It’s such an important topic.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Toussaint: *Dir li doh!*

Mr Speaker: You are invited to a religious ceremony?

Mr Ameer Meea: No.

Dr. Jagutpal: It's a new health facility comprising of diabetic foot care. It's so important for all of us. Services have been established since 2020.

Mr Ameer Meea: I have an important PQ next.

Dr. Jagutpal: Diabetic specialised nurses have been trained to manage cases of podiatry as well as advanced wound care dressings.

In addition, Retinopathy Screening Services are also available at 6 retinal screening units where dilated eye examination is conducted every 1-2 years, starting at the time of diagnosis. Treatment for cataract and diabetic retinopathy are also carried out through Laser therapy and Injection therapy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, several surveys and research work in relation to diabetes and risk factors have also been carried out in order to devise appropriate intervention strategies so as to reduce its incidence and thus improving disease control. My Ministry, in collaboration with international consultants, conducted the Mauritius Intensive Diabetes Action Study (MIDAS). In addition, my Ministry also conducted a study on 'Development and Evaluation of a Technology-Assisted Diabetes Prevention Programme in collaboration with Diabetes Research Foundation, Chennai, India in Mauritius to evaluate the impact of text messaging on the prevention of diabetes in the Mauritian population who are at high risk of developing diabetes from 2019 to 2021.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you hon. Minister for this very comprehensive answer. We know smoking is one of the major causes of Type 2 diabetes. Can the hon. Minister inform the House what actions are being taken at his Ministry to discourage smoking and of course any sensitisation campaigns with respect to smoking and diabetes? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, smoking is a key factor in developing diabetes and as I stated in my reply, from the legislative point of view, many amendments have been brought to the smoking cessation activities introduced in Mauritius since this year as well as many campaigns on prevention and they are offering services for smokers to quit smoking in different smoking cessation clinics.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As the hon. Minister informed the House, tomorrow we commemorate the World's Diabetes Day. Can the hon. Minister inform the House what are the activities planned at the level of his Ministry? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, tomorrow we are having a very important activity at Rivière du Rempart where all Members are invited to participate in these activities and the Members of the Opposition also are invited to take cognizance of all the

activities organised by the Government, by the Ministry to promote a healthy lifestyle. Not only weightlifting but there are so many other activities that we can do to sensitise the population on prevention.

Mr Speaker: Now, it's your turn to talk.

METRO EXPRESS LTD - FINANCIAL STATEMENT

(No. B/1473) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to Metro Express Ltd., he will state if the financial statement thereof is now available and, if so, table copy thereof.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Metro Express Ltd. that the latest audited financial statement filed with the Registrar of Companies under the Companies Act 2001 relates to the financial year ending 30 June 2020. The financial statement for the year ending 30 June 2021 is currently being audited and same is expected to be finalised by January 2024. I am also advised that the financial statement for the financial year 30 June 2022 and financial year ending 30 June 2023 would consequently be finalised by June 2024 and December 2024, respectively.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am really stunned that the last financial statement for Metro Express dates back to 30 June 2020 and it has been almost three and a half years that we do not have another set of financial statement. There have been three financial year-ends, 2021, 2022 and 2023, which have not yet been published.

Can I ask the hon. Minister, because the figures that we have on CBRIS, the portal of Registrar of Companies, we have a loss of almost Rs500 m. in 2020, which, I agree is not an indication because it was only Phase I and only half year of running of the Metro, but can we have a feel of the financials of the company as at now?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the first part of the question of the hon. Member, I will explain to him why the delay has taken place. Mr Speaker, Sir, due to the COVID-19 pandemic constraints, the Metro Express project was launched in sub phases over three years, namely –

- (a) Phase I – Port Louis to Rose Hill in 2020;
- (b) Phase IIA – Rose Hill to Quatre Bornes in 2021 and then Phase IIB and Phase IIC – Quatre Bornes to Phoenix and Phoenix to Curepipe in 2022, and
- (c) Phase III – Rose Hill to Réduit in 2023, that is, this year.

Metro Express – I am sure the hon. Member will understand – as a responsible developer and operator, ensured that the Mauritius population benefits from the service incrementally and this resulted in the asset base of the company to grow continuously over the past years. Consequently, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an on-going assessment of the asset base which, you will understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, have implications on the financial position of the company and needs to be accurately reflected in the financial statements of the company.

Now, with regard to the other part of the question of the hon. Member, the accounting loss, as he rightly said, Mr Speaker, Sir, is understandable but I can assure him that this loss included depreciation of fixed assets and financing cost comprising of interest and charges on Exim loan and also foreign exchange loss.

Now, with regard to the financial viability of the project, Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, this would be related to sensible information but I can inform the hon. Member that Metro Express has only been fully operational from Port Louis to Curepipe and from Rose Hill to Ebène, only nine months ago. So, the question of profit generated to date is premature. The operations are not fully bedded and the company has yet to reach its cruising speed.

Moreover, let me inform the hon. Member that, therefore, the financial performance of light rail cannot be assessed, cannot be gaged over such a short period of time but I can assure the hon. Member, the House and the nation at large that it is comforting to note that MEL is currently already operating at nearly 80% of its breakeven level.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to what the hon. Minister stated in reply to PQ B/1334 to the effect that the extension towards St Pierre and Côte d'Or has been deferred due to slow uptake of private projects in the region of Moka, using his own words, does the hon. Minister think that this might have an impact on the financial statement of Metro Express?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we gave the reason and I gave the answer last time why this Phase IV project has been deferred but the hon. Member should know also that there are new projects which are already in the pipeline, for example, the extension from Place d'Armes to Immigration Square and from Curepipe to La Vigie also, which will inevitably boost up the ridership of the Metro Express, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: MP Richard Duval!

HARRY LATOUR STADIUM - CLOSURE - REASONS

(No. B/1474) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Harry Latour Stadium, he will state –

- (a) the reasons as to the closure thereof, indicating since when;
- (b) when the last renovation work was carried out thereat, giving details thereof and the total amount spent therefor, and
- (c) the renovation plan thereof, if any, being envisaged by his Ministry and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Harry Latour Stadium was closed to the public on 16 August 2023 due to the maintenance of the football pitch. The stadium was reopened on 04 November 2023.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the stadium had undergone major renovation/upgrading works as follows –

- (a) Phase I – for which bids were launched at the level of the Ministry comprised –
 - (1) the construction of stand, boundary wall and ancillary works –completed on 05 October 2016;
 - (2) upgrading works including supply and laying of tiles, painting works, supply and laying of interlocking paving bricks – completed on 12 June 2017, and
 - (3) replacement of luminaries – completed on 03 February 2020;
- (b) Phase II – the contract for the renovation works was awarded by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development under the Framework Agreement 2018-2019, to contractor Nova Glass Waterproofing Private Co. Ltd in 2020 and completed in 2022.

The main components of the works included –

- (1) repair of broken slabs for drains around the perimeter of the football ground;
- (2) reconstruction of high boundary wall of the stadium;
- (3) repair of fencing of football playground and other ancillary works;

- (4) renovation of cloakroom, office, toilet, store, cabinets, and
- (5) construction of metal shed and shelter near the main entrance.

In June 2022, upgrading works consisting of the removal and replacement of floodlights and associated electrical installation works were carried out at the stadium and completed in the same year. The total amount for the above major renovation works have cost around Rs10,738,656.04.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last renovation works relate to the maintenance of the turf of the football pitch as stated above and is carried out on a yearly basis and covers a three-month's period. Maintenance is required to prevent the deterioration of the turf, and poor surface playability, which in turn may result in increased risk of injury and increased cost of repairs. The cost of the maintenance works amounts to around Rs70,000 and includes topsoil, fertiliser and other related items.

With regard to part (c) of the question, my Ministry will endeavour to attend to either minor or major renovation works that may crop up in the future subject to the availability of funds. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, Harry Latour Stadium, having a relatively high booking rate, there is the need for regular maintenance. Presently, the football pitch is practicable for users and does not require any major uplifting but only regular maintenance. Thank you.

Mr R. Duval: Le ministre n'est pas sans savoir qu'aucune compétition officielle de la MFA n'est organisée privant ainsi les Mahebourgeois de distraction. Et alors que les derniers travaux se sont éternisés, le ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi ce stade est laissé dans un état si déplorable ?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, je crois que l'honorable membre n'a pas du tout écouté ma réponse. J'ai bien expliqué tous les travaux de rénovation depuis 2016 ; pour commencer, le *boundary wall*, M. le président, était sur le point de tomber sur la tête des gens. Et je le redis depuis 2016, il y a plusieurs travaux de rénovations qui ont été faits incluant le *boundary wall*.

Nous avons construit un abri juste à l'entrée, nous avons refait les gradins ; je ne vais pas relire toute ma réponse. Je redis, j'ai l'impression que l'honorable membre n'a pas écouté ma réponse.

Mr R. Duval: M. le ministre, une vidéo circule sur les réseaux sociaux par les habitants eux-mêmes. Ils sont terriblement remontés par l'état du stade. Est-ce que le ministre est conscient de ça ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, il y a tellement de photos et de vidéos *lamok* en ce moment, je ne saurai porter gré à ce genre de cinéma de bas étages sur les réseaux sociaux. Si l'honorable membre a quelque chose de spécifique pour expliquer que d'après lui, le stade est dans un état déplorable, nous sommes disposés à écouter et s'il y a des actions à prendre, on le fera. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Woochit!

RESERVOIRS' UPGRADING – INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE – COST & MEASURES TAKEN

(No. B/1475) Mr Woochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to water supply, he will state –

- (a) the amount of money invested for the upgrading of reservoirs, and
- (b) the actions taken and measures envisaged to improve the resilience of the infrastructure thereof.

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr M. Seeruttun):
Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I am going to reply to this Parliamentary Question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the paramount importance of water supply infrastructure is underscored by both financial investments in reservoir upgrading and the strategic actions taken to enhance infrastructure resilience. This dual focus not only addresses the immediate need of water resource management but also ensures the long-term sustainability and adaptability of the vital reservoir systems.

I am informed that between 1997 and 1999, a dam safety analysis study was conducted by the Water Resources Unit for the Mare aux Vacoas, Mare Longue, Piton du Milieu, la Nicolière, La Ferme and Riche en Eau dams as well as the Municipal Dyke. The study recommended the rehabilitation and upgrading of these infrastructures and the raising of the storage capacity be increased wherever feasible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that from 2001 to 2005, the Mare aux Vacoas and La Nicolière dam as well as the Municipal Dyke were rehabilitated for a total sum of around Rs180 m. Works for the rehabilitation and upgrading of La Ferme dam are expected to start in July/August 2024 and to be completed around June 2026. In this context, the consultancy services of Studio Pietrangeli from Italy was retained in 2020 to –

- review existing reports on the upgrading works at La Ferme dam;

- make proposals for reservoir boundaries;
- update design report, and
- carry out EIA, amongst others.

To date, an amount of Rs159,167.25 has been paid to the Consultant.

Upgrading and rehabilitation works are expected to cost around Rs700 m. and they include raising of the dam to increase its storage capacity from 11,520,000 m³ to around 14,000,000 m³. A portion of the storage will be used to boost potable water supply to western regions. After the La Ferme dam, it is planned to rehabilitate the Piton du Milieu dam including its raising to increase storage capacity followed by Mare Longue reservoir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that all existing dam rehabilitation and upgrading projects are developed by skilled international consultants who also supervise their implementation up to the final stage.

With regard to part (b) of the question, in the order to improve the resilience of our water resources infrastructures particularly dams and feeder canals, budgetary provisions are made annually for their maintenance and operation. In the Financial Year 2023/2024, an amount of Rs25 m. has been provided for the purposes of maintenance, general cleaning and clearing of dams and feeder canals as well as minor repairs to those infrastructures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the significance of maintenance contracts and investment in reservoirs upgrading play a notable role in ensuring reliable water supply and enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure. I am informed that the contracts for maintenance of dams and feeder canals are executed under two contracts that cover –

- (i) Midlands dam, Piton du Milieu dam and La Nicolière feeder canal, and
- (ii) Mare aux Vacoas, Mare Longue, Bagatelle, La Ferme and Arnaud dams, respectively.

Moreover, monitoring of the instrumentation installed on the new dams at Midlands and Bagatelle is carried out on a regular basis. Physical inspections of dams and feeder canals are performed in addition to maintenance works and during bad weather circumstances. The proper functioning of the electro-chemical equipment at Midlands and Bagatelle dams are furthermore outsourced to specialised service providers. The above measures contribute towards ensuring the good health and resilience of the water resources infrastructures which are at the heart of the water supply. Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know the hon. Minister is not the substantive Minister. Still, may I ask him if he is aware that millions of rupees are being spent on consultancy fees according to yearly budget and by yourself as you have just mentioned, on upgrading and maintenance of reservoirs, feeders canals and filter beds as is, and if it is so, can the Minister provide a specific timeline for the completion of these upgrades and by when, the problem of water supply disruption is expected to be resolved?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I said in my main reply that some of the reservoirs have already been upgraded and the one that is being planned to be upgraded in the near future is La Ferme dam. And I can inform the House that with regard to La Ferme dam, the works are expected to be carried out in June/July 2024 and expected to be completed by June 2026.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/1476, B/1477, B/1481, B/1486, B/1490, B/1493, B/1502, B/1505 and B/1511 have been withdrawn.

Time over by four minutes!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

(4.40 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

WORLD DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD TRAFFIC VICTIMS 2023

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With your kind permission, I will make a statement in the context of the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims which is commemorated, each year, on the third Sunday of November in line with the Resolution adopted by the United Nations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims seeks to pay an earnest tribute to the countless victims having either lost their lives or sustained

serious injuries which have resulted, in severe incapacitation, as a result of road accidents, across the world. It also intends to acknowledge the excruciating pain and deep emotional trauma and devastation inflicted on all victims, their families and communities.

The commemoration brings us to the stark reality of the aftermath of fatal or serious road accidents, the consequences of which are broken and disjointed families, financial and economic distress following the demise of breadwinners, dreams which would never materialise especially for young people, or reduced quality of life arising from the loss of body parts due to the road accidents, just to name but a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Day of Remembrance serves as a platform to ensure that the memory of the departed never wane into oblivion whilst also emphasising on preventive actions to curb road traffic accidents.

The chosen slogan and theme for this year, as set out by the United Nations, are ‘Remember. Support. Act and Justice’, respectively.

The World Remembrance Day, Mr Speaker, Sir, is also an opportunity to give due recognition to all those who tirelessly strive to make our roads safer and those front liners providing immediate assistance to victims of road accidents. Here, I have in mind the emergency crews, namely the Police, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, and especially the medical professionals who deal daily with the aftermath of road crashes. Their selfless commitment towards those involved in road accidents cannot go unnoticed and we need to give them the credit they rightfully deserve.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with considerable sadness that I have to inform the House, that since the beginning of this year to date, the road has made 115 victims who have lost their lives. Out of the 115 victims, 36 were pedestrians, 54 were on two-wheelers, including cyclists and pillion riders. The pedestrians and two-wheelers account for around 78% of the total killed and are considered to be most vulnerable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one death is too many. In spite of the accrued effort of Government to provide better and safer roads, accidents are on the increase and this trend cannot be accepted.

To mark the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims and to create an awareness for our road users to use the roads wisely, my Ministry, together with relevant stakeholders, is organising a series of activities with specific classes of road users, in the course of next week with a view to further sensitising the population on road safety issues –

- (i) On Saturday 18 November 2023, a ‘Mass’ would be organised at La Chapelle Saint Luc at Résidence Kennedy and would be presided by His Lordship, the Bishop of Port-Louis, Mgr Jean-Michaël Durhône. This Mass would also be graced by the presence of the hon. Prime Minister who has always been a staunch supporter for road safety and who is presently chairing a Road Safety Commission.
- (ii) On Sunday 19 November 2023, a Motorcycle’s Road Show would be held in collaboration with the Moto Club and Fellow Bikers, two associations regrouping some 200 motorcyclists and the riders of the Police Traffic Branch. The road show would start from Plaza and would proceed to Tribeca Mall through Belle Rose and Ebène.
- (iii) The Official Ceremony of the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims 2023 would be held at 11.00 a.m. at Tribeca Mall. This event would comprise the launching of a Road Safety Campaign for Pedestrians, a Motorcycle’s show, sensitisation of the public by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, the Police and the Emergency Services (Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services and SAMU) and Metro Express Ltd. and distribution of reflective motorcyclist vests by SICOM Ltd., which has regularly extended support to my Ministry for promoting road safety.
- (iv) On 20 November 2023, helmets would be distributed to Motorcyclists and an interactive application on Road Safety for School Children of Grade 4 would be introduced in collaboration with Total Energy at the Belle Vue Gas Station.
- (v) On Wednesday 22 November 2023, as from 10.00 a.m., a Youth Rally consisting of 200 youngsters from Youth Centres and Youth Associations, accompanied by the Police Band, would be organised from Plaisance Mall to Gandhi Square, Rose Belle. This will be followed by a ‘Wreath Laying Ceremony’ at the Stele found at the Gandhi Square to commemorate the death of road victims each year.
- (vi) On 23 November 2023, a training course on defensive driving would be provided by the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, in collaboration with my Ministry, the MITD and the Police Force, for some 100 taxi drivers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the aim of these activities is to unrelentlessly push for the promotion of road safety practices among the population as the importance of sensitisation

can never be overemphasised the more so that people tend to overlook that road accidents are, at times, sudden violent events with long lasting impacts and irreversible consequences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, sadly, we are still observing with profound concerns, several cases of irresponsible behaviour in terms of drivers operating under the influence of intoxicating substances. Likewise, excessive speeding by irresponsible road users is one of the major causes of fatal accidents. These obnoxious behaviours and abhorrent practices should be condemned by one and all.

Therefore, my appeal today, Mr Speaker, Sir, through this august Assembly, is for every citizen to act responsibly while being on the roads. And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to stress that road users need to be particularly mindful of those who are most vulnerable, that is, pedestrians, among whom the elderly, and two-wheelers. In fact, these two categories, as I have stated earlier, account for around 78% of the victims of road accidents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, road safety is, therefore, a battle that can only be won through the collective efforts of one and all. Though, we, as a Government, are responsible to frame appropriate and dissuasive legislation to eliminate road casualties in addition to enhancing the road infrastructure to make it more forgiving, we need the extensive support of the population for embracing a road safety culture. This starts from instilling correct road safety practices in our children right from their tender age and acting as responsible citizens by setting the right example to the younger generations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the activities being organised by my Ministry during this road safety week will culminate on Friday 24 November 2023 which is being dedicated as a White Ribbon Day in memory of all those who have lost their lives as a result of road accidents. I seize this opportunity to make an appeal to the public to wear a white ribbon, on that day, in solidarity with the families of victims of road accidents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the White Ribbon is a community-based initiative encouraging individuals to directly contribute to raising awareness on the importance of road safety. The White Ribbon, which is in the form of a road loop, is a symbol used to represent support to road crash victims. In addition, the White Ribbon for Road Safety urges people to be careful on the roads and promote road safety messages to friends, family and colleagues.

In this context, Mr Speaker, Sir, public officers would be requested to wear a White Ribbon on 24 November 2023 as a symbolic gesture towards those involved in road

accidents. A similar plea is being made, through Business Mauritius, to the Private Sector for them to encourage their employees to partake in this endeavour as well. An appeal has been made to the public transport operators, including Metro Express Ltd, to provide a ribbon to all their passengers on that day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the above, my Ministry has arranged for all hon. Members to be provided with a white ribbon so that we can commemorate, together, the White Ribbon Day which is to be held on Friday 24 November 2023. The ribbon on the table of hon. Members is to be worn on Friday 24 November.

Mr Speaker, Sir, road safety is a national priority and transcends party politics. We are all involved in this battle and I enjoin all Members of this House to promote a road safety culture.

I would, therefore, make an appeal to all Members of this House to act as Road Safety Ambassadors and to disseminate road safety messages by wearing the White Ribbon on 24 November this year.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Deputy Speaker will take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

HON. SHAKEEL MOHAMED - PRESS CONFERENCE - ALLEGATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Hon. Members, I have to inform the House that the hon. Dhunoo has in writing, earlier today, given notice to raise a privilege complaint under Standing Order 74(1) against hon. Shakeel Mohamed for having in the course of a press conference on Tuesday 07 November 2023 made certain allegations against the Speaker, which according to hon. Dhunoo are tantamount to, I quote –

“uttering or publishing any statement reflecting on the conduct or character of, or containing or amounting to an accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty by the Speaker”

The matter has been referred to me by Mr Speaker. The transcript of the said press conference has been perused, the relevant part of which are being tabled as annex to this Ruling.

Hon. Members, I take the view that an offence may have been committed under section 6(1)(s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, which reads as follows –

“6. Contempt of the Assembly

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), each of the following acts, matters and things constitutes the offence of contempt of the Assembly”

Subsection (s) reads as follows –

“uttering or publishing any statement reflecting on the conduct or character of, or containing or amounting to an accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty by the Speaker, Deputy Speaker or Chairperson of any committee.”

Mr Dhunoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in light of your ruling, I move that the matter whereby hon. Shakeel Mohamed made comments reflecting on the conduct of the Speaker in the discharge of his duty during a press conference on Tuesday 07 November 2023 be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action pursuant to Standing Order 74(4) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling copy of the video recording and transcript of the press conference.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Boolell: Shame! Shame!

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the following Bills were read a first time –

- (a) *The Combating of Trafficking in Persons (Amendment) Bill (No. XVII of 2023)*
- (b) *The Trade (Anti-Dumping, Countervailing and Safeguard Measures) (Amendment) Bill (No. XVIII of 2023)*
- (c) *The Construction Industry Authority Bill (No. XIX of 2023)*

Second Reading

THE MAURITIUS AGRICULTURAL MARKETING (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. XVI OF 2023)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill (No. XVI of 2023).

Question again proposed.

(4.55 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the floor. This is, in fact, an important piece of legislation and I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. However, I will start with an important...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, hon. Minister Ganoo, I am sorry. The Leader of the Opposition is being distracted. Is that okay? You are happy now to continue?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, I am happy to start again. I am going to make an important quotation; quoting a sentence from hon. Seeruttun who was then Minister of Agriculture, and during a PNQ which I asked on 04 July 2017, this is what hon. Seeruttun said. He said

—

“We are not going to force anyone to go to the wholesale market to sell his products.”

What are we doing now? We are doing exactly the contrary to what the hon. Minister said at that time. Now, fast-forward...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Allow the Leader of the Opposition to continue! He was distracted earlier on! Continue please!

Mr X. L. Duval: Fast-forward to 2023. Firstly, the project is about four years late, we know that; it's not complete at all. It's far from complete. It's about four years late. But what happened to section 25BA, and it contradicts totally what we were told, what we were informed. We were misinformed, it seems, four, five years ago. In 2017, this is what section 25BA says —

“No person shall conduct the wholesale by auction of any locally-produced product at any place other than a national wholesale market.”

This seems to be in total contradiction to what we were told during the PNQ. Maybe we were wrong at the time to believe the hon. Minister. He has the chance to speak after me. He can tell us why the complete U-turn, and this is the whole point of this debate today, Mr Deputy Speaker. Why the complete U-turn? Why the complete denial of the previous

engagement formally undertaken by a sitting Minister of Agriculture in this very House. Were the planters wrong at the time in believing the Government? Should they have doubted his word? Should they have doubted his promise? Well, let's see.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it's quite aberrant what is being proposed in the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill. It says that any person who contravenes this, that he sells wholesale by auction outside than at Wooton, will be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs100,000, but, also, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you value your liberty like me, it says this: and to imprisonment not exceeding one year. Imprisonment not exceeding one year. Why? These people haven't sold *lalo pouri*, they haven't sold *brinjel gaté*, they haven't sold *margoz avarié*. No! These guys should go to prison! These guys know they haven't done all this. They are selling proper food but not in the right place that is acceptable to the Government. That is, I presume, their only fault; not having sold indecently dirty products! No! They have just sold it in the wrong place, in the wrong manner, that is, wholesale by auction.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what are we doing? We are threatening otherwise honest law-abiding citizens. We have nothing to reproach them. We are, in fact, coming with this draconian measure - I have never seen this anywhere else - for these honest, law-abiding, hardworking citizens. We are threatening them now with imprisonment, nearly for selling by auction in the wrong place, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I think, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we should not forget the difficult life - and I think the Minister mentioned it because he lives in a rural area also, like I do. He has mentioned the difficult life of the *petits planteurs*, and I agree 1,000% because I live in Melville and Melville is surrounded on one side by fishermen, on the sea, and the three other sides by planters who live a very, very difficult life, especially in the north.

I don't know; I can't say everywhere else. I presume it's the same everywhere else, but a very, very difficult life. And these people are pillars of our society, like it or not. They are pillars of our society; they are respectable people, and these people suffer. They suffer when there is too much rain - you said so yourself. They suffer because their crops rot. If there is too little rain, again, drought, they suffer because their plants dry up.

A sudden cyclone can destroy months of hard labour. They work in the scorching sun most of the time and they also work, if need be, in the drenching rain. These are the pillars of our society for which we are actually threatening with imprisonment today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only this. All this can go very well. Let's say they just mistime their crop. They produce tomatoes at the wrong time and there is a glut of tomatoes and, there again, *faillite*, because they can't find a decent market at a decent

price. These are, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, worthwhile - I know the Minister also mentioned it; I appreciate that - also for the Opposition to show that we understand the effort that the small planters make in their daily lives. But, more than that, they suffer from a deliberate policy of Government; depreciation of the Rupee.

Ayaya! Bad bad bad! Depreciation of the Rupee! Cost of fertilisers hits the roof; herbicides hit the roof; pesticides hit the roof. Whenever you meet a small planter, when he sees a politician, I guess the first thing that he will say - isn't that right - he will complain about the cost of these products to go into his plantation. This is the main conversation, and so, the small planters must understand that it is because of the dramatic fall in the rupee by 40% since this Government took over in 2015 that the inputs they put in their plantation have hit the roof because of mark-ups, by maybe more than 40%, maybe 80%, that the importers, etc., obviously make on importation.

So, they have suffered, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And how long will these small planters be with us? How many young people actually join in the small planting community? Not many. I have spoken to a lot living in Goodlands, for instance. They tell me: 'You know, my children are lawyers, teachers, civil servants. They are not going to be small planters like me.'

(Interruptions)

Ministers! Why not? This is the situation that we have. So, this is a category of people who are extremely important for the nation but who are and might be disappearing because there is an easier life elsewhere for their children who are now educated and well-to-do. This is the situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we face ourselves in.

So, like fishermen, this category of our citizens needs to be nurtured; they need to be taken care of, and this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is an absolute necessity. So, we ask ourselves in the Opposition: why them? The additional burden for people who don't deserve this treatment, to be threatened with Rs100,000 fine and imprisonment of one year when the Government had taken exactly the opposite commitment in 2017 by the then Minister. And we are being told by the current Minister of Agro-Industry why all this is being done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is being done to improve the financial livelihood of planters; you told us that last week. Are these people so stupid that they don't understand that you are trying to improve their livelihood or is it you who do not understand what they really need? I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it is the Government that doesn't understand what the planters need and what the planters want, and that is the problem. They are intelligent people; they know how to run their business and they don't need to be

threatened with imprisonment because you have decided to construct a white elephant or something like that in Wooton.

I am glad that hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah finds it funny, but so long as there is no swearing, I don't mind. Thank you; thank you very much. Just don't swear, I'm okay; laughing is okay.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the first point is, therefore, in my view, if it is going to improve the financial livelihood of planters, let's say that it is and I believe that for some category of planters it may well do so, it all depends on geographical location probably, then, why do we need to coerce the others? That is the question I am asking myself because I think you did not mention the cost when you spoke, hon. Minister. We are told something like Rs500 m. has been spent on this facility. Now, this facility is about four years late. I think it was meant to open in 2019, and we are now obviously in 2023. You will blame COVID, etc., as everybody, but COVID did not last four years, and it is four years late. And even now, this wholesale market is not complete. Is it?

So, you have an incomplete facility that you want to coerce people to go to. It is not complete. Where is the cold room? I would like to see the cold room that was promised by the previous Minister.

Where are the storage facilities? Where is the warehouse? Where is the commercial space for sellers of fertilisers; sellers of agricultural equipment? Where is the space for a bank? Where is the space for growers to sell directly to retailers? All these are not yet there. The project is only 50% complete. Maybe, had you really had a complete project with all the interesting facilities, people will go there, have a cup of tea in the food court that doesn't exist, go to the bank, buy some agricultural equipment, buy some fertilisers and go home. They might see some interest in coming, but you have not completed it. Have you? It is still 50% complete; there is none of these.

There is only a big space, subdivided for people to sell. That's about all I have seen and offices upstairs for your staff, which is quite rightly so. But even you have agreed the MauriGAP Certified Growers is not yet operational. Is it? That's not there. The special desk to help planters; it's not there. The public address system - is it really that difficult, in 2023, to organise a public address system? I mean, does that take so much time? Surely that's something that is quite easy to do. I mean everybody does that every day; electronic displays, CCTV cameras. None of these, according to what you say, are yet operational; they are envisaged in this medium-term and some even in the long-term. Also, as you might remember, hon. Minister, this facility was not meant to be managed by the Agricultural Board. Was it? It was meant to be managed by joint private-public company;

to be managed jointly by the private sector. That also has been *une promesse en vain* because it hasn't been done.

So, it is the Government running a commercial facility with no managerial input from the private sector. Last week, you told us that 250 planters visit regularly. We were told during that PNQ of 2017 that there are 6,700 planters in all. You told us, I think, last week, that it was 10,000 planters. I don't know what is the discrepancy in the figures, but you also told us that 250 visit on a regular basis. That is a problem, isn't it? If you have 6,700 planters or 10,000 planters - I don't know which - and only 250 visit regularly, that tells you itself. Probably this is why there is need for this. Some of them I know use traders, etc., but it's not a pleasant situation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, having said all this, I think the attractiveness or not of the National Wholesale Market is the geographical location. There is no doubt; we are not being stupid here that if you are to live in Vacoas or near the National Wholesale Market, you will find it positive. So, the central area, maybe even the southern area, maybe some people in the western area, they might find this a positive aspect and we have no problem with that. That part of the planters' population finds it positive. But, in the famous PNQ of 2017, we were told that 3,700 planters lived outside these regions. Therefore, they live in the eastern and northern regions of Mauritius. So, they live in Flacq, Triolet, Goodlands, Fond du Sac, etc. You name it; that is where they are. 60% (3,700) live outside of these regions, and I can find the text if you want me to in the PNQ.

So, this is the question, and that is why the Opposition has come in with the proposal to have regional markets and you have not yourself – thank you – you have not discarded this possibility. Unlike your predecessor, you have said that the law provides for “a” National, not “the”. So, you can have more than one, and this is exactly our contention. It is that this may offer some or numerous advantages depending on the geographical location of the planter but it also offers huge disadvantages to people who live far. Now, imagine that you be – let us say 4 or 5 a.m., 4 a.m. in the morning, I do not know – in Wooton. Now, you have to be a *somnambule* to like this sort of things. You have to leave Goodlands, Triolet, Flacq early, put it in your truck, take it there and try and sell it. If it is sold, good enough; if it is not sold, take it back and obviously you have to return. I got stuck in the traffic when I left Wooton. When I left about Monday last, I got stuck in the traffic, there was a lot of traffic while leaving Wooton, and I left about 7 a.m. So, there is a problem of traffic, there is a problem of time.

Now, nobody likes to relish waking up early in the morning to end up in Wooton where they could sell much more easily in Flacq or even in Port Louis as before and we

are suggesting some regional wholesale markets. And this morning, I do not know what happened. The hon. Minister maybe will tell us what happened this morning because there was a big hoo-ha this morning at the National Wholesale Market. I do not know if you are aware that there was a big hoo-ha because instead of opening the market for the bidding at the usual time, someone decided that they should do it at 2 a.m. in the morning and 2.30 a.m. in the morning. And, obviously everybody was taken aback. Most of the auctioneers were not there. Only one or two auctioneers had had this advanced warning. It is only for fruits by the way, it was not for vegetables. And so, this is also very unfair. Only one or two auctioneers were there and it started at 2.30 a.m. Can you imagine starting an auction at 2.30 a.m. in the morning? These people are human beings entitled to a decent sleep. And of course, if they do not take it there now, you are going to put them in prison. I think this does not make sense at all!

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we talked about having to take the product there and I am told that from where I live in Goodlands, it used to be Rs50 a crate to go to Port Louis. To go to Wooton, it is now Rs75 a crate. Who is going to pay the Rs25 extra? Tell us later: who is going pay? You are noting. I know it is true.

Who is going to pay the Rs25? It is an important question. Who is going to pay the extra Rs25? Now, if as had been expected, you had promised the financial incentives, going there would have been covered then everybody would have been happy to go if they were getting Rs50 more on a crate than they were getting before. It is obviously not the case. So, *zot pe perdi dan poche*. It is not good; something must be done and of course as we know, the cost of diesel keeps on spiraling in Mauritius thanks to some contract to which we had not have the luck, the opportunity to see because it is confidential. Nevertheless, it is affecting this confidential agreement made with MIC – MIG or something, MMG, MMI, whichever – confidentially. It is affecting the lives of the planters here, you see, because they have to pay additional cost for the transport with no transparency as to exactly what Government has done in the name in the purchase of diesel.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a transport issue. Not to mention that the goods may have to return back to Triolet, Goodlands, etc. If the goods are to be sold in Goodlands market or Flacq, they will be taken from there to Wooton to be sold and they have to be taken back from Wooton to Flacq, to Goodlands and everywhere else. So, not only are you talking about Rs75 – like the hon. Minister of Commerce, I am also an accountant you know – so, I can imagine that it is going to be twice now. Rs75 going one way and Rs75 coming the other way. None of this would have existed before. This is a

cost that is being imposed on the small planter. If he had sold by auction his goods in Flacq, he would not have paid the fees to Wooton neither the guy from the *foire* would have had to pay the return fair. This is all imposed on the planter and eventually, obviously the consumer.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are some of the reasons why I have gathered that there is a lot of reluctance. I mention again, it is all to do with geography or where the planters are and where the markets are, with goods going up and forth, not to mention, I think, *pomme d'amour* going up and down from Flacq to Wooton is not good for the state of the *pomme d'amour*. So, I mean that also does deteriorate the product, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Now, there was also supposed to be a Joint Price Commission, wasn't there? A Joint Price Commission to determine prices in the morning. No sign of that Joint Price Commission yet, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, we, in the Opposition, we want, we will have regional markets. We will have, the next Government will have regional markets so that people can sell their goods in Flacq, can sell their goods maybe in Port Louis and in the west because that is the only solution. With the added advantages that no doubt exist at the National Wholesale Market, to do with added security, added traceability, added pesticide control, it does not have to be only in Wooton that you can do this. At small cost, you can do this in three other places as well. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is for the future. The regional wholesale markets are something for the future and it is something that I absolutely believe in.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now, this Bill does not ban wholesale markets, wholesale selling, sale by wholesale. It only bans wholesale by auction. So, you can very well keep your product and sell it at a pre-determined price to whomever you want and that is not illegal. Thank God! I still do not understand why fishermen cannot sell their fish themselves and have to go to *banian* to sell the fish. But, this was something that the Minister found was necessary to impose on the poor fishermen, that they will have to go to a *banian*, to an intermediary to sell their fish even if they are selling to a hotel, to a restaurant. I find that totally unacceptable. This is not the case! Here, the planters can sell directly if they wish. It is only by auction that they cannot sell.

Mr Seeruttun: Tout le contraire maintenant !

Mr X. L. Duval: It is only by auction that they cannot sell. Why? But, you see, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a law must be enforceable and this is my point. This is WhatsApp. I take a picture of my product; I send it to my WhatsApp group and I say okay, who wants it for Rs25 or Rs30? It is all here on WhatsApp. Can you enforce this, even with the NSS

and all the listening equipment? Are you going to listen to what the planters do on their phone? You cannot enforce this law. It is already being done at the moment. People are already selling their products via WhatsApp group. This is a law that is not even enforceable and the first rule of having a law is for it to be enforceable. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not enforceable because it is so easy to bypass it, so easy. I mean a child will do it.

Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a law must be precise. You cannot have a law that is *à peu près*. I am not a lawyer but section 10 of our Constitution and the recent judgement of Seegum, the ICTA, are very clear, that you cannot have a law which says if you annoy people then that is illegal. Same here! You are saying that wholesale by auction is legal except for large quantities. What is large? How many crates do you consider as large? Is it for your personal consumption? Large may be a lot. For another person, large may be little. Are two crates of *pommes d'amour* large for you? Can you tell us in your summing-up or the Minister will tell us what is large? We need to know what is large; the planters need to know. The *encanteur* needs to know what is large. How many is large? Can you tell us? I will give way if you can tell us now. I give you way right now. Can the Minister tell us what is large? What is large? How many crates are considered as large? You are talking about *bal kokom*? What are you talking about? How much is large? He does not want to. I am giving way; he does not want. Okay! I would have expected...

(Interruptions)

Sorry?

Mr Hurdoyal: Large can be weighed through the quantity and also through the quality.

The Deputy Speaker: It is not proper once again...

Mr X. L. Duval: No, I am giving way, it is okay.

The Deputy Speaker: One second, one second!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am allowed to give way.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, if you want to answer, you have way. Do you want to?

Mr Hurdoyal: The hon. Leader of the Opposition asked...

The Deputy Speaker: Say it on the mic if you want.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, you can. Yes. What is large? So, large is quantity and quality?

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no!

Mr X. L. Duval: That is what you said, isn't it?

Mr Hurdoyal: ... *li pa...*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Hurdoyal: *Li pa enn...*

Mr X. L. Duval: What is large?

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay, we won't continue.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no!

Mr X. L. Duval: We do not know what is large.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. I continue.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: It is not Question Time; keep it for the next Sitting.

Mr X. L. Duval: No, we do not know what is large. That is the point, Mr Deputy, Speaker, Sir! The Minister does not know what is large; the Court will not know what is large.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no!

Mr X. L. Duval: The planters do not know what is large. Nobody knows what is large and that is the problem.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no! Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Sorry?

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Cheap politics!

The Deputy Speaker: Order! By far, I see...

Mr X. L. Duval: What is wrong?

The Deputy Speaker: Give me one second! I just wanted order so that you can hear me properly. It is not proper right now to say that the Minister does not know what is large.

Mr X. L. Duval: No? Why not? What is not proper with that?

An hon. Member: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! You do not have to answer for me!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Is it Question Time or debate?

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay, I rephrase it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr X. L. Duval: Does the Minister know what is large? He has not replied so we presume that he does not know.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: It is not Question Time!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, large is a big issue and I really hope and I really want - if he can - the Minister, in his summing up, to be precise as to what is large. Now, I heard him said that large is not only quantity but is also quality.

Mr Hurdoyal: Weight also...

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. So, let us see. It would be interesting to see his definition of 'large'. But, as I mentioned, the law may not actually fit the standards set by the Constitution and by the recent Seegum case but we will see. I will be patient and in the summing-up, all of us will know what is large and what is small and can be sold and cannot be sold. That is important though.

(Interruptions)

Who is that?

Mr Hurdoyal: *Bizin amen balans!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! You won't wait hon. Minister?

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me continue.

As I mentioned, there is a strong cost incentive not to go to Wooton if you live far and the strong time incentive not to go.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what about the toll fee? It seems we have forgotten about the toll fee. Because this market will not operate according to what we were told in the PNQ of 2017 and the Minister has neither mentioned that it is still there nor that it is not

there. And we, obviously, expect the Minister to be complete in his reply. There was mention...

Don't fall off your chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

The Deputy Speaker: I am not!

Mr X. L. Duval: There was mention that the toll fee would be from Rs100 per entry to - would you believe - Rs1,000 per entry into this famous wholesale market. *Non seulement* they force you to go there but you also have to pay to enter. This is great! You also have to pay to enter! You mentioned that, didn't you? You remember that? Yes! So, there is a toll fee. And what has happened to this toll fee? We do not know. This toll fee was going to bring a few million rupees, as far as I remember, to the coffers of Government. So, perhaps, hon. Minister, you will tell us now whether it has been increased or has it decreased, what has happened to the toll fee. I thought you would have told us in your opening speech.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I read, I think in *L'Express*, a few days ago, on the 13th I think, some *encanteurs* complaining about the facilities. And you told us that it was going to be clean, etc. I am sure you read what the guy said about the toilets being extremely dirty. So, this is obvious, not even the toilets can be clean. *C'est embarrassant* for a new facility like this, for which you are forcing people to go and to use the dirty toilets that are there, and with a toll fee that you want to make people pay.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, application for an auctioneer licence. We have to respect our citizens. We cannot create laws or continue with laws that force you to apply for an auctioneer licence, do not give you any criteria, do not give you any time limit, do not give you any appeal's procedure should you be refused an auctioneer licence. The same thing happened last time with the fishermen and everyone in the fish industry. I think we owe it out of respect to our citizens, to the people of Mauritius to be rules-based in what we do: who is entitled to an auctioneer's licence; what is the time limit for the Ministry to respond to it; also provide a reason for rejection; and an appeal's procedure. That is very, very important.

And I see that in its generosity, the Government has now said that *encanteurs* can pass on their business to their heirs, not to the 'hairs', to the heirs. But why can't they sell the business? You work 30-40 years in a business; you have become the biggest *encanteur* in Mauritius; you are making a lot of money and that is good because you are the best. You want to retire and you do not have anyone to give it to because nobody wants to do this business, to get up at 2 a.m., and you cannot sell it. Why? You can sell any company

or anything but for the *encanteur*, it does not provide this. The Government will generously allow you to give it to your children. That is it! I cannot understand this philosophy of drafting laws like that, without respecting our ordinary citizens - I cannot understand - especially those that I have mentioned, who have a very hard life.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I finish to say that, no doubt, there are some advantages to quite a few people: planters who live nearby or not too far; better security with a lot of policemen, I saw; better traceability - good for the consumers -; better pesticide control eventually - I don't understand why the pesticide reports are not made public -; better hygiene hopefully when you clean the toilets. This will happen. But why can't all this be done in a regional context? And that would take away the whole objection that so many people have to this. The only issue is to create these markets. He did not need such a big one there; it's only 50% complete. Have others, satellite markets. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that would solve the problem and that is definitely what the Opposition will do when we get back into Government.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Now, we shall break for 30 minutes.

At 5.31 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.04 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Minister Seeruttun!

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr M. Seeruttun):
Merci M. le président.

M. le président, mardi dernier, nous avons, à cette Assemblée, voté le *Fisheries Bill* et mon collègue, le ministre de l'Agro-industrie et de la Sécurité alimentaire, l'honorable Vikram Hurdoyal, a présenté en deuxième lecture le *Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill*. Deux projets de loi très importants pour notre sécurité alimentaire et l'avenir de notre pays et des Mauriciens.

M. le président, je note que sur la liste des orateurs, il n'y a que quatre membres de l'opposition qui vont intervenir et personne du MMM ; c'est dommage ! M. le président, je crois que cela dit, surtout ça donne l'impression de l'attention que porte l'opposition aux planteurs. Mardi dernier, M. le président, soit le 7 novembre 2023, cela faisait quatre ans, jour pour jour, que la population mauricienne avait fait son choix en toute liberté de donner à notre équipe de gouverner le pays pour cinq ans. Pendant quatre ans, M. le

président, les membres de l'opposition ont passé leur temps à contester ces élections et il a fallu un jugement du Conseil privé du Roi, notre plus haute cour d'appel, pour les faire taire.

Mr Toussaint: *Bizin payer aster!*

Mr Seeruttun: Pendant ce temps, nous, au gouvernement, avec notre Premier ministre responsable et dévoué, nous nous sommes concentrés à faire avancer le pays en soutenant l'ensemble de la population et tous les secteurs productifs du pays.

M. le président, je voudrais aujourd'hui rendre un hommage spécial à nos planteurs, y compris les planteurs de brède songe. En passant, M. le président, même si certains trouvent que le songe est dénigrant...

Dr. Boolell: Mais non !

Mr Seeruttun: Si, si ! Le songe est un mets très apprécié dans les mariages hindous...

Mr Toussaint: *Bien bon sa !*

Mr Seeruttun: Et a aussi un apport nutritif...

Mr X. L. Duval: *To pou fer to racist mem la? Toale? Ti kroir to pli intelligent. To p fer to racist!*

An hon. Member: *Mank ti puri...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Pena racist ladan!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is this? Leader of the Opposition, what is happening?

Mr X. L. Duval: *Racist...*

Mr Speaker: You spoke and everybody listened to you. We are in a parliamentary democracy.

Dr. Boolell: Not in the temple of democracy!

Mr Speaker: Yes, I learn this from you, and practice it!

Mr Seeruttun: Je le redis encore, M. le président. Le songe est un mets très nutritif et qui est très apprécié par beaucoup de Mauriciens, pas ce qu'on a voulu faire croire en disant que c'est servi dans les mariages hindous, donc je suis raciste. C'est par l'ensemble des Mauriciens que le songe est apprécié.

Vous savez, M. le président, quelqu'un avait dit une fois que dans une vie, on peut avoir besoin d'un médecin de temps en temps, d'un architecte peut-être une ou deux fois dans sa vie, d'un avocat, aussi rarement que possible j'espère, parce qu'on ne peut pas trop avoir des avocats. Par contre, d'un planteur, nous en avons besoin trois fois par jour et tous les jours – pour le petit déjeuner, le déjeuner et le dîner. Ils sont, M. le président, dans leurs champs, du matin au soir, tous les jours, sous le soleil comme sous la pluie. Ils font face aux aléas du climat et on connaît comment les catastrophes naturelles les impactent directement. Leurs cultures vivrières sont souvent attaquées par des maladies et des ravageurs et ils font face aussi à l'impact de l'inflation et du coût élevé de la main-d'œuvre ; sans oublier des dégâts causés par des chauves-souris et des singes.

M. le président, ils sont souvent aussi sujets à des vols. Malgré tous ces risques, ils sont toujours aux champs pour s'assurer qu'on ait de quoi se nourrir tous les jours. M. le président, en plus de tous ces risques et sacrifices, ils ne reçoivent qu'une partie infime des bénéfices car ils ne peuvent pas dicter le prix de leurs produits. M. le président, le système de vente à l'encan qui existait jusqu'à tout récemment, ne répondait plus aux normes d'un pays moderne, raison pour laquelle il y avait eu le besoin de revoir ce système de vente.

D'ailleurs, l'idée de revoir tout ce système de vente émane du plan stratégique du secteur non sucre pour la période 2003-2007 basé sur un rapport de l'*IFAD* présenté par le ministre de l'Agriculture d'alors qui est nul autre que l'actuel Premier ministre aujourd'hui.

Malheureusement, M. le président, avec le changement du gouvernement en 2005, le projet a été abandonné, mis au frigo. Mais, néanmoins, dans le plan de 2008 du gouvernement PTR/PMSD - je crois qu'à l'époque, l'honorable Dr. Boolell était le ministre responsable de l'agriculture - dans le *Food Security Fund*, il parlait aussi de la mise en place d'un *National Auction Market*. Et je pense, qu'à l'époque, l'honorable leader de l'opposition faisait partie de cette équipe et ils avaient même institué un comité technique pour se pencher sur un *strategic plan for the setting-up of a National Auction Market*.

M. le président, le comité était unanime à dire que –

“The traditional marketing system is not able to handle commodities produced with modern technology and the new exigencies of the consumers. A market structure to take care of the bulk sale of fresh vegetables and fruits would be the first step towards this modernisation that will service both the farming community and the consumers and at the same time providing a better operating condition to the operators involved in the marketing of fresh vegetables and fruits.”

Voilà un peu ce qui est ressorti de ce comité technique. Mais, encore une fois, fidèle à leurs habitudes, M. le président, c'est rester lettre morte dans un tiroir. Ils n'ont donné aucune suite à ce projet.

An hon. Member: *Al konpran.*

Mr Seeruttun : Et après, arrivé en 2013, là, *somey kase* comme on dit, ils se réveillent et le projet est remis sur le tapis et, donc, ils veulent revoir un peu comment instituer ce *wholesale market*. Alors là, ils font appel à un expert, un cabinet de consultants, de conseils connu comme le cabinet *Gressard Consultants*, et l'expertise de ce cabinet a été demandée. Donc, le cabinet fait son travail, il vient avec un rapport ; le rapport est sorti en avril 2014 et, bien sûr, dans ce rapport le consultant fait remarquer que

“The improvement of present wholesale activities is necessary to organise the fresh fruit production and marketing chain, maintain traditional activities and their correspondent social impact, improve quality at all levels and give development opportunities to all operators in the country.”

Encore une fois, ils sont conscients qu'il y a le besoin de mettre sur pied une nouvelle infrastructure mais le rapport reste toujours dans un tiroir ; rien n'est fait. Et il a fallu, M. le président, qu'il y a un changement de gouvernement en 2014, fin 2014 ; le MSM arrive au pouvoir et j'ai eu la responsabilité, moi, comme ministre de l'Agro-industrie et de la sécurité alimentaire, de relancer ce projet et ça a été inclus dans notre plan stratégique 2016-2020. Alors, mon équipe et moi au niveau du ministère, on avait commencé par faire un état des lieux et on a commencé par visiter les différents sites où se tenait la vente.

Il faut aussi faire ressortir parce que je crois comprendre, en écoutant le leader de l'opposition, il parlait de Goodlands et autres endroits, mais il y a que trois endroits où la vente à l'encan se faisait : Port Louis, Flacq, et Vacoas. Et c'est aussi bon de noter qu'à Vacoas et à Flacq, ce n'est pas tous les jours que la vente se faisait. Donc, peut-être qu'il a loupé cette petite information mais c'est bon de faire ressortir que même si les planteurs devraient fournir leurs fruits et légumes, ils peuvent venir à Port Louis même s'ils habitent dans le sud, dans le nord, dans l'est ou dans l'ouest parce que les deux autres sites n'étaient pas ouverts tous les jours.

M. le président, le constat était accablant. Accablant pourquoi, M. le président ? Parce qu'en termes d'hygiène, il y avait un manque d'hygiène totale, M. le président. Je

sais qu'avant de poser sa *PNQ* à l'époque, l'honorable leader de l'opposition avait visité ...

Mr X. L. Duval: *Pou aste bred sonz.*

Mr Seeruttun : ... le site de Flacq et ça a été rapporté dans des journaux parce que j'avais vu l'article. Il était là-bas dans l'après-midi mais la vente se fait tôt le matin, dans la nuit. Et moi, j'étais à une heure du matin et j'étais à Vacoas, à Port Louis et je peux dire de une heure à cinq heures du matin, j'ai vu dans quelle situation et dans quel état la vente se faisait. Donc, en termes d'hygiène, il y avait un manque d'hygiène totale. En termes de lumière, de clarté, luminosité, il n'y avait rien, M. le président. C'était sombre. C'était impossible de pouvoir voir ce qui se passait à quelques mètres d'où on était.

L'insécurité, M. le président. Dans l'obscurité, en plein air, et bien souvent les planteurs qui venaient et qui apportaient leurs fruits et légumes faisaient face à des vols et donc perdaient toutes leurs récoltes. Dans son intervention, le leader de l'opposition parlait des heures d'ouverture, car il trouve qu'aujourd'hui avec le nouveau centre, alors que les heures d'ouverture ont été étendues - à l'époque c'était seulement à Port Louis de minuit jusqu'à cinq ou six heures du matin, la même chose à Vacoas et à Flacq - il trouve qu'aujourd'hui demander aux planteurs d'être à Wooton à cinq heures du matin est une aberration. Or, c'était pire que ça à l'époque. Le Dr. Boolell est d'accord avec moi.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, I don't mind the Minister making his speech but don't misquote me. I said 2 a.m., not 5 a.m. If you want to quote me, quote me correctly.

Mr Seeruttun: I said 2 a.m.

Mr X. L. Duval: What 5 a.m.?

Mr Seeruttun: M. le président, il trouvait deux heures du matin...

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, 2 a.m.

Mr Seeruttun: ... trop tôt, mais à l'époque, c'était minuit, une heure du matin. Donc, alors ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Do not misquote, just quote it properly.

Mr Seeruttun: C'est ce que j'ai dit. Avant à minuit, une heure du matin, il trouvait correcte, aujourd'hui deux heures... parce que pour moi, ce que je sais, l'ouverture, c'est à partir de quatre heures du matin. Donc, pas deux heures du matin, quoi qu'il avait parlé de la vente des fruits aujourd'hui, et d'après l'information que j'ai, M. le président, suite à une demande des opérateurs, ça a été accédé par l'*AMB* de pouvoir permettre à la vente de

se faire à cette heure-là pour pouvoir donner la possibilité aux gens qui viennent acheter les fruits de pouvoir rentrer chez eux et aller vendre là où il faut les vendre. Donc, cela a été une demande des opérateurs.

M. le président, il n'y avait aucune facilité de stockage. L'accès était difficile – je ne sais pas si vous avez été là-bas – mais, l'accès était difficile. Et, par rapport à la manière dont la vente se faisait, il y avait un manque total de transparence et c'était le cri des planteurs. Moi, je connais, parce que je les ai côtoyés, et jamais ils arrivaient à savoir à quel prix leurs produits étaient vendus. Ils étaient à la merci d'un groupe de gens, des encanteurs qui décidaient le prix. Et, bien souvent, ils n'avaient rien pour pouvoir *substantiate* le prix. Et par rapport à la traçabilité, encore une fois, M. le président, il n'y avait aucun moyen d'avoir cette traçabilité.

Donc, en prenant compte de tous ces problèmes qu'il y avait, et avec raison, le rapport de Gressard, le consultant, avait proposé qu'on change complètement l'infrastructure et trouver un endroit approprié, convenable, central, avec l'espace nécessaire pour pouvoir répondre aux besoins du jour. L'honorable leader de l'opposition critique aujourd'hui l'état des légumes dans les hôpitaux. N'aurait-il pas dû aller voir dans quel état les légumes étaient vendus à l'époque où il était ministre ? En passant, M. le président, au lieu de toujours critiquer le ministre de la Santé et le personnel hospitalier, il est important que la population – je pense – leur exprime de la gratitude, car pendant la période la plus difficile, la pire de notre pays, de notre histoire, pendant la pandémie de Covid-19, qui s'occupait de nos malades ? Qui mettait à risque leurs vies pour sauver la vie des autres ? Et moi, je dis que si on est ici aujourd'hui en bonne santé, c'est grâce à ces *frontliners* que, moi, je salue de bas. Et, je dis merci au ministre de la Santé, l'honorable Dr. Kailesh Jagutpal. Merci pour votre dévouement, merci pour votre sens du devoir.

M. le président, après avoir fait des visites, on a commencé par des consultations. Et, je peux vous dire qu'on avait appelé tous les partenaires concernés lors d'un *workshop*, d'un atelier, le travail qu'on avait fait au MCIA à Réduit, et je dois vous dire que lors de cette session de travail, tout le monde qui était présent avait l'occasion de s'exprimer, de partager leurs points de vue et de proposer des solutions. Et, à la fin du jour, ils voulaient tous avancer sur ce projet parce qu'ils savaient que c'est un projet qui va être utile pour eux. Et, je dois vous dire que, M. le président, la plupart des suggestions faites ce jour-là ont été prises en compte, et il y avait à la fin du jour l'unanimité pour qu'on aille de l'avant avec le projet tel qu'on connaît aujourd'hui parce que le *New Wholesale Market* est venu corriger tous ces manquements qu'il y avait avec le système de l'époque.

M. le président, dans la vie, il y a une seule chose qui est constante, c'est le changement et, bien sûr, le changement apporte son lot d'inconvénients et quand il faut, il faut changer ses habitudes et s'adapter. Le ministre de l'Agro-industrie, il a parlé dans son intervention, il a dit qu'il est à l'écoute des planteurs, il est à l'écoute des encanteurs et il va venir au fur et à mesure avec des propositions, des recommandations et des solutions pour pouvoir trouver comment améliorer. C'est une nouvelle infrastructure et aujourd'hui, cela demande bien sûr d'être améliorée autant que possible.

Moi, ce que je trouve dans les points émis par l'honorable leader de l'opposition, il est contre cet amendement qu'on apporte à ce projet de loi par rapport à – et il fait référence à ma réponse que j'avais donnée lors d'une PNQ – et j'avais dit avec raison qu'avec cette nouvelle infrastructure, on ne va pas empêcher les planteurs de vendre leurs produits comme ils le faisaient déjà. On n'oblige personne d'aller vendre leurs produits au *New Wholesale Market*. Enfin, moi, je connais comment cela fonctionne, comment travaillent les planteurs. Je suis assez proche d'eux. Oui, j'ai dit que déjà les planteurs...

An hon. Member: On ne va pas forcer.

Mr Seeruttun: ...dans un village, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Seeruttun: Les planteurs qui produisent leurs produits et ils mettent cela en vente, bien souvent dans leur propre cour, aux villageois de venir acheter ou dans une petite échoppe. On n'est pas en train de dire 'non' à ces planteurs. Encore une fois, il faut faire la différence entre vente à la criée, vente à l'encan et vente aux détaillants.

Mr X. L. Duval: We are not going to force anyone.

Mr Seeruttun: Et, c'est là où je crois qu'il se trompe ou mal avisé parce que cela fait toute la différence, M. le président.

Mr X. L. Duval: We are not going to force anyone.

Mr Seeruttun: Pardon?

Mr X. L. Duval: You said 'we are not going to force anyone'.

Mr Seeruttun: On n'est pas en train de forcer qui que ce soit comme planteur de vendre leurs produits. Ce que la loi vient dire aujourd'hui, la vente à l'encan n'est pas permise sauf au *New Wholesale Market*, et il faut avoir un permis de pouvoir le faire. Alors, et bien je sais moi ce que je dis et je le redis encore, M. le président.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are not going to force anyone.

Mr Seeruttun: Donc, on n'est pas en train de forcer qui que ce soit.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are not going to force anyone.

Mr Speaker: No! No! I cannot continue like this. Excuse me. I cannot. Leader of the Opposition, you have to be polite. You are in a parliamentary democracy. If you cannot listen, freeway.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: If you cannot listen, freeway.

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay.

Mr Speaker: Continue!

Mr Seeruttun: Donc, M. le président, il parlait aussi de ce que j'avais dit – qu'on allait avoir pas mal de facilités sur ce nouveau site et qu'on n'a rien fait à ce stade. S'il avait eu l'occasion de lire le rapport, il était à l'époque ministre dans le gouvernement et bein, cela fait mal on dirait.

S'il avait lu le rapport, M. le président, comme n'importe quel ministre responsable, il aurait vu que dans le rapport, c'était recommandé que le projet se fasse en deux phases. Il y a une première phase et une deuxième phase. Alors, on a complété la première phase et la deuxième phase va venir, M. le président.

Donc, encore une fois, c'est pour dire comment il s'est mal inspiré et vient débiter n'importe quoi aujourd'hui ici à la Chambre ; pareil comme il avait parlé de cela à l'époque dans sa *PNQ* – problème de transport.

Aujourd'hui, on a une infrastructure qui se trouve à Wooton. Wooton tout le monde connaît, c'est dans le centre du pays. Wooton, aujourd'hui, est accessible de n'importe quel coin de l'île et on est en train de dire que cela va coûter plus cher de bouger du nord pour venir à Wooton. C'est vrai qu'en termes de distance, c'est plus loin mais il y a aussi des planteurs du sud, il y a aussi des planteurs de l'est, il y a aussi des planteurs de l'ouest, il y a aussi des planteurs du centre qui font la grosse majorité des planteurs. Pour eux, bien sûr, c'est plus près de leur lieu de travail. Mais, je sais aussi que le ministre responsable est en train de venir avec quelques solutions, donc, j'espère que ça va être considéré en temps et lieu.

Mais, je le redis encore une fois, cette question de transport, M. le président, il parlait des planteurs de la région de l'est qui sont pénalisés, il faut savoir qu'à l'île

Maurice, on a ce qu'on appelle le 'microclimat'. Ce qui est produit à Flacq dans l'est, ce qui est produit dans le nord, ce qui est produit dans l'est ou dans le sud ou dans l'ouest, ne sont pas les mêmes produits. Alors, ce qu'on peut cultiver dans l'est, ce n'est pas la même chose qu'on peut cultiver dans l'ouest. Donc, c'est pour cela qu'il faut avoir un endroit où on peut avoir tous ces produits qui viennent converger dans ce lieu où des maraîchers peuvent venir et acheter ces produits, M. le président. Donc, encore une fois, si on connaît comment ça se passe au niveau du secteur agricole, on ne viendra pas dire des choses pareilles dans cette Chambre, M. le président.

Et ce que moi, j'ai trouvé assez étonnant de la part du leader de l'opposition, M. le président, c'est la manière dont il est en train de défendre une quarantaine de personnes, des encanteurs au détriment des 10 000 planteurs. Donc, c'est pour cela que je pense, M. le président, que nous au gouvernement, on est en train de faire tout ce qui est possible pour protéger les planteurs. On leur donne une infrastructure moderne, une infrastructure qui répond aux normes du jour. Et on est en train de faire cela pour le bien de la population, d'abord aux agriculteurs mais aussi des consommateurs. Aujourd'hui, c'est un outil indispensable pour s'assurer qu'il y a un meilleur service qui est offert à tout ce monde qui se retrouve dans ce monde agricole.

Je sais que le temps m'est compté donc je ne vais pas aller plus loin sauf pour dire que, M. le président, moi j'ai plutôt écouté les gens qui sont dans le secteur. Je peux citer un des planteurs connus à Maurice, Monsieur Krit Beeharry, un extrait de son intervention d'un article de L'Express du 21 juillet. Et là, il dit –

« Ce projet, imaginé depuis 2008, a, certes, rencontré plusieurs pépins. Toutefois, sa création permettra à la communauté des planteurs d'être mieux organisée et plus sécurisée. Un nouveau modèle de gestion sera également instauré. »

Et il va plus loin pour dire que –

« Ce système va aussi aider à planifier la production. Actuellement, nous produisons sans connaître la demande.

(...) avec l'arrivée de ce marché, il y aura plus de transparence, surtout auprès de ceux qui doivent suivre à la lettre la *Food Act* et la *Pesticide Act*.

Quand il y aura une surproduction, cette dernière sera gardée dans les chambres froides. C'est cela qui apportera une stabilité des prix. »

Donc, voilà un peu les commentaires de Monsieur Krit Beeharry, planteur connu à Maurice.

Et là, récemment encore, dans l'Express du 30 octobre, toujours Monsieur Krit Beeharry qui vient dire –

« (...) le gouvernement a raison de venir avec une telle législation. Il trouve que certains encanteurs faisaient la pluie et le beau temps avec les planteurs. Ce sont eux qui dictaient le prix. Avec le marché de gros, tout est contrôlé par le *Marketing Board*. »

Voilà un autre planteur qui est le président du *Centrewest Small Planters Association*, Monsieur Sanjeev Dindyal. Et lui, dans Le Défi du 7 novembre 2023, il disait ceci –

« Si les planteurs sont en faveur du *National Wholesale Market*, ils souhaitent néanmoins une amélioration dans son fonctionnement.

Nous sommes parmi les initiateurs de ce projet, mais toujours est-il que les planteurs font face à des problèmes. »

Mais, il dit qu'il est entièrement d'accord avec ce projet.

Monsieur Isoop Soobadar, le président du *Market Traders Association*, toujours dans le même article du 7 novembre 2023, il dit qu'il –

« (...) accueille favorablement cette législation. Cela car elle va mettre fin à la tenue de ventes à l'encan parallèles dans certains endroits et qui favorisent en particulier les marchands ambulants. Il souhaite aussi que ceux qui sont patentés soient munis d'un laissez-passer lorsqu'ils se rendent au *National Wholesale Market*, afin d'interdire l'accès aux marchands ambulants. »

Monsieur Eric Maingar du Mouvement pour l'Autosuffisance Alimentaire dit ceci

–

« *MMA* a non seulement accueilli favorablement ce marché au gros mais trouve qu'il est à l'avantage des producteurs et Wooton est un endroit idéal pour un marché agricole au gros. »

Et il parle aussi de la sécurité, de la sous surveillance et de bien meilleures conditions de vente sur place par rapport aux vieux *auction markets*.

Voilà un peu, M. le président, la réaction de plusieurs personnes qui sont directement concernées dans ce secteur. Et moi, je suis entièrement d'accord avec ces gens parce qu'ils connaissent comment c'était avant et comment c'est maintenant. Et je crois que lorsqu'on entend l'honorable leader de l'opposition parler de problèmes, je crois qu'il exagère. Je ne dis pas que c'est un système idéal. C'est un nouveau système ; il faut

s'habituer avec, il faut s'adapter. Et comme le ministre qui est très proche avec les planteurs, je suis sûr qu'il va faire tout pour pouvoir - n'est-ce pas - trouver des solutions pour régler le problème des planteurs.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je vais dire que quand le MSM est au pouvoir, il a toujours donné une attention particulière aux planteurs. On connaît la grande réforme dans l'*industrie sucrière*, on connaît aussi le nombre de mesures incitatives, de supports, de soutiens qu'on a donnés à tous les planteurs de thé par exemple, ceux qui font du *sheltered farming* et autres. Je peux en parler comme ça, il y a de multiples exemples.

Par contre, par rapport au Parti travailliste, eux, le traitement réservé aux planteurs, M. le président, je me réfère à l'affaire de l'exemption de la taxe que les planteurs de canne à sucre avaient et qu'il avait aboli ; l'exemption de la taxe sur les 4x4 qu'il avait enlevé. Et n'oublions pas, M. le président, le sort réservé aux planteurs de Riche Terre.

Donc, voilà un peu la différence entre le MSM et le Parti travailliste quand ils sont au pouvoir. Donc, nous, nous travaillons pour le bien des planteurs et nous allons continuer à travailler pour leur bien parce que, comme j'ai dit au départ, on a besoin d'eux tous les jours, trois fois par jour pour se nourrir. Donc, c'est pour ça que je dis, il faut leur dire merci tous les jours parce que sans eux on ne peut pas avoir notre nourriture. Sur ce, M. le président, je vous dis merci. Donc, je vous rends le micro. Merci!

Mr Speaker: MP Dr. Boolell!

(6.41 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. I don't intend to say things that are not true. And as I will go, untold stories will unfold and I don't intend to kick the can down the road. Let me, right from the outset, make it quite clear. There is somebody who is praiseworthy of the policies put in place by the Labour Party, it is my good friend who today is Minister of Agriculture and I am sure he will vouch for that and his nodding says a lot. Now, let me make it quite clear that the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition are very pertinent. It is precisely because you want to widen the circle of opportunities and get as many stakeholders on board that those points were raised. What did he say? One, he put a valuable question and a valid question in relation to the unfettered powers conferred upon the Minister by way of regulation.

Today, we have a good Minister, tomorrow you never know who will be the Minister and he may make an abuse of the unfettered powers conferred upon him in relation to large quantities of locally produced products. Where is the harm? If it is defied,

I would have expected my predecessor, the former Minister who was Minister of Agro-Industry, to have come out clean in relation to the definition of large quantities. And then, what is wrong in respect of the point canvassed forcefully by the Leader of the Opposition, it relates to transfer of permit. Whether there is a Licensing Committee or not, I would expect the Minister to spell it out and say: yes, it is a fundamental right for the permit to be sold, it's not only a question of transferring the permit. And then decentralisation, but the Minister, in his Second Reading, made it quite clear that yes, he will give due consideration to decentralisation. What harm has the Leader of the Opposition done in raising these pertinent points? I don't know of anybody who is dead against this project. In fact, we are all in favour, but we have to err on the side of caution and we don't want the National Wholesale Market to be rudimentary and elementary. This is what we are saying. And let me impress upon all those who are here to listen to what the stories are, how the stories have unfolded in relation to the setting up of National Wholesale Market. And in his opening remarks on the Bill to set up the National Wholesale Market, the Minister has taken us on a guided tour of the Agricultural sector from 1963. Hon. Sir Satcam Boolell moved the Bill to set up the Agricultural Marketing Board and amongst the interveners were hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth and hon. Maingard who delivered his maiden speech.

The Bill to set up the Agricultural Marketing Board in 1963 was introduced by Professor Balogh, an eminent specialist in Agricultural Economics and he submitted his report on agricultural diversification. There was no provision then for the setting up of a National Wholesale Market as it existed since the existence of the planting community, and I am sure my good friend has subscribed to this. But it has been a long, long walk to the National Wholesale Market and today Agricultural Marketing Board will regulate the activities of the National Wholesale Market. Hon. Duval made the point as to whether the Agricultural Marketing Board which is an importer, a buyer, a seller, not of last resort and which exercises control upon specific communities in relation to price now is being called upon to act as a regulator. It's not on the lock, stock, and barrel but it is double barrel and we have to look at the consequences in relation to the power conferred upon the Agricultural Marketing Board.

We have travelled a long way, may I remind our friends that at the time, priority was given to the sugarcane industry and king sugar ruled the waves in the hay days of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement and after independence by the sugar protocol as an annex to the Lomé Convention. Sugar is no longer king but it's here to stay. But we have to produce what we eat and eat what we produce and we have to lessen our dependency on import. As the then Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, my good friend, is right

to say food security was high on our agenda but there cannot be scale, ambition and prosperity without food security and this is a fact. National Wholesale Market is a strong link in the conveyor belt but this morning, incidents confirmed that it is weak and can easily snap.

So, this is not the National Wholesale Market that consumers, distributors and buyers expect. In fact, it's a let down. So, that's why I will impress upon the Minister to go back to the drawing board and refer to technical committees which hon. Seeruttun referred to in 2008. It is true we organised a national conference on food security and it established four technical sub-committees to elaborate the way forward for Agro-Industry. One of them was the strategic plan for setting up of a National Auction Market and it was unanimously agreed by all stakeholders and participants and I agree to what hon. Seeruttun said and he quoted what the rule of the market would be in relation to the dynamics in the Agro-Industry Sector.

Besides, we are a member of COLEACP and we have no choice but to lay emphasis on quality control, on provisions for grading and, of course, if there is below norm and unsold products, we have to look at the economic use by way of composting and animal feed, provision of cold storage facilities as a stand by facility for 24-hour period. We are talking of perishable goods and I am glad that these issues have been spelt out by the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry when he moved the Bill to be read a second time. Enforcement is neither here nor there. The Minister's intention is good but I expect him to be active and proactive. You cannot have a National Wholesale Market which is elementary and rudimentary.

So, we all enjoy going to the market fair and I was taken aback when I went to the wholesale market to see that fruits were being sold on the tarmac covered with tarpaulin purchased by Agricultural Marketing Board, and these are unacceptable. Where are the provisions of quality control, grading and selection as proposed in the study? And I grant the Minister that he has to sell dreams that one day the National Wholesale Market will be akin to the one that prevails, that exists in Birmingham, as we say to be compared with the best in Europe with electronic display of prices of products and well trained auctioneers smartly delivering a service in all transparency and accountability. But it is time for the wholesale auction of fruits and vegetables and later flowers to be held inside the hall. If we care for the planters, we don't want them to get wet and we know what the vagaries of climatic condition is in a really wet area like Wooton.

So, we have to make provisions and they have to auction their products inside the hall and not having their products exposed to the vagaries of climatic condition,

notwithstanding, as my good friend have said, they have travelled a long, long way before they could reach the National Wholesale Market. Leaving home early, in the early hours of the morning and don't even know there is predictability and reliability in relation to the auction of the market.

As the Minister has stated, it was on 27 July that the Prime Minister inaugurated the National Wholesale Market. I said it has been a long walk and I recall the first report, Mr Speaker, Sir, was prepared by FAO and IFAD in the late 90s, but neither planter nor wholesaler was keen to embrace its findings, and you know as well as I do, planters are hard nuts to crack. You need to have a rapprochement and you have to make sure that you bow to their, I will not call them whims and caprices, but if you want to win them over, there is a psychological barrier and you must not allow this psychological barrier to be erected.

So, we have to understand the psyche of the planters and they are very difficult at times. I recall when we embarked upon the reform of the sugar industry, they were reluctant to regroup in spite of the fact that the price of sugar had dropped by 36%, but you have to win them over slowly but surely and you have to make sure that when there is dialogue, there is proper consultation, that they are fully on board, and it's very time-consuming, but sometimes you have to race against time.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Seeruttun was right to say that we enlisted the services of foreign Consultant, Cabinet Gressard. But make no mistake, Cabinet Gressard levelled on the findings of the report of the technical committee chaired by Mr Sonia of the Farmers Service Corporation for a complete report and action plan and, therefore, it was not a futile exercise but, in fact, an exercise which bore its fruits. This exercise, as the hon. Minister has stated, was completed by 2015 and the Cabinet submitted its report on 04 April 2014. Even the Director of Audit mentioned those facts in the report for year 2022.

As an exporter of pineapples to EU and UK, the Minister is right to highlight the relevance and importance of good agricultural practices, hazard analysis, control critical point, traceability and pesticide control. Without the MauriGAP certificate, as was stated by the Leader of the Opposition, awarded by MSB, there is no quantum leap. The object is to prohibit parallel wholesale marketing and to instil professionalism, but the Minister has to tell us how large is the sale of locally produced products to the highest auction bidder. Is there a defined rate? Because you know those products are brought in bales; it has to be defined because we don't want it to be a criminal offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Wholesale Market may be an early harvest for locally produced products. Since 2015, we have ended up with an important Bill which is massive

and expensive. The policy of the regime is a faulty tower. It has encouraged land speculation and encroachment upon prime agricultural land and if the trend is not reversed, it will turn the National Wholesale Market into a white elephant; as we say, elephant upon a dilapidated castle.

Where there is fertile land for the locally produced products which are the *raison d'être* of the National Wholesale Market; where the land volume depends on land availability and, of course, on the vagaries of climatic conditions, where is the land? Acreage is in constant decline, from 75,000 hectares to 40,000 hectares. We are in a state of emergency in respect of land availability and if you want to safeguard the interest of planters, that trend has to be reversed. We have to put an end to encroachment upon prime agricultural land if we want to put planters first, amongst the equal. Don't simply pay lip service to the planters, Mr Speaker, Sir.

First, come up with accompanying measures for planters and define special agricultural zone and make it mandatory that there should be no encroachment upon prime agricultural land. Time to discourage farming on ribbon types or small contiguous plots unless there is regrouping after land preparation.

Let us empower the planters; let us teach them how to take the rung of the social ladder, and put a premium upon the work that they do, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is no need to pay lip service, and I trust the Minister can do it because he has seen it and he has seen it well and done, Mr Speaker, Sir. Both Landscape today and Land Use Division of Agro-Industry spell disaster. The National Wholesale Market is the gateway. Clarity and certainty first for predictability; otherwise, it may make a false start.

Open the doors wide for the chant and cry of the auctioneer. There is an early harvest with an initial sale of 35,000, of approximately 100,000 tons of locally produced products, whether these products are produced by 6,000 or 10,000 registered planters, but I expect the Minister to wage an aggressive campaign to sensitise planters, wholesalers, distributors, restaurants, and hotel managers. Indeed, the circle has to be widened for all users; no one should be left behind.

The potential for exponential growth can be explosive. The sky is the limit. Set up all the infrastructure, be it sanitary and phytosanitary norm, as time, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an essence to create the critical mass. The sale of perishable goods, irrespective of the shelf life of the products, is being centralised.

The hon. Minister is right to say that the decentralisation of the national wholesale for vegetables, fruits will not be ruled out, and flowers at a later stage. There is a pressing

call from planters in the North and East, not only on compassionate grounds but on practical and economic ground, to decentralise without compromising on sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

As the son of a planter who had regularly accompanied his dad to sell his agricultural produce to wholesale market in the early hours of the morning, the Minister has living memories of events; events as they have unfolded. But why the Minister is taking so long to respond to the two memoranda forwarded by the Association of Wholesalers via email? He has to entertain a request for a meeting. The Secretary of Vegetable, Fruits Auction Association, a young lady, holder of an MBA and a third generation family member who has learned the trade and the job, is waiting for her appointment, and I expect that through constructive dialogue with stakeholders, there will be an outcome. The output should be good and I expect that the outcome would be of paramount importance to ensure that there is firm commitment to wage war on parallel market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a member of COLEACP, Mauritius has to adapt or perish. The National Wholesale Market should be the largest integrated market to provide fresh fruits, vegetables to fast food retailers, restaurants, hotels, and fast food markets. Markets, as we say, are dynamic and are rapidly changing in horticultural and key agro-value sector. The folklore of markets and fairs is here to stay, but growing demand and sophistication of markets is becoming a way of life.

Let me take the case of Mr Surat, a distributor and wholesaler, who has entered into a farming contract with hundred planters and both are operating in a win-win situation. If contract farming is an avenue for success, then the National Wholesale Market is a boulevard, an opportunity to level up with technology, research and development and innovation. Make agriculture smart with computer-controlled delivery of nutrients and create enabling environment for investment in agriculture under shade house hydroponics, aeroponics, rooftops, and bare land. I do grant you that planters, as I have said, are conservative. Sometimes, hard nuts to crack but persuasion, Mr Speaker, Sir, persuasion can be time consuming and can give the appropriate result.

In a reply to a PNQ, hon. Minister Seeruttun who held the portfolio of Agro-industry, frantically stated that the National Wholesale Project was enunciated by the Labour-PMSD Government Programme 2012-2014. It was the outcome of wide discussions with all relevant stakeholders at the bar of public opinion. The final report, as you said, was submitted by Cabinet but we know what was the outcome of the general elections. We lost but it took you more than eight years to implement the project and you

are telling this House that you deliver. You have failed once, you have failed twice and you have failed abysmally, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the policy of this Government; failure is very high on the agenda.

The cost of evaluation of the project, do you know what the cost of evaluation of the project should have been? Less than Rs350 m.! And it was completed at the exorbitant cost of almost Rs500 m. It reminds me of the best Government that money can buy, and I will refer to an article written by a Senior Officer of the Ministry of Agro-Industry. At first glance, it is apparent that operation is being done in the same systems as set up by auctioneers and vegetables and fruit producers because we know that they are facing the music. No provisions of quality control grading and selection as proposed in the study are made but then, as I said, Rs500 m., it is taxpayers' money down the drain. Not down the drain, down the pockets! This excessive cost warrants an investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has to reassure planters that the goods received note will be a prelude for information to be relayed to the MRA. You have to give them firm assurances. So, be it and let the planters honour the obligation without harassment or coercion. They pay the taxes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me end up by reminding all of us that the role conferred upon the Agricultural Marketing Board; that's what I have stated earlier. The role of regulator is uncalled for. What we need, we need to have a better regulatory body which is independent, which is not a seller, which is not a buyer, which is not an importer of last resort. By conferring the powers upon Agricultural Marketing Board, we are setting up a Board which has resort to colourable device. This is what we are doing. Either the Minister takes up a decision, revisits the role of the Agricultural Marketing Board and sticks to the proposal made by the Leader of the Opposition if there is seriousness of purpose to wage war on parallel wholesale market. AMB has to set the example. There is a Court to introduce legislation, as I have stated, on the role of AMB in an era of market liberalisation with good oversight from the appropriate regulatory body.

Why should AMB have continued to have a monopoly over importation of garlic? If we subscribe to the vagaries of market forces – I say 'vagaries' because sometimes you win, sometimes you lose – why is it that Agricultural Marketing Board, the supposedly regulator should have unfettered powers? Should be given differential and special treatment? Should our National Wholesale Market be limited to locally produced products only if we want to play in the big league?

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind our friends, and if I listen to them, they are full of zeal but I will put a relevant question. Where is the Fish Auction Market which was

financed by Greece, which we set up? What have you done to it? And, you claim to be in the forefront, in the vanguard! There is a Fish Auction Market which you have turned into a white elephant, and today you know what it is? It is being used as a dumping ground by the National Coast Guard. And, they are here to tell us that they care for the empowerment of the fisheries community. Your story is very telling and as I have stated, I have spoken without fear or prejudice but this Government does not deserve to be here.

(Interruptions)

Time for them to make an exit, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the name of planters and fishermen!

Thank you very much!

Mr Speaker: I like your smile. Hon. Balgobin!

(7.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

(Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, not to go into the Muppet show and comedy to...

Mr Osman Mahomed: *To mem Muppet la.*

(Interruptions)

Mr Balgobin: *Du calme, du calme...*

Mr Speaker: So, I would remind the House that when hon. Dr. Boolell was speaking, the House was quiet.

Mr Toussaint: Be polite!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Continue!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: You can use Muppet then, *un peu trop!*

Mr Balgobin: Muppet show is not anybody, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a show. It is not a person, for some persons.

At the very outset, allow me to congratulate my dear friend, hon. Hurdoyal, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, for coming forward with the amendments to the Agricultural Marketing Board Bill which is being debated today.

These amendments bring to the forefront of this House, a match of utmost significance to our agricultural sector and the livelihoods of our hardworking planters across the country. These are not merely proposals but a visionary step towards strengthening our agricultural sector and ensuring a sustainable future for our nation. We

must strike a balance between tradition and progress while taking into consideration the apprehensions of those who are directly concerned by this transition. This Bill not only enhances efficiency and transparency but also safeguards the interest of our planters and consumers, ensuring that the benefits of the National Wholesale Market are accessible to all. While these amendments may initially appear as a radical change, I urge each one of us to reflect upon the potential benefits it might bring to our agricultural community and our economy as a whole.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before we explore the proposed amendments to this Bill, I wish to take a minute to acknowledge the role of all the women and men, the planters in assuring food security and food sustainability in Mauritius. They are the backbone of our society, toiling tirelessly to cultivate, harvest and distribute a wide variety of fruits and vegetables that make up the foundations of our diets. Their daily commitment to nurturing the land of our beloved country is a testament to their unwavering dedication. In a world facing challenges of climate change and natural disasters, supporting planters is not only an ethical imperative of this Government but also a strategic necessity for food security and the well-being of the future generation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the heart of this Bill lies a crucial proposition that has the potential to redefine the landscape of our agricultural economy. That is, a significant shift in the manner in which the wholesale by auction of locally produced vegetables, fruits and flowers is to be conducted. The Bill suggests that these transactions which have traditionally taken places in three sites –

- I. Port Louis;
- II. Vacoas, and
- III. Flacq

should now be centralised and conducted at the National Wholesale Market in Wooton which is in operation since July 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are approximately 10,000 registered planters in Mauritius. There are more than 3,000 planters in my constituency, Flacq-Bon Accueil, and 10 auctioneers, *encanteurs*, registered and operating in Flacq. I meet both the planters and auctioneers on a regular basis. Every other Sunday, I go personally to the market fair of Flacq to meet vegetable and fruit sellers, meet my constituents at the same time, and speak to them and listen to their requests and suggestions. The auctioneers from Flacq have - Flacq market is probably one of the biggest on the island - been operating for many years in deplorable conditions, lacking adequate and sanitary infrastructure. I am told by our

friends how, 40 years ago, the wholesale auction of vegetables and fruits was done *enba pie badamie* near the District Court of Flacq. Their produce, Mr Speaker, Sir, was laid on the street, in the dust and dirt. No hygiene, no tables, no shelter, under scorching sun - we know the sun is very strong - heavy rain, without a proper infrastructure, no light, no safety conditions.

While the new market fair in Flacq was opened in October 2012, what did they do at that time? A minor upgrade. Mr Speaker, Sir, the then Government, and especially elected Members of Constituency No. 9, Flacq-Bon Accueil, at that time, had absolutely no vision, and they still do not have. Especially...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: *Advisor pe koze laba!*

Mr Balgobin: Especially, lots of noise were made at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the previous Minister in the constituency, auto-proclaimed 'King of the East'; self-proclaimed. King but with no kingdom! No vision because at that time he had the opportunity to provide a proper place, to provide perfect conditions, hygienic conditions, infrastructure in this big *bazar* Flacq for those planters and auctioneers. Nothing was done at that time. Only talks, no action. On that October 2012, the market of Flacq was opened. In January 2013, they were allowed to sell their produce, you know where, Mr Speaker, Sir? From the *pie badamie*, on the parking lots, down! And once again, they were operating in unsanitary conditions, open-air setting, extreme weather conditions, heat and heavy rainfall. These vegetables and fruits which we were consuming had contact with dust and dirt. Inadequate sanitation, as we know, can lead to the spread of harmful pathogens such as bacteria and viruses. This can contaminate fruits and vegetables, posing a significant risk to the consumers. These conditions not only make it uncomfortable for all involved but also reduce the shelf life and quality of vegetables being sold. When I met the auctioneers, they told me there was no shelter; they were selling their fruits *en plein air*. And what vision they had at that time? Only a dedicated space covered with *fey tol!* Not *lamok pouri*, *fey tol!* No proper hygiene. No proper lighting. No loading base. No washroom. Nothing! That was the condition when they had built Flacq Market at that time.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, when I meet with them, when I speak to them, I can see relief on their face. Auctioneers are happy since they have started to sell their produce at the National Wholesale Market. One of them even told me, and I quote –

“Legim rent vit, vann vit.”

The auctioneers mean to say when I meet them: 'There is now a dedicated loading and unloading area for each auctioneer. There is proper lighting because we have auctions done at dawn.' A lot has been said about the opening time and closing time, 2 a.m. in the morning, etc. They have gone and visit the Wootton National Wholesale Market. But why don't they go, as my friend hon. Seeruttun when he was the Minister, at 1-2 a.m. in the morning and see? They just go at a time, just to make some publicity, take some pictures, invite the Press but do not go at the correct time when it starts. And now, it is being said that it starts at 2 a.m. It is not true. The hon. Leader of the Opposition said, 'I did not say 5 a.m.; I did not say 4 p.m.; I said 2 a.m.' It is not true. They should have gone there at that time to check and see. But, unfortunately, at 2 a.m., there will be no Press; there will not be anybody.

The normal time of operation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is at 4 a.m. and sale of auctions starts as from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. This is the correct timing. But, of course, to be able to start at that time, the planters would come earlier to install their products, to install their produce. It is logical that they will come earlier. More so, Mr Speaker, Sir, the auction for fruits starts at 4 a.m. to 6 p.m., not as being said a bit earlier. So, I come back to what the auctioneers said, 'Now, there is proper manipulation of their produce, more hygiene and sanitary conditions, and with proper infrastructure, we can help foster a healthier, more efficient and prosperous agricultural supply chain.'

Mr Speaker, Sir, centralising the wholesale auction for local produce at the National Wholesale Market provides a platform for farmers to obtain fair and competitive prices for their products. It is a transparent auction setting where buyers compete to acquire these products, driving up the prices and ensuring that farmers across the island receive the true value of their hard work.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, the centralised wholesale market auction simplifies and modernise the distribution process. It eliminates the need for planters to negotiate with multiple individual buyers, visit various markets and incur high transportation costs. Instead, it offers a one-stop solution, saving time and resources. This increased efficiency benefits planters and consumers alike as produce can be more readily available at affordable prices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Wholesale Market is spacious, modern, safe and hygienic. The centralisation of these wholesale activities will enable the Agricultural Marketing Board to better monitor and regulate the flow of agricultural produce, ultimately contributing to the reduction of wastage and spoilage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is putting lots of effort and investment in digitalisation of public services for the benefit of all citizens. With the new infrastructure, record of all transactions and data collected from the auction market sales, we could leverage on new and emerging technologies and digital platforms to streamline the process of buying and selling their produces. I am very positive that my good friend, hon. Hurdoyal, as he mentioned in his intervention last week, will further explore the adoption of technology to digitalise operation at the wholesale market to increase efficiency, same as is happening outside, in Belgium. For example he mentioned, Bel Orta, where vegetables and fruits are being auctioned online and they are handling an activity of 4000 tons of vegetables and fruits per day. So, I am sure we can, in the future, come up with solution like this so that we could also leverage on technology in the agricultural sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that we remain mindful on the concerns and apprehensions of our local planters. This Government, through the able leadership of our hon. Prime Minister and through dedication and hard work of my colleague, the hon. Hurdoyal, Minister of the Agro-Industry and Food Security, is ensuring that this transition is not only seamless but also beneficial to the planters who form the backbone of our agricultural sector. We also recognise the huge efforts and work that have been done previously by the former ministers, my colleagues, hon. Seeruttun and hon. Maneesh Gobin, for this project to be successful today.

Adequate provisions have been put in place to guarantee that the planters' community voices are heard and their interests are protected throughout this transformation process. And what is said by my colleague hon. Seeruttun, we cannot just let all these planters and auctioneers perform like it was before; there should be this change but I'm sure that the Ministry of Agro-Industry in the capacity of Minister, my good friend, will ensure that there is a seamless transition and that everybody will be happy with this.

So, I implore the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, to consider the long-term benefits and implications of the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill. Let us not perceive this change as an upheaval but as a progressive step towards the modernisation and advancement of our agricultural sector. I strongly support the amendments being brought to this Bill for the benefit of all the planters and auctioneers in Mauritius. This will bring a far reaching positive impact on the overall agricultural community and improve the conditions in which they operate.

Let us seize this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to create a more robust, efficient and sustainable agricultural market that can contribute to the growth and prosperity of our nation as a whole.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(7.24 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me first of all congratulate my colleague, hon. Minister Hurdoyal, for bringing this Bill to the House because it was much awaited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am talking by experience, my first job was at the Small Farmers Welfare Fund as a technical officer and I was on training there. Before joining the Small Farmers, I have been working with planters in the East region – Belle Mare, Trou d'Eau Douce, even in Circonstance St Pierre and I would say that this project that we are bringing now has been much awaited. Why so, Mr Speaker, Sir? I will not go much in details but many of my colleagues before me, the former Minister of Agriculture, hon. Mahen Seeruttun mentioned about it; hon. Dr. Boolell also talked about the planters earlier but we have to understand the problem of the planters. They have to face bad weather condition when planting; they have to face pests and diseases; they also have to face *vols agricoles*, agricultural theft, like we say and now with this project, Mr Speaker, Sir, we mentioned it, hon. Mahen Seeruttun mentioned it: traceability.

I remember in my time at Small Farmers Welfare Fund when we were working on this piece of legislation and to see how we could work with FAREI, local authorities, Police, Ministry of Health so that we could make these changes because for most of the planters, many thing that was happening – I know that hon. Bodha will speak later. He will remember what happened in Henrietta, in Glen Park where in some fields planters took law in their hands when there were agricultural thefts and how it had affected them when their products were being stolen in the fields. We do not want this to happen, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it is the truth, if the planters do not have security officers or they are not watching their field, people of bad faith will go and steal and they do not even know whether the plant is ready for consumption – sometimes planters have just put some pesticide on it and it will take some time before we can consume it. We have seen cases in Mauritius where people have been contaminated and some lost their life by buying vegetables on the streets from hawkers and there was a big problem of traceability.

Now that we are talking about the National Wholesale Market, we know that now we have a proper place with the right conditions – other colleagues have mentioned it: clean, safe. Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Balgobin and even hon. Seeruttun mentioned about the conditions in which auctions were being conducted in Vacoas market, in Port Louis and also about the sanitary conditions of these food products. Sometimes the food products were put on the streets and we know how it was done. We had to come with this piece of legislation and with this project. Yes, hon. Dr. Boolell, it took time but we have done it.

What is important is that the project is now on. We have a vision to make it like – I do not know if you had the opportunity, I had the opportunity to go on the *Marché de Rungis*. I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition who is used to go to Monaco for Grand Prix, maybe he can go to Paris and ask to see the *Marché de Rungis*; how it is and how it is being done. Here, we start the auction at 4 a.m. but there, they start the auction at 1 a.m. and ends at 11 a.m., just to tell you. We know that the International Market of Rungis, with an area of 234 hectares, is out of Paris but it is the largest market for fresh food, in the world where you have fish, meat, fruits, vegetables, dairy products and flowers.

We are starting with vegetables now, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we have much vision, with our Prime Minister who had the vision to do it and we should remember because it's hon. Pravind Jugnauth, former Minister of Agriculture, who created the Small Farmers Welfare Fund to give recognition to planters. If today, planters are recognised and have a planter's card, it is thanks to hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. If today, we have this National Wholesale Market, it is thanks to his vision when he was Minister of Finance and he proposed it, but I will tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, today it's a reality, thanks to my colleagues, hon. Seeruttun, the Government, hon. Gobin, and hon. Hurdoyal; thanks to them, we have this project on and running now.

Much has been said, Mr Speaker, Sir. What was the objective of the National Wholesale Market? The objective is to construct and create the necessary infrastructure for handling of fruits, vegetables, post-harvest for onward sale, fully compliant with all existing relevant legislation, agricultural and food standards. We had to create a modern market yard because, Mr Speaker, Sir, when this Bill was brought for the first time in this House in 1963 - I was not even born - it was brought by *feu* Satcam Boolell, and at that time - hon. Dr. Boolell mentioned Dr. Balogh - *feu* Satcam Boolell also mentioned one thing, that we need to think further, that besides food crops, we will need to go into livestock, we will need to go into fish. They were talking about the fish auction market, but if you go to the *Marché de Rungis*, you will see, Mr Speaker, Sir, how they have

developed. This is the vision of the 5- rays that we want to bring to this country, and we are modernising our agricultural industry.

We talk about agribusiness now, Mr Speaker, Sir, not only of small planters, but it's important that people understand why this project is being done, because earlier I heard the Leader of the Opposition. I know he was very confused in himself because he said that he has gone to the Wooton Auction Market, but I don't think he knows how the auction is being done. I think I would ask the hon. Minister, when the auction is being done, if he could invite the Leader of the Opposition or Members of the Opposition to go there and to experience it so that they understand how this is being done.

There are different aspects that we need to take into account, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, with what we are doing, we are going in the right way. With regard to traceability of the products, which is important, I would now like to quote what the Member of the Assembly, Charles Gaëtan Duval, said in 1963, I think with the Bill that they were bringing on the actual Marketing Board –

“The rich will become richer, the poor will become poorer.”

It's not the case, Mr Speaker, Sir. What we are doing, we are giving our planters the right platform so that they can sell it at the right price and with the right place and with the right condition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with our Government, with the vision of our Prime Minister, it is not only to modernise the country, modernise infrastructure with hon. Hurreeram; we are also modernising our agricultural sector. You will see in the future, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are talking of the 5-rays of Rungis, but we will talk about the 5-rays of Wooton, and we know - hon. Dr. Boolell said - that we need to market and make the planters adopt. We have to give some incentives, yes, but we will have to work on this with the planters, and no way, no way - this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, what we are doing under the leadership of our Prime Minister - we will do something without consultation with the planters, with the auctioneers. We are doing it in a proper way so that it is fair and the part of shares because we know, Mr Speaker, Sir, all the hard work is done by the planters and the middlemen who take most when the product is being sold. We know how it was being done in the past. Now that it is being controlled, we will see how we will move forward, how we are empowering our planters and, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will go in the right way.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end by saying that our Prime Minister, with this Government, we are doing our best for our planting community to provide good agricultural products to our population, and I will end with a quote of Mahatma Gandhi –

“Agriculture is not just about growing food; it is a way of life that connects us to the earth and to our roots.”

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I fully adhere to this project and to the amendment that is being brought to the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

(7.37 p.m.)

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Je vais essayer de ne pas répéter ce qui a déjà été dit par les orateurs me précédant.

M. le président, ce que nous devons comprendre ce soir c’est que les débats sur le *Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill* concernent un amendement pour empêcher, un amendement pour rendre illégal ce qu’on appelle vente à l’encan, vente au gros dans des marchés, des bazars, *ti bazar*, la foire et autres. La vente à l’encan, la vente au gros de fruits, légumes et fleurs produits localement sera désormais, bien sûr après la promulgation de cette loi, autorisée uniquement dans un *National Wholesale Market*. Nous ne sommes pas ici ce soir, M. le président, pour débattre sur le *National Wholesale Market* qui se trouve actuellement à Wooton. Nous ne sommes pas là pour débattre sur son fonctionnement, son emplacement, ni faire son procès, et j’y reviendrai, M. le président, si vous me le permettez. Notre pays est béni d’un sol fertile et nos grands-parents ont su comment labourer le sol et gagner leur vie.

Ainsi, la vente à l’encan a été un événement inévitable qu’a connu tous les planteurs, marchands, et cela a été chose normale pour assister à l’encan à trois heures, deux heures du matin, et bien que les anciennes ventes à l’encan étaient folkloriques, nous ne pouvons nier que les planteurs, marchands, encanteurs étaient confrontés à de nombreux défis pour nourrir leurs familles.

M. le président, en réponse aux arguments de l’opposition, permettez-moi de vous ramener dans le passé, plus exactement en septembre 2000 quand notre actuel Premier ministre, l’honorable Pravind Jugnauth, occupa le poste de ministre de l’Agro-industrie. M. le président, c’est depuis cette époque que le projet de créer un marché national de distribution et de vente à l’encan avait été proposé. 23 ans de cela, M. le président, l’honorable Premier ministre alors ministre de l’Agriculture avait déjà une vision pour transformer ce mécanisme de vente à l’encan qui se déroulait dans le marché et qui, pour trop longtemps, était critiqué pour leur manque d’hygiène, manque de sécurité, risque de vol, espace d’embarquement et de débarquement inadéquat, problème de parking, et j’en passe.

M. le président, plus de 20 ans, tout était là dans un plan directeur, mais rien n'a été fait, et cela est dommage pour tous ces *stakeholders*, planteurs, encanteurs, marchands, consommateurs, hôteliers. Il a fallu que ce gouvernement revienne au pouvoir pour faire avancer les choses et qu'enfin le *National Wholesale Market* voie le jour. Et quelle ironie, M. le président, que ce n'est que maintenant que nos amis de l'opposition ont cru bon faire un *site visit* au *wholesale market* de Wooton, accompagnés de leur photographe.

Et là, je me dois de féliciter l'honorable ministre de l'Agro-industrie, l'honorable Hurdoyal, d'avoir accompli presque un miracle qui est d'avoir permis à l'actuel chef de l'opposition et le chef de l'opposition sortant de bénir enfin le bâtiment de Wooton par leur présence. M. le président, sans ce projet de loi, le *National Wholesale Market* n'aurait suscité aucun intérêt pour eux et c'est cela la vraie photo.

M. le président, je viens de faire mention des problèmes d'hygiène, de santé, de sécurité, de logistique que comportait la façon traditionnelle de vente à l'encan dans le marché. Avec le *wholesale market*, nous allons éliminer tous ces problèmes. Mieux encore, nous aurons plus de transparence, nous aurons une meilleure traçabilité des produits, meilleure visibilité sur notre actuelle situation agroalimentaire et l'utilisation des technologies modernes pour rendre le mécanisme encore plus rapide, fluide et agréable pour tout le monde.

L'honorable ministre de l'Agro-industrie et mes collègues avant moi nous ont donné une liste exhaustive de tous ces avantages ainsi que les risques mitigés. Sur ce point, heureusement, il n'y a pas de discordance entre les membres de l'opposition et de ce côté de la Chambre. De ce fait, M. le président, il serait normal que nous mettions tout en œuvre pour empêcher l'existence et la prolifération de vente à l'encan parallèle qui, à leur tour, M. le président, engendreront les mêmes problèmes d'hygiène et de santé et autres que nous avons déjà subis pendant trop longtemps, pendant des décennies avec ce genre de pratique. Bien sûr, d'où l'introduction de ce projet de loi qui n'est qu'une suite logique après ce que nous avons fait, le plus gros travail qui est, M. le président, je voudrais le rappeler, une infrastructure moderne de 5400 m² construite sur un terrain de 30 arpents au coup de 450 millions et la rendre opérationnelle à la grande satisfaction de tous les *stakeholders*.

Et là, je me dois de saluer le ministre Mahen Seeruttun qui avait repris le dossier lorsqu'il était à l'Agro-industrie ainsi que le ministre Maneesh Gobin qui a permis à ce projet de voir le jour.

M. le président, vous allez être d'accord avec moi, cela n'a pas été chose facile de ramener tous les *stakeholders*, planteurs, marchands, encanteurs de changer du jour au

lendemain un système qui marchait mais malheureusement un système dépassé et qui avait fait son temps. Nous comprenons tous que ce n'est pas facile ; on avait des ventes à l'encan à Vacoas, Port Louis, Flacq. Bien sûr que nous sommes conscients des problèmes de distance résultant dans divers complications mais, il est bon de dire et le redire et je me réjouis que l'honorable Hurdoyal l'a souligné, le *Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill* fait mention à la section 25BA (1) – « *at any place other than a national wholesale market.* ». Cela démontre deux choses –

- (i) Premièrement, ce gouvernement n'est pas insensible aux difficultés et exigences de nos amis planteurs. Nous sommes bien au courant que tout changement, tout nouveau système implique quelques inconvénients au début et requiert un temps d'adaptation, et
- (ii) Deuxièmement, M. le président, ce gouvernement fidèle à sa philosophie de moderniser le pays ne s'arrêtera pas en si bon chemin et que d'autres *National Wholesale Markets*, s'il y en aura, ce sera sous ce gouvernement, sous notre gouvernement et pas ce que le leader de l'opposition a voulu nous faire croire.

M. le président, la population n'est plus dupe. La population n'attendra plus encore 23 ans.

D'ailleurs, M. le président, et c'est important de le rappeler, dans le dernier budget présenté par l'honorable ministre des Finances, provision de R 2 milliards a été fait pour venir en aide à nos amis planteurs. Et c'est dans ce budget que nous avons accordé un *grant* de 50 % jusqu'à un maximum de 500 000 pour la construction de deux *sheltered farms*. C'est dans ce budget que nous avons donné 50% de subsides pour l'achat des fertilisants. C'est dans ce budget, M. le président, qu'on a donné 75% de subsides sur les graines de chou, giraumont, concombre et carotte. C'est dans ce budget, M. le président, que nous avons donné un *grant* de R 200 000 pour la construction d'un *Seedling Production Unit* pour les sociétés coopératives et j'en passe. Et c'est aujourd'hui que seulement trois membres de l'alliance de l'opposition, venant de deux parties de l'alliance de l'opposition, vont essayer de nous faire croire que c'est eux qui ont vraiment à cœur les intérêts de nos planteurs.

M. le président, le *Statistics Bureau* rapporte que la superficie totale récoltée sous-culture alimentaire a augmenté de 11,9% passant de 3,219 hectares au premier semestre de 2022 à 3,602 hectares au même période de 2023. La production a augmenté de 38% passant de 39,524 tonnes à 54,728 tonnes. Cela est très encourageant, M. le président, et

démontre l'engouement de nos mauriciens à se lancer dans la plantation de fruits et légumes.

Ainsi, M. le président, ce que nous constatons aujourd'hui est un rajeunissement dans la communauté des planteurs. Beaucoup de jeunes s'intéressent à la plantation et tentent l'aventure et cela est porteur d'espoir. M. président, nous devons les encourager. Notre gouvernement a toujours encouragé et aidé nos jeunes amis planteurs. Nous avons besoin d'eux ; nous avons besoin de beaucoup plus de jeunes.

M. le président, le *National Wholesale Market* offrira de nouvelles opportunités aux planteurs pour lancer les stratégies marketing et des opérations innovantes qui apportent de la valeur. Les petits producteurs de légumes et autres petites entreprises à petite échelle qui étaient réticents à s'engager dans l'amélioration, production et la commercialisation en raison des prix instables du marché pourront maintenant avoir plus d'espoir. M. le président, les arrangements inefficaces, prolongés dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement, le manque de transparence du marché ont traditionnellement été les principales causes de variation de prix. Ainsi, à travers un marché centralisé, ces chocs de prix qui affectaient principalement les petits planteurs, seront atténués et les consommateurs bénéficieront de prix plus stable.

M. le président, notre gouvernement a toujours travaillé dans l'intérêt de la population et en même temps s'assurer que tout changement apporté pour améliorer un système ne laisse personne de côté. M. le président, c'est notre gouvernement qui est venu de l'avant avec un *proper wholesale market* avec toutes les infrastructures adéquates. Qu'avons-nous vu tout ce temps ? Des marchés de légumes transformés en vente à l'encan dans le noir et en marché dans le jour.

Ainsi, M. le président, compte tenu de l'abus des produits nocifs tels que les pesticides par certains planteurs, il existe une opportunité considérable de former, d'éduquer de manière plus efficace les planteurs et les commerçants qui utilisent le marché de gros. De plus, M. le président, avec le *National Wholesale Market*, il existe maintenant la possibilité d'effectuer des vérifications, des tests échantillonnés de produits échangés sur le marché.

M. le président, le *National Wholesale Market* a été conçu pour offrir à la population un système d'enchère moderne, sûr, hygiénique et propre, qui fournit toutes les installations nécessaires garantissant que le processus est fluide et efficace. Cela profite aux vendeurs qui reçoivent un prix équitable pour leurs produits, aux encanteurs qui bénéficient d'un environnement de travail adapté et sain et les consommateurs qui bénéficient de la connaissance des produits et qu'ils sont de bonne qualité.

Pour conclure, M. le président, tout centralisé par le *National Wholesale Market* comporte plusieurs gros avantages que je qualifierai comme –

- *economies of scale*, avantage pour tous les *stakeholders* ;
- le stockage frigorifique ;
- le tri et classement des produits ;
- la transformation ;
- l’emballage, qui bien sûr sera rendu possible et rentable – surtout rentable – après avoir reçu, après avoir dépassé une certaine quantité – comme l’on dit en anglais : *when we have the numbers* ;
- une meilleure gestion de déchets dans l’optique d’atteindre une économie circulaire et conformément à la récente feuille de route de l’économie circulaire publiée par l’honorable ministre de l’Environnement ;
- plus de transparence avec des *displays* électroniques affichant les prix à l’encan quotidien ;
- un meilleur contrôle sur la qualité des fruits et légumes ;
- une meilleure traçabilité ;
- un meilleur contrôle de l’utilisation des pesticides et autres produits pouvant nuire à la santé publique à travers un laboratoire installé dans le *National Wholesale Market*.

M. le président, c’est pour toutes ces raisons que je soutiens l’idée de tenir des ventes à l’encan dans un des locaux du *National Wholesale Market* et c’est pour toutes ces raisons que je voterai pour ce projet de loi.

J’en ai terminé, M. le président et je vous remercie pour votre aimable attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha, you have 20 minutes, you may start.

(7.50 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. J’ai l’honneur et le plaisir de participer à ce débat, sur un projet de loi qui est extrêmement important sur un secteur qui est vital pour notre économie et pour l’avenir.

J’ai visité la vente à l’encan de Port Louis en 2003 à 4 heures du matin. L’image que le ministre Seeruttun a peinte est réelle, c’était cauchemardesque et c’était inacceptable. À l’époque, on parlait d’un *wholesale market* et on avait choisi la région de Riche Terre et je vais expliquer pourquoi. À Port Louis, il y a 160 000 habitants et pendant la journée, il y a à peu près 250 000 personnes qui viennent à Port Louis, ce qui fait une population d’à peu près de 350,000 à 400,000. Et le marché de Port Louis reste le principal

marché de cultures vivrières de Maurice. Ce marché est alimenté par toute la région Nord, toute la région de Vallée des Prêtres, Montagne Longue, Crève Coeur, Terre Rouge, même par une région de l'Ouest. Au fait, 60% de la production et de la consommation de cultures vivrières se trouvent dans la région de Port Louis mais ce n'était pas possible de continuer avec la vente à l'encan là où ça se faisait et il fallait absolument faire le projet de *wholesale market*. Et on avait pensé, à l'époque, quand je suis devenu ministre après le Premier ministre qui était alors mon prédécesseur et avec le *Non-Sugar Sector Plan*, on a parlé donc de Riche Terre.

La question de la décentralisation à Wooton était-elle la solution ? Est-ce que Wooton, certes, au centre de l'île, mais étant excentré par rapport à la consommation, par rapport au marché, était l'endroit idéal pour le faire ? Ça c'est une autre question.

Je suis allé à Wooton il y a quelques jours et j'ai appris beaucoup de choses. Effectivement, les problèmes posés, c'est-à-dire, l'insalubrité, l'éclairage, le traitement, le *handling* des légumes, ces problèmes ont été résolus, c'est-à-dire les problèmes logistiques et pratiques. Mais Wooton est un entrepôt ouvert, c'est tout. Il n'y a rien d'un marché comme l'on connaît à Rungis ou à Saint-Pierre à l'île de la Réunion. Et tout ce qui se fait à Wooton n'a pas changé. Les fruits et les légumes sont entreposés à même le sol. Ça veut dire que rien n'a changé au fait. On a changé de lieu, c'est un peu mieux mais rien n'a changé.

Et quand j'avais conçu le projet à l'époque, j'étais à la vente à l'encan de Saint Pierre et je vous explique comment ça se passe et ça se faisait en plein jour. Le ministre Hurdoyal qui est un producteur et un exportateur d'ananas comprendra bien. Celui qui a emmené 1000 ananas, il ne pose pas les 1000 ananas par terre, il emmène une boîte avec 10 ananas. Et celui qui va acheter, il choisit, il dit oui, il y a 10 ananas, moi, je vais en prendre 200. Et on fait un transbordement du camion du producteur au camion de l'acheteur. Il n'y a pas lieu de poser tous les melons d'eau, les pastèques, les giraumons par terre et c'est ce qui se passe actuellement à Wooton. Rien n'a changé ! Et j'ai vu la vente à la criée, l'emprise des encanteurs sur ce secteur est toujours là.

Quel était l'objectif du *wholesale market* ? Je vais vous expliquer. Le planteur, il gagne R 5 par kilo ou par livre de carottes. Le consommateur achète la carotte à R 15 et dans les grandes surfaces c'est à R 20 parce qu'on a fait l'emballage et tout. Qui est gagnant ? C'est ni le planteur ni le consommateur. Et l'objectif du *wholesale market* c'est ça, il faut protéger le producteur, le planteur et il faut protéger le consommateur. Alors je pose la grande question à tous les ministres qui sont là au gouvernement : est-ce que

Wooton a amené une baisse dans le prix des légumes à Maurice ? La réponse est non. Donc, ce que vous êtes en train de faire n'a pas répondu à l'objectif principal de départ.

Je vais prendre un autre exemple. On produit 120 000 tonnes à peu près de cultures vivrières et le *wholesale market* est concerné par seulement 30 000 à 40 000 tonnes, c'est-à-dire, à peu près 30% seulement de la production locale. Le *wholesale market* aurait dû s'occuper de l'ensemble de la production locale. Vous allez vous occuper seulement de 30%. Et ce dont j'ai peur, ce que l'honorable Ittoo a évoqué, il ne faut pas qu'il y ait des marchés parallèles qui fassent que finalement le *wholesale market* de Wooton se réduit à une peau de chagrin. Et, aujourd'hui, Wooton est en train de manipuler 100 tonnes par jour. 100 tonnes par jour ça va faire à peu près 30 000 tonnes par an, c'est-à-dire 30 % de la production locale totale. Qu'est-ce qui va se passer avec les 70 000 tonnes autres ? Quelles seront les autres réseaux de distribution ? Quelles seront les autres transactions qui vont se faire ? Alors, Wooton ne va pas réglementer le prix de légumes à Maurice. Alors, il faut repenser complètement le système parce que vous êtes concernés seulement par 30 % de la production. Et il y aura, donc, des marchés parallèles. Il y aura probablement pas de marchés à l'encan en parallèle mais il y aura beaucoup de conduits, beaucoup de transactions entre les hôtels, entre des gens qui vont finalement être dans ce secteur sans passer par Wooton. Si je prends un exemple, 100 tonnes par jour, si je compte à peu près R 100 par kilo, cela nous fait R 10 millions. Ça veut dire qu'il y a un chiffre d'affaires de R 10 millions qui passent par Wooton tous les jours. Pendant une année cela fait R 3 milliards. Il faut multiplier cela par 3 parce que la production et la consommation c'est à peu près R 10 milliards.

Alors, moi ce que je suis en train de vous dire, premièrement, c'est une région excentrée. Peut-être qu'avec les échangeurs et tout on pourra avoir accès à Wooton, c'est vrai. Mais 60 % de la consommation et de la production se trouve autour de Port Louis. Donc, il faudra gérer cela et je suis très content que mon collègue, Ittoo, a dit peut-être qu'un jour, il y aura un autre marché. Et je crois que du côté de l'opposition, nous sommes tous d'accord qu'il faudra un autre marché. Il faudra qu'il y ait un rééquilibrage géographique de la production et de la consommation. Wooton va marcher, mais moi, ce dont j'ai peur, que finalement vous pensez à 30 % et que si vous arrivez à seulement 20 % à ce moment-là, ce sera un éléphant blanc.

Alors je reviens, bien sûr, nous avons tous parlé de la communauté des planteurs, nous sommes tous les enfants des planteurs et des laboureurs. Nous savons tous d'où on vient et nous savons tous ce qu'ils ont vécu. Et je pense que tout le monde est d'accord,

ici, des deux côtés de la Chambre, qu'il y ait une nouvelle génération de jeunes planteurs qui utilisent la dernière technologie, la *smart agriculture*.

Maintenant, je vais prendre un exemple. Il y a 1.2 millions de touristes qui viennent à Maurice pour dix nuitées, ça fait 12 millions de nuitées. S'ils mangent une banane par jour, ça fait 12 millions de bananes. Eh bien, il faut mettre en place un secteur de production de bananes. Nos bananes sont chétives et mûrissent trop vite. Ce que je suis en train de dire, les opportunités sont là parce que le touriste a besoin de produits de qualité. Alors, est-ce que maintenant le circuit pour fournir les légumes et les fruits dans les hôtels passera par Wooton ? Non.

Alors il faut bien comprendre le poids de Wooton dans cette industrie. Nous importons 40 milliards de produits alimentaires par an, il est grand temps pour la sécurité alimentaire qu'on puisse réduire ça, même si on réduit par 5% par an, ça nous fait 2 milliards.

Je prends l'exemple en Europe. Le beurre qui est fabriqué au Danemark a un coût de production très élevé. Le beurre qui est fabriqué en Bulgarie a un coût de production moindre mais quand ces deux produits se retrouvent sur les étagères en France, les prix sont comparables, pourquoi ? Il n'y a pas de politique agricole sans une politique de subventions de prix et j'invite le gouvernement à penser à subventionner les prix et qu'il y ait un prix minimum garanti pour que le planteur puisse organiser sa production. Ainsi, il ne plante pas les pommes d'amour étant dans le nord, en espérant que personne ne plante la pomme d'amour dans l'autre région comme ça il a un jackpot, en espérant un jackpot.

Et moi, j'avais mis en place une institution et cela une idée que je lance. Il faut une *Market Intelligence Unit* qui va faire une étude sur la consommation, la production des cultures vivrières, et il y avait Madame Gauche qui avait, à l'époque, travaillé entre 2003 et 2005 quand j'étais ministre, elle a fait un rapport sur le *Market Intelligence Unit*, c'est-à-dire comment réglementer et gérer le marché de culture vivrière à Maurice pour que les planteurs trouvent leur compte et les consommateurs trouvent leur compte. Vous savez finalement on n'a que 40 encanteurs, il y a une vingtaine qui sont à Wooton, il y avait une dizaine qui se trouvaient à Vacoas et il y avait quelques-uns qui se trouvaient à Flacq. Mais 40 encanteurs ne peuvent pas tenir sous leur emprise tout le système parce que vous savez ce qu'ils font ? Ils donnent des prêts aux planteurs pour que les planteurs puissent commencer leur production. Après, ils donnent des crédits aux vendeurs, ça veut dire ils contrôlent toute la chaîne. Il y a que 40, et moi, je m'étais bagarré avec eux – si vous voulez réglementer pour que la carotte qui rapporte R 5 aux planteurs de Henrietta, ne se vendent pas à R 15 à Vacoas et que finalement c'est le consommateur qui paye et le

planteur qui paye les pots cassés et bien sûr maintenant quand il y a les inondations, la sécheresse. Bein, j'avais proposé aussi le *Crop Insurance Scheme*. Il faut un prix garanti. Alors quand je suis allé à Wooton, un encanteur qu'est-ce qu'il a fait ? Il est venu, il y avait deux caisses de pommes d'amour. Alors il a commencé par R 30, c'est lui qui a décidé quel était le prix indicatif. Alors il commence à 30, 30, 30, 30, alors il y a quelqu'un qui dit 20, l'autre qui dit 25 et puis il y a quelqu'un qui s'arrête à 27.50, l'encanteur dit 27.50, 27.50, 27.50, trois fois, adjugé ! Ce n'est pas cela la vente à l'encan. *It should go to the highest bidder.*

Alors, nous avons un outil exceptionnel à Wooton. Il faut savoir maintenant comment gérer ça pour le bien du planteur et pour le bien du consommateur. Il ne faut pas que les intermédiaires finalement se fassent les choux gras sur le dos de celui qui produisent. Bon, on a beaucoup parlé du planteur, de ses misères, de difficultés, de tout ce qu'il faut faire. Alors moi, je crois qu'il faut régionaliser ; à un moment donné il faudra le faire et il faudra régionaliser dans le nord.

Concernant Flacq ce que j'ai appris, il y avait l'encan deux fois par semaine parce que l'encan avait lieu la veille du marché. Alors ça veut dire qu'il y avait le marché deux jours donc il y avait l'encan la veille. Maintenant cette question qu'on doit venir avec nos légumes, avec nos fruits, avec nos cultures vivrières, la veille et installer tout ça pour que l'encanteur puisse commencer à faire les enchères à 2 heures - 3 heures du matin, il faut qu'on travaille à des heures convenables et cette question d'étaler les giraumons, alors ils sont venus de Flacq, il faut les transporter, il faut les poser par terre après quand on les a achetés, il faut maintenant les prendre pour le mettre dans le camion et ça va repartir ; donc il faut trouver, il faut moderniser le système.

Vous avez un instrument extrêmement intéressant mais 470 millions pour faire ce qu'on a vu, sincèrement je trouve ça une somme faramineuse et je ne comprends pas comment on a fait ça. Il y a la deuxième partie. Vous parlez de chambre froide, vous parlez de maintenance, vous parlez d'un certain nombre de facilités que vous allez offrir aux planteurs. Bien vivement que cette deuxième phase se fasse avant que le marché ne meure comme un éléphant blanc ! Parce que si vous voulez vraiment que la majorité des cultivateurs, des planteurs viennent là-bas, alors ils doivent venir quand ils ont un avantage pour venir sinon ils vont rester là où ils sont et ils vont essayer d'écouler leurs marchandises dans la région, leurs cultures vivrières, leurs légumes différemment. Ça se fait déjà maintenant. Ça se fait *online*. Alors ce que je suis en train de dire par *online*, ça veut dire que quelqu'un dit – je vois les ananas, c'est de bonne qualité et quand j'ai parlé à une dame qui est la présidente de l'Association des Encanteurs. Je lui ai dit s'il y a une

caisse d'ananas, il y a 10 dedans et après je commande une centaine et que quant au moment de la livraison, la centaine d'ananas ne correspondent pas à la qualité qui a été offerte ici et c'est là que l'*Agricultural Marketing Board* c'est là que les autorités interviennent justement pour créer une *blacklist*. Ça veut dire que si aujourd'hui moi, je me suis fait avoir parce que j'ai commandé des ananas et je n'ai pas reçu ce que je voulais recevoir, à ce moment-là on crée un *blacklist* et ce planteur ou ce vendeur ne va pas répéter ce qu'il a fait pour que justement c'est une question de réputation, c'est une question de *trust*.

Alors, moi, je crois qu'il faut absolument repenser le système parce que vous êtes en train, enfin de compte, de traiter seulement 30% de la production, 70% de la production vous échappe. Alors si je comprends bien, j'ai dit 100 tonnes par jour, 300 jours ça fait à peu près 30,000 tonnes sur un total de 120,000 tonnes.

Maintenant je rejoins mon collègue Dr. Arvin Boolell concernant le *Sugar Map*, j'ai toujours dit, il faut redessiner la carte sucrière pour 350 à 400,000 tonnes, des terres qui seront réservées exclusivement à la canne. Il est d'accord avec moi. Il faut qu'il y ait donc un *Sugar Map* pour 350,000 tonnes de sucre. Maintenant, il faut également une carte pour le *Non-Sugar Sector*, par exemple, mon collègue Ittoo a donné des chiffres en disant qu'on est passé de 3,219 hectares à 3,600. Il faut préserver les terres vivrières. Il faut encourager la nouvelle génération de planteurs. Il faut avoir des ambitions. Il faut se dire qu'on ne peut pas continuer à importer R 40 milliards de produits alimentaires. Donc, tout ça fait partie d'une philosophie, tout ça fait partie d'une vision audacieuse de ce que devrait être notre secteur agricole de demain engageant une nouvelle génération de planteurs avec une production de qualité pour les mauriciens et pour les touristes et un nouveau secteur pourrait naître et dans ce cas-là, le *Wholesale Market* serait un instrument mais je ne crois pas que cet instrument-là est suffisant. Il faudra un autre instrument régional en dehors de Wooton mais faites attention si vous tombez moins de 30%, 20% seulement de la production, à ce moment-là Wooton ne serait qu'un éléphant blanc !

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, hon. Minister Ganoo has an urgent statement to make and I allowed him to make the statement.

(8.10 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

OLD MOKA ROAD, ST JEAN, QUATRE BORNES – FLOODING

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission and with regard to the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition during the Private Notice Question regarding the flooding which occurred along the Old Moka Road, near St Jean Church, Quatres Bornes on 08 November 2023, I wish to make a Statement to clear any misunderstanding. The hon. Leader of the Opposition stated that the flooding was the result of the Metro Express Project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition, during the PNQ this morning, to the effect that the flooding at the said locus was a direct result of the implementation of the Metro Express Project, I deem it appropriate to clear any confusion that the comments of the Leader of the Opposition might have created and to set the record straight.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to stress that the flooding incident at St. Jean, at the cemetery, did not occur as a result of the Metro Express Project as this particular area clearly falls outside the metro corridor.

I am advised that no new impermeable surface was applied at that location, as the Metro Express corridor is built on an elevated structure. In view thereof, no additional surface water runoff was created by the metro structure. I am, however, informed that this location represents a low point where water accumulates rapidly.

The drain crossing below the boundary road has a lower section than the drain located upstream and downstream which causes a bottleneck to the water flow at this location. I am informed that several utilities are crossing inside the drain at this location which further created an obstacle to the water flow. Moreover, a grating/metal barrier has been placed at the entrance of the drain before the boundary wall, which often collects debris and, therefore, is easily clogged.

As the House is aware, the areas of Sodnac and Trianon witnessed a rapid urbanisation in recent years. A number of buildings and towers have been constructed, without taking into consideration the additional strain created upon the existing drainage system and this strain has been further accentuated by the occurrence of flash floods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to point out that the Metro Express Project has, in no way whatsoever, adversely impacted upon the drainage system and its capacity in the region of St. Jean. On the contrary, this project has been designed and implemented to improve the existing drainage system. This is evidenced by the fact that there has been no water accumulation along the metro corridor. This very fact shows that the metro drains are

efficient. Moreover, all along the metro corridor, the existing drains were rehabilitated and upgraded.

M. le président, la conceptualisation du projet ne s'est pas faite au petit bonheur car il y a eu plusieurs consultations avec tous les acteurs concernés lors de la mise en place du projet.

Accordingly, the Metro Express Ltd, together with its Contractor, L&T, have consistently sought the clearance and worked collaboratively with all relevant Authorities including the LDA, the RDA, the NDU, other utility providers and the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, as regards the project interface and this includes the construction of drains. As for any other works, Metro Express Ltd and Larsen & Toubro have been following all the procedures and approval requirements with the relevant authorities and in this particular case, the Land Drainage Authority approved, I repeat, the Land Drainage Authority approved all designs and drawings pertaining to the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, during the implementation of the project, existing drains were either rehabilitated or upgraded, as the case required, after consultation and approval from the LDA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that the Project was exempted from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). However, the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise, whose technical and advisory services were retained by the Metro Express Ltd, did carry out an EIA. I am informed that the Contractor, Larsen & Toubro Ltd, also developed an Environmental Management Plan, the conclusion of which was congruent with the EIA carried out by the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise and the recommendation of both were implemented in accordance with international standards. This demonstrates in no uncertain terms that the Metro Express Ltd did embed environmental considerations when framing and implementing the Project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we also need to acknowledge that Mauritius, as a Small Island Developing State, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather conditions which include intense and sudden torrential rain. On that particular day, Mr Speaker, Sir, approximately 100 mm of rain poured in that specific location within 3 hours. It would not be fair to make the Metro Express Project bear the brunt of the damages resulting from the flash flood which happened at St Jean road.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, this issue of flash flood has become critical all over the world where very intense rainfall, within a short period of time, has been observed. Hence, it is imperative that we come up with solutions which are sustainable, innovative

and realistic to cater for these unprecedented events. To this end, I believe that the solutions as detailed by my colleague and Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development will indeed help to resolve this flooding incident that took place at the St. Jean Cemetery and Colville Avenue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is a caring one. We have always been attentive to the grievances and sorrows of the people. As far as possible, we have attended to same as we are not insensitive to their pleas. As a compassionate Government, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is presently working on a mechanism to assist the flood victims, including the inhabitants residing within the precincts of the St. Jean Cemetery and Colville Avenue.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 8.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.22 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to join the numerous speakers from this side of the House in support to this Bill brought to the House by the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, hon. Hurdoyal.

We take note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that agriculture is probably the least partisan of any issues across this Parliament. The reason why maybe only four orators on the other side of the House are participating in the debates, and we do take note as well that we have only two Members of the Opposition present right now at 21.22 hrs to listen to this very important Bill. Also, we do take note as well that we do not have any orators from the MMM party. It says a lot, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Few days back, on 2 November, we celebrated the Aapravasi Diwas, the indentured labourers and during that ceremony, there was a beautiful sketch presented by some artists under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage where we displayed about how our ancestors came from India to Mauritius, and look at us today! We are *Girmitiyas* as we call us. So, *Girmitiyas* are those who work *avec la terre – travailler la terre*, and now today, we are proudly sitting into this Parliament. Today, we are MPs, we are Ministers, we are Prime Ministers, this is the root, this is where we come from and this is the essence, and it shows the importance that such an important Bill holds for the

Members of the Opposition side as well. And, as one of the planters in my constituency said it rightly –

“Ou kone madam, nou nou zenfan planter nou. Banla zot, zot proprieter later.”

So, it makes a whole difference. This is why we have so many orators on this side of the House taking part and bringing our own contribution to our planters, to the auctioneers, to all those who do contribute to the agricultural department but then, once again we ask ourselves – where are the Opposition Members? Why are they not taking part in such an important Bill? Also, why is it that we only have PTR Members and only hon. Bodha who participated? Where is hon. Navarre-Marie? Where are the rest of them?

They should have been here, debating. Is it because our planters are not important? Is it because it is least important for them to fight for their cause? And I heard hon. Bodha who mentioned – as the rules of the debates, it is normal for me to rebut – I heard hon. Bodha saying that in 2003, he visited the *l’encan*, but from 2003 till today, did he not go to the *l’encan*? Is it only because we are presenting such an important Bill that they did go to Wootton to visit that auction market? And the funniest thing about it is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition as well did mention some kind of figures and hopefully, he could have skipped participating into the debates because, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you read about the article written on *lexpress.mu* on 13 November 2023 ‘*planteurs, encanteurs et l’Opposition pas convaincus par Hurdoyal*’ but then, you can almost understand his speech. So, he could have skipped being part of this debate because he did not bring any contribution. And, thank you to the hon. Minister Hurdoyal who brought such an important Bill to remind Members of the Opposition, to remind the population at large, how important our planters are for us, Members on this side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is very much important as it is the continuity of what this Government has been doing for this sector to support the planters and standard setting to build economic opportunities. Stepping back, we do realise that it is our planters who are sometimes the first ones to fight the issue of climate crisis that we are living in. In 2014, or even back to the year 2000 when the hon. Prime Minister was the Minister of Agro, this Government has relentlessly been supporting the farmers to become more climate resilient.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like also to draw the attention *et aussi déclarer mes intérêts* that I am proudly the granddaughter of a planter. My *dada*, my grandfather was a planter in the region of Flacq and my father-in-law is an *encanteur* who has been working in the *l’encan* of Port Louis. During the debate, they have mentioned that *l’état des toilettes, c’est déplorable, etc.*, but I would like to ask the Members of the Opposition,

have you been to the *l'encan* of Port Louis? Have you seen the state where those *encanteurs*, those planters were working? No. It is only when this Bill has been brought, then you went to that auctioneers market in Wooton. So, it is quite unfair to come here and do *démagogie* on people who are working.

The Leader of the Opposition has been talking about timings as well; timing like starting at 4 or 5. There has been much debate but whether it is planters from my constituency which is Montague Longue, Crève Coeur, les Mariannes, whether it is *encanteurs*, they start working as from midnight or 01.00 a.m. And, do you know they end very early 4/5 a.m., even at 6/7 a.m., they can just finish their own work.

And what is more important in this one, whether it is the hon. Member Bodha who is unfortunately not present in the House to listen to me, or whether it is the Leader of the Opposition, they have been debating about the timings. Well, you cannot operate an auction market from 9 to 4 because one should understand the mechanism between an auction market. It is: you buy from the auctioneers, *les encanteurs* as we call them and then, you go and sell it. So, if you start a business at 9 and you finish at 4, what time would those vegetable sellers, those who work in the different markets, go and sell their vegetables?

I will take the example of *la foire* Abercrombie. It is thrice a week; it is on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays as well. On the rest of the days of the week, they have to go to get the vegetables as well but just imagine if that *encan* starts at 9 and finishes at 4, then what time do they get to get their fresh vegetables and sell them? This is the reason why I fully support that it should start and end very early.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been a proof that this Government has been working relentlessly whether it is for planters, just to increase their productivity as well, giving them different kind of incentives and one should also check that since the year 2014 till today, there have been numerous amendments, there have been numerous incentives being brought to the House by the different Ministers, whether it has been hon. Mahen Seeruttun, hon. Maneesh Gobin, hon. Hurdoyal, all the Ministers have done their part and they brought their own contributions. And, it has been a vivid proof that on this side of the House, we do give importance to our farmers, who have been working relentlessly for us.

The object of this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very clear and explicit as well. It is to amend the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act. It is just an amendment to empower the AMB, and this will help the AMB to bring some changes and to really make some amendments, whether it is as my hon. colleague, Ashley Ittoo, mentioned it. Everything when it is starting, it does have that *rodage* as we call it. So, if you expect things to go

right on track the very next day that it opens, then trust me, you, Members of the Opposition, have only been doing *démagogie* because this is what they do. It is only political things that have been going on in this House, on their side.

So, as I mentioned it earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir, the object of the Bill is very clear and explicit. It is actually to amend the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act in view to provide the wholesale by auction of locally-produced vegetables, fruits and flowers that it shall no longer be conducted in markets and fairs, but shall henceforth be conducted at the national wholesale market. This comes as a regulation so that to help those auctioneers and to help those vegetable sellers as well.

And as mentioned by the mover of the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, these unauthorised activities undermined the traditional auction system, skewing market dynamics and making it difficult for official auctions to function efficiently. The situation has led to a lack of fairness and transparency, which ultimately harms both the sellers and buyers in the market. If one could sum up this amendment, it is into three words, Mr Speaker, Sir –

- (i) it is modern;
- (ii) it is hygienic, and
- (iii) there is transparency.

Let me explain *le côté moderne*.

This modern facility available at the National Wholesale Market would enable the use of innovative technologies. As mentioned by the hon. Minister himself, there would be electronic displays, agricultural information system, and there is more space as well because I have had the opportunity to visit the auction market of Port Louis, whether it is Vacoas, whether it is Flacq. Because, as I have said it earlier, I am a child of a planter, I know how it functions and I know the struggle between a planter working very hard during cyclonic weather, during rainy season and trying to sell their vegetables. So, through the auctioneers, now it is being regulated and it is in a modern infrastructure. Now, they are in a space which is safe as well. Can you imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, those auctioneers, those planters had to drop their vegetables at times at 11 p.m. or at midnight or even at 1 a.m. and they had to pay someone to look after their vegetables. So, just imagine the cost. But now that they have moved to Wooton, it is in a safe place. And trust me, initially, I am sure with the records, there would be some data available on theft of vegetables. But now, with the coming of this auction market, it is a safe place for them to come to work; it is a clean place as well. It is like giving them their value as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this gives the market a significant food handling and logistical advantage. Being able to consolidate the operations within the market, this helps to also handle the potential to reduce handling and labour costs as well. When the planters come with their vegetables, whether it is pumpkins or as hon. Bodha mentioned bananas or whatever it is, you have to pay a porter. There is a *porteur* who comes and takes the vegetables, drops it inside the *l'encan*, and then from there, the auctioneer will come and sell it for you. Once it is sold, you have to get that *porteur* once again inside to carry the vegetables to your truck. And as wrongly mentioned by hon. Bodha, he said during the auctions sales, it is only a few pieces, whether it is watermelon or whether it is pumpkin, that are displayed, which is totally untrue, Mr Speaker, Sir. When you are in an auction market, it is all the vegetables being separated into kilos or into grades of vegetables. I am sure the hon. Minister will give further details with regard to that. And I think hon. Bodha should visit the space where they do sell watermelon next to Nissan, ABC Car Rental, where there is a huge space where all the watermelons are exposed. So, it is untrue to say. Whether it is pineapple, whether it is watermelon, it is displayed. The whole lot is being displayed, then, the buyer will purchase the vegetables as well.

More hygienic, Mr Speaker, Sir, because our local markets are primarily the centre for trade and distribution of fruits and vegetables, and those fruits and vegetables vendors have the responsibility for keeping our food hygienic and safe from contamination. This has been the subject of debates so far. And it shocks me not to see the name of hon. Ehsan Juman on this list because he has been debating about food hygiene and everything, but he is not even participating in this one. The vegetables that we do eat at our place or whether it is at the hospital, come from the market itself. So, I think, instead of going with the *lamok* and doing the planting there, he should have visited the Wooton auction market or some other vegetable sellers to know exactly what is happening, how our food comes to us. This is why I would lay emphasis on the hygienic side of this auction market. This also helps the sellers to feel more confident by improving the environmental sanitation conditions at local markets and the auction markets. We are, thus, building upon the hygiene and safety. This would help us to prevent foodborne diseases and having a clean working environment is essential to prevent contamination. And I beg to differ when hon. Bodha mentioned about having vegetables being placed on the floor at the auction market, which is totally false. We, on this side of the House, did have the chance to visit that place and it has been maintained properly. It is a proper, clean and hygienic place as well.

Transparency, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned initially, it is very important to understand how the auction market works. The vegetable grower, very often, we have

been hearing about the *encanteurs* who take the profit and everything. I think through this auction market, there is going to be the element of transparency, where the vegetable grower plants the vegetables, drops them at the auction market, where the latter will sell it to the vendors. And in this process, it is often insinuated that the auctioneer makes huge amount of profit. However, in the auction market now, there is transparency, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This wholesale market has been the vision of one man, the hon. Prime Minister, himself, has been the Minister of Agro-Industry, and it only shows the importance of our vegetable sellers, of our planters to the Government. You will definitely agree that through the years, we have proven that we are here to support them, whether it has been sugarcane growers, whether it has been planters, vegetable planters, through some allowances, through some seed allowances, as mentioned by hon. Ittoo, we have always been giving the support to the vegetable sellers, to the planters' community as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to end on a note, that Mauritius is built on the proud history of farmers and labourers. As I said it initially in my introduction, we are *Girmitiyas*, we are children of farmers, children of labourers and today, we have the privilege to sit in a Parliament to debate on such an important Bill. So, I am sure the population will judge by seeing the list of orators, will judge that who holds much importance to the planters, to the labourers. We do hold it on this side of the House and we do show respect. Today, I am sure it is a day of gratitude towards those planters, towards those vegetable sellers who have been helping us to grow, who have been educating their children through their *métiers* as we said, and this makes the whole difference. And once again, I would like to set it on record that we have tonight only four orators from the other side of the House participating in this very, very...

Dr. Boolell: Where is your Prime Minister?

Mrs Luchmun Roy: ... important piece of legislation, on this very, very important part of amendment being brought to the House.

On this note, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your kind attention. I am done. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

(9.39 p.m.)

Mr F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will intervene briefly, in support of this Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill (No. XVI of 2023), to amend the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act, to provide for the wholesale by auction of locally-produced vegetables, fruits and flowers to be conducted at no place other than a national wholesale market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister Hurdoyal, rightly stated that, ‘this is not merely a Bill, but a transformative piece of legislation that is set to modernise the current system of trade for fresh locally produced fruits, vegetables and flowers and address the issues related to parallel auctions, hygiene, food safety, transparency, and accountability’.

Right at the outset, I have to say, that our Republic must continue to aim at becoming self-sufficient in a few basic agricultural products.

As we move ahead, we will require more locally produced food to nourish our population and maybe our neighbouring countries. When I look at the area of agricultural lands available in Mauritius, our agriculture requires some diversification in that regard, to reduce our food importations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope that this innovative model towards a unified National Wholesale Market for auction of our agricultural commodities will ensure better prices for farmers through transparent auction process. This Bill will not only allow us to look into the issue of agricultural product for sale, but at agriculture as a key sector for employment and productivity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was going to ask the hon. Minister to enlighten the House about whether the National Wholesale Market will also comprise of an online transparent platform to enhance ease of doing business to the traders and to empower the planters by providing real-time information and timely payment. I am happy hon. Balgobin correctly replied about the digital platform to be put in place to increase efficiency in an innovative way.

Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to now say a few words on the Bill in relation to Rodrigues. The gist of my intervention is to extend my appreciation towards the hon. Minister Hurdoyal for the consideration given to Rodrigues. I have to put on record the gratitude from Rodrigues towards the hon. Minister for Agriculture, following his last visit thereat and meetings held with planters and the agricultural community.

I also acknowledge the support to Rodrigues, from previous hon. Ministers for Agriculture, be it the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth himself, hon. Maneesh Gobin, hon. Mahen Seeruttun, hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, hon. Faugoo, amongst others. Mr

Speaker, Sir, agriculture has been the traditional economic backbone and one of the main sources of income for Rodrigues.

Et ici, M. le président, on se souviendra toujours des paroles célèbres de mon grand leader honorifique, Louis Serge Clair, GCSK que je cite –

« pas compte lor manze ki sorti dehors compte lor manze ki sorti dan ou la terre – zour bato la pas vini ki pou arrive nou ».

Cela s'inscrit dans la vision de mon parti politique l'OPR depuis sa création en 1976 et sa stratégie pour assurer la sécurité et la souveraineté alimentaire de la population de Rodrigues. M. le président, je voudrais le souligner ici, et c'est ce qui nous a toujours poussé, nous les Rodriguais, à ne jamais abandonner l'agriculture.

M. le président, comme grand principe politique, nous ne voulons pas confier notre alimentation à d'autres et surtout venant d'ailleurs, car ce n'est pas soutenable et c'est contraire à notre vision et philosophie politique d'assurer par soi-même la nourriture pour son peuple. C'est pourquoi nous valorisons et encourageons des hommes et des femmes qui aiment travailler la terre. Personnellement, comme tout le monde, j'aime l'agriculture, je travaille la terre ; j'attache beaucoup d'importance aux valeurs du métier d'agriculteur, que sont : le courage, la solidarité et l'humilité devant la nature et notre territoire. J'apprécie aussi la passion, l'envie d'entreprendre et d'innover pour produire, ce que nous mangeons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, with regard to Rodrigues, it's clear that there has been a decline in agricultural practice and the total area under food crop production, for various reasons associated with, since early 1970s following various extreme cyclones and the severe drought that hit Rodrigues for around 4 to 5 years.

Rodrigues has never recovered from these natural calamities that affected the old life-style of the population and commitment towards agriculture. The challenges ahead remain: access to water for irrigation, limited cultivated surface area, reducing soil degradation and loss of agricultural lands to non-agricultural developments mainly for residential development. The latter has to be controlled seriously through proper land use planning policies.

The other challenges also are pest and disease occurrence, as rightly pointed out by hon. Seeruttun, and access to reliable market and how to adapt our agriculture to climate change, which is a reality today and how to increase the volume of local agro-food to satisfy the demand. Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated by the hon. Minister Hurdoyal in his speech, that –

“In view of helping the agricultural sector in Rodrigues, provision is being made to allocate a specific stall to auctioneers selling fruits, vegetables and other products from Rodrigues.”

Je dois féliciter, l’honorable ministre et toute son équipe pour cette décision qui supprimera la barrière géographique entre Rodrigues et le marché national. En moyenne, Rodrigues exporte environ 540 à 560 tonnes de légumes et de fruits vers l’île Maurice.

Cependant, très souvent, les planteurs ne sont pas en mesure d’atteindre le seuil de rentabilité, car les prix proposés par les importateurs privés sont au plus bas et discriminatoires. Un système transparent, fiable et efficace, a été toujours le grand souhait de nombreux planteurs depuis longtemps. Il est bon de souligner qu’à l’époque où Rodrigues était le grenier de Maurice, nos agriculteurs ne disposaient pas des informations nécessaires sur les prix et ont été contraints de vendre à bas prix et sans installation de stockage approprié. C’était de l’exploitation, c’est une des raisons de la naissance de l’OPR, mon parti, en 1976, pour défendre la cause rodriguaise.

M. le président, l’attribution d’un stand pour la vente des produits importés de Rodrigues constituera une avancée majeure pour le secteur agricole à Rodrigues. Il permettra de relever les défis imposés par le marché et de sauvegarder les intérêts des planteurs rodriguais, favorisant ainsi le développement du secteur agricole.

De plus, ce qu’il y a de bien avec cette vente aux enchères sur le *Wholesale Auction Market*, c’est que nos frères et sœurs de l’île Maurice, auront l’occasion d’avoir accès à des produits agricoles de haute qualité et savoureux en provenance de Rodrigues, qui devront aussi avoir la certification label ‘Rodrigues Naturellement’. Non seulement cela, mais nous parlons des Produits Bio (avec la plupart du temps sans engrais chimiques) et nous encourageons la culture avec du compostes que ce soit pour nos oignons, ails, piments, bananes, agrumes (citron, pamplemousses), haricots, notre café, nos fruits comme pitalia, fruit de la passion, grenade, fruit à pain, le maïs hautement recommandable pour lutter contre le diabète, nos farine de manioc et patate, le safran et des légumes comme la citrouille entre autres.

J’espère qu’un *modus operandi* sera élaboré pour s’assurer qu’il y a un régulateur pour éviter des abus et la manipulation des prix et qui fixe les bonnes conditions dans l’intérêt de toute la communauté des producteurs agricoles.

Aujourd’hui, l’opportunité est de donner aux agriculteurs de Rodrigues de bien planifier son marketing et d’adopter des mesures sanitaires adéquates pour être en règle avec le Food Act.

En disant cela, je pense à nos amis planteurs de café - café arabica spéciale de Rodrigues. La *Rodrigues Coffee Producers Multi-purpose Society* formé en 2012, qui, avec beaucoup de courage, développe cette filière pour un produit aux arômes exceptionnelles : le café arabica de Rodrigues.

M. le président, j'encourage énormément toute la communauté agriculteur de Rodrigues d'être encore plus productif, d'exploiter complètement et de ne pas abandonner le peu de terres agricoles qui nous restent à Rodrigues.

L'État aussi a une lourde responsabilité pour légiférer et protéger toutes les terres agricoles de Rodrigues. Rodrigues, aujourd'hui, est voué à être plus productive et nous avons ce potentiel pour redevenir le 'grenier de Maurice comme autrefois'. C'est un grand défi, oui, mais au niveau de l'OPR, mon parti, nous y croyons et nous y arriverons.

M. le président, la population de Maurice est aujourd'hui à 1.3 millions et celle de Rodrigues à 44,945 habitants. Alimenter nos populations exigera des changements importants en vue de garantir la production, la distribution et la consommation d'une quantité suffisante d'aliments à la fois nutritifs et produits de manière durable.

M. le président, la *Rodrigues Trade and Marketing Company (RTMC)* de l'Assemblée Régionale de Rodrigues et l'*Agricultural Marketing Board, (AMB)* ont un accord de principe pour l'exportation, l'achat et la commercialisation des fruits et légumes de Rodrigues, que je dirais doit être revu dans le cadre de ce projet de loi.

M. le président, je suis ravi des mesures annoncées du récent budget 2023/2024, avec toutes les incitations fournies par le gouvernement central pour stimuler la production agricole à Rodrigues. Il est bon de mentionner que lors de la lecture de *l'Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill (No. IX of 2023)*, l'honorable ministre des Finances, le Dr. Padayachy, avait annoncé deux mesures importantes pour Rodrigues aux paragraphes 336 et 337, que je cite –

« Le Gouvernement continuera à soutenir le développement du secteur agricole à Rodrigues.

Nous étendons aux agriculteurs rodriguais les programmes suivants disponibles pour les agriculteurs de l'île Maurice »

Parmi la promotion de l'agriculture sous abri et de l'agriculture intelligente entre autres.

Et de plus, au paragraphe 343, je note que le gouvernement central apportera son soutien à l'industrie locale à Rodrigues en renonçant aux frais de fret sur les conteneurs de

Rodrigues vers Maurice pour les produits agricoles, y compris les oignons, les piments, les grains de café et les citrons.

M. le président, finalement, le transport aérien pour nos produits frais et périssable vers Maurice sera primordial, d'où l'attente de la construction de la nouvelle piste et l'agrandissement de l'aéroport de Plaine Corail à Rodrigues.

Ici, je profite de cette occasion pour remercier le gouvernement sortant de l'Assemblée Régionale de Rodrigues, l'OPR, pour le travail accompli pendant plusieurs années pour le projet d'aéroport de Plaine Corail, l'engagement du gouvernement central, l'apport financier de l'Union Européen et le financement de la Banque mondiale pour la réalisation bientôt de ce grand projet d'infrastructure pour Rodrigues.

M. le président, pour terminer, voilà la volonté politique du gouvernement central en collaboration avec Rodrigues dans l'intérêt de tous nos agriculteurs. Avec un marché garanti pour les agriculteurs de Rodrigues, de facto, Rodrigues devait renforcer son développement agricole vers la modernisation et la professionnalisation du secteur agricole par une nouvelle génération d'agriculteurs. Oui, une nouvelle génération d'agriculteurs ! La durabilité du secteur agricole de Rodrigues passera certainement par une agriculture raisonnée et bio.

M. le président, voilà ma contribution en appui à ce projet de loi et je vous remercie pour votre aimable attention.

Mr Speaker: I will now call the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair for the rest.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated!

Hon. Nuckcheddy, are you ready?

(9.56 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene on this Bill and I would also like to thank the two Members of Labour Party and three Members of PMSD who are with us tonight. It seems that it's the only place where PMSD has got a majority.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if I had any authority or power conferred upon me to name a Bill, I would have then called this Bill 'Destiny'. 'Destiny', Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because on 27 July of this year, the hon. Prime Minister inaugurated the wholesale market of Wootton and this is why I call it 'Destiny'.

In the MSM/MMM Government, between the year 2000 and 2005, when the hon. Prime Minister was the then Minister of Agriculture, Food Technology and Natural Resources, a Strategic Plan for the Non-Sugar Agricultural Sector 2003-2007 was devised and the objective of that strategic plan, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was to re-orientate the non-sugar sector with a view to promoting a transition from the traditional practices towards a more sophisticated, technology-based approach which focus on attaining a certain degree of self-sufficiency and developing the Local Agro Processing Industry.

In that strategic plan, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, questions were raised on the sustainability of the traditional approach to agricultural practices, and that strategic plan had been prepared as a blueprint to give a new thrust to the non-sugar sector and thus enable it to account for a larger share of the agricultural sector and to complement the sugar industry. The plan had also the objective of transforming the local agricultural scene with a high-technology focus and enable the emergence of the island as a regional nursery and agro processing hub by 2007. But because of the change of government in 2005, we are now here; better late than never because anyway we are known for: *nou fer sa ki nou dir*.

In that plan, already there were 16 proposals and one of them was the setting-up of a centrally located one-stop shop that will provide specialised fast track services as well as information and technical guidance to agricultural stakeholders was also proposed.

The fourth point mentioned about addressing the issue of the profit margin of planters being squeezed by auctioneers, poor sales environment, the jeopardisation of the safety of customers and at that time already, we promised to restructure and review the system to put in place a proper market-driven marketing framework.

At that time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Members of the MMM Party were with us and they were happy with that project, with the plan. Now that they have chosen to be on the other side of the House, after they have chosen to betray the hand that fed them and now that they have chosen to backstab the nobleman who kept his word, they have now preferred to abstain from intervening on this Bill.

I can see that, my friends earlier mentioned that there are no Members from the MMM party intervening on this Bill. So, should we understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the MMM does not care for the vegetable sellers? They intervened on the Fisheries Bill, and now should we understand that they care more for fishers than planters? They are very caring for the *requins* it seems, and the special species of *rekin moustas* that we commonly know.

On the other hand, we had the hon. Bodha who was also with this Government, very close to the hon. Prime Minister but not that close as to go and kiss his hand but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I read in the Press that hon. Bodha mentioned that –

« Le *wholesale market* de Wooton n'est pas la solution pour garantir une sécurité alimentaire et la qualité des produits. »

Later, I will come on this aspect of food hygiene and quality but let me just mention that hon. Bodha has now got a habit of whenever the Government is doing something good, he comes and says 'I did that', 'it was my idea'. And let me say one thing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the same hon. Bodha intervened on the Fisheries Bill, and I am quoting from the Hansard. Listen carefully, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what he said –

« C'est quelqu'un de *la Kwizin* ! Une personne contrôle le bycatch dans le port. »

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this must stop! If there is ever a *la Kwizin*, there hon. Bodha would have had been *le grand Chef de cette 'Kwizin', le cordon bleu*. And he also mentioned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am again quoting from Hansard –

« Il faut aller voir comment cela se passe là-bas. Et avec les possibilités de connivence de trafic de drogue... »

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I make an appeal to the hon. Members, if they got any doubts, if they got any suspicions, there are authorities. If they have got any doubts about the smuggling of drugs, you can have any type of smuggling. You can have smuggling of *bois rose*, for example, which he did not mention, which he forgot to mention. So, I will make an appeal to these hon. Members to go and report these cases with the authorities instead of using this parliamentary immunity and saying things that will tarnish the image of this country. We are here as a Government working to take this country to a new height and that is why we are here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am not going to repeat what my friends said but I would like to say that while moving the Bill, the hon. Minister mentioned that not less than 20 consultative meetings with various stakeholders had been held during the last three years and this Bill has taken into consideration all the proposals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of Opposition cited the hon. Minister Seeruttun concerning the wholesale market while he was the Minister but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, nothing has changed. The hon. Leader of Opposition should understand that auction and wholesale are two different things. Either it is a deliberate attempt to try to misguide the population or he has not understood the Bill at all. I am sure that he has not understood the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have a plan for this country. At times, we cannot do everything at one go. So, we have to do it in phases and projects like this wholesale market is one of them. The current building is only the phase one. There will be other phases where the use of modern technologies with big screens displaying the prices of vegetables, fruits and flowers, like our friends from the other side of the House mentioned, it is happening in other countries; we will come to that. You will see that we will have screens displaying the prices of the products, the vegetables, the flowers, the fruits that will be auctioned there, like we see at the stock exchange, and then the display will be done properly so that people can also see the dates and there will not be any confusion about the packaging and the expiry date like we saw on the packaging of soya. Some hon. Members were confused between the packaging date and the expiry date. So, there, it will be displayed on big screens. They can see; everyone can see properly what is going on.

So, let us come to the place itself and the building, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The location of the market is the best we could have. It is situated in the centre of the island, which makes it accessible for everyone and not only that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is midway from the seaport and the airport, making the location ideal for all purpose it is supposed to serve. I heard some critics that the road at Hermitage is already congested and narrow, that will create road congestion issues. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is farsighted. However, as I said earlier, we cannot do everything at a time. Things are taking time and as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are planning for our next mandate. When we will be back after the next elections in 2024, when the Opposition will be busy lodging their petitions, when they will be busy with the Privy Council, then we will already be on site implementing the second phase.

And coming back to this mandate, in his budget speech of the year 2022-2023, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development provided the sum of Rs1.5 billion to improve the connectivity and a bypass at Hermitage along Côte d'Or had already been mentioned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, as I said, we are doing things progressively, we will attend to that objective. Maybe it will take time but we are going to achieve it. We are going to do the utmost best so that we can keep our promise. We are not like others who only promise and never keep their promises. We are keeping our promise and people are witnessing that.

And we have talked a lot, be it in this Assembly or outside about the climate change, the necessity of diligent use of water. So, the market, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will undergo deep cleaning weekly, and you know what? We will have Midlands Dam just next door, but the market has made provision for a rain harvest and the use of water for

cleaning the market so that the auction can occur in a hygienic environment will be done by the water which will be harvested. A provision is also made for a borehole, thus, making the market autonomous. Let me now take the new section 25BB which is proposed to the principle Act, the amendment which is proposed to the principle Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the sub-section (5) mentioned that the licence may be transferred to the heirs of the holder and this is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because at present, the issue of taking over is a serious problem, especially in the regional markets. So, here this Bill makes provision for transfer of the licence which I feel is a very good thing in itself and hope that this will open the way to find a solution for those people who are working in the market since decades without any licence. These people are waiting for a solution for them and for them this is the only source of income and you have to find a solution. When we are coming with this new Bill, we are making provisions for these lacunas.

Having laws is good but enforcement of these laws is also important, and the section 26 will allow the employees of the Board to enter and inspect the premises where there are any other suspicious act being contravened. Now, the officers, they just cannot go on their own like our hon. Members from the other side of the House are doing actually. They have to be accompanied by a Police officer with a valid written authorisation of the check, and the officers may even break and open the safe. *Alors, ceux qui ont des coffres doivent faire un peu plus attention parce que là, maintenant, les officiers peuvent ouvrir les coffres* and take photos, not photos of *lamok*, only like *lamok plante*, but photos of all evidence that can be presented at the Court if there is any contravention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned that he is a son of planter, and me, as a son and grandson of a vegetable seller myself, having worked as vegetable seller in the late 80s, at that time where the vegetables were sold in the open air *enba pie badamie*, like my friend, hon. Balgobin mentioned. I was not even 10 years old at that time, and when I compare it with what this Government is providing as a modern infrastructure with numerous facilities such as a loading and unloading bay and palettes, health and safety measures such as safety sign, floor markings and fire hoses, CCTV camera with the aim of reforming the auction system in our island. I have also consulted some auctioneers, wholesalers, distributors and planters and let me inform the House that the users are very happy with the infrastructure that has been provided in the sense that there is more hygiene, better ventilation, adequate lights and there is a prescribed hours of

operation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The price is controlled and there is more competition and uniformity of price.

Hon. Dr. Boolell alleged that this Government spent an astronomical amount of 500 million on that facility. It is not 500 million, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is 450 million. And yet, 450 million on a steel building of about 5,500 square metres, with all the facilities, the site work on a plot of 30 arpents, and all the facilities is money well spent. He talks of money in the pockets! Putting money in the pocket in 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is when the District Council of Moka-Flacq launched a tender on design and build basis for the market fair of Flacq. Tenders were received for a building in concrete and the price submitted was Rs40 m. Then, in July 2005, the Labour Government came and they cancelled the tender, relaunched a tender, and you know what? Then, the same tender which was quoted at 40 million, with the Labour Party Government, the same project was quoted at 90 million. Then, the project was completed at a sum of 119 million. This is putting money in pockets, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Our Leader does not owe 6 million to the population for its treatment. We do not have to pay the Privy Council. You need money; the Labour Party needs money. They need money to put in their pockets. Now, as we are talking about daily food and as they say we are what we eat, there is a famous saying by Masanobu Fukuoka, and I quote –

“The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.”

With this quote, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention and I provide my full attention to this Bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Kushal Lobine, please!

(10.12 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not repeat what Members of this august Assembly have been saying or debating on this Bill. On this side of the House, we have been very clear that we are not against the establishment of this national wholesale market, but we have, through the Leader of the Opposition, through hon. Dr. Boolell and even through hon. Bodha, advanced our point of view, our ideas, and our apprehensions as to this amendment Bill.

With regard to those intervening from this side of the House, it is not a question of quantity, how many people are talking on a Bill. These are administrative matters of a Party, agreed between Whips of both sides of the House. This is not the crux of the debate. The debate is about what quality in the debates are you bringing in. Many Members from this side of the House and from the other side of the House have come with pertinent points with regard to this Bill. It is not in my nature to go into petty politics or to answer to personal attacks through innuendos on such a Bill where we are talking about food security. It is not a question of who is listening or who is not listening. It is a question of contributing on a Bill, and any Bill that concerns agricultural sector is an important Bill.

I have heard hon. Members from the other side of the House talking about one man, one vision. I would say this is the vision of the nation. Right from pre-independence era, this Bill, it is amending the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act of 1963. This is one of the rare Bills that are amending a law which dates back to pre-independence; very few are remaining – pre-independence legislations. And what are we talking about? We are talking about the same issues that were live in 1963, food security. Food security, after so many years, will remain a very important element for human beings, be it prehistoric, pre-independence, post-independence. That is why we should not do petty politics with such a Bill. It has been a vision of any Government, be it...

(Interruptions)

Can I be allowed be to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without being disturbed by hon. Nuckcheddy, who had the latitude to speak, please? May I? Because I am not reading from a piece of paper, I am speaking. Give me the latitude to debate.

Mr Nuckcheddy: What did I do?

The Deputy Speaker: Take a break please and come back again later. Take a break please!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Take a break!

An hon. Member: Name him.

The Deputy Speaker: Last time, please!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Okay, I take a break.

The Deputy Speaker: And then, come back. I said come back.

Mr Lobine: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you happy now?

Mr Lobine: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: You are happy?

Mr Lobine: I am not reading from a piece of paper. I am speaking; I am debating. I am happy.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Lobine, are you happy?

Mr Lobine: I am very thankful to the Chair. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: So, please, focus on the Bill...

Mr Lobine: Of course.

The Deputy Speaker: ...rather than over there.

Mr Lobine: Of course.

The Deputy Speaker: Look at me, please!

Mr Lobine: I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Alright, are you at ease now?

Mr Lobine: What I am saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should not do petty politics with this Bill because through various Agricultural Ministers, be it Sir Satcam Boolell, be it Dr. Arvin Boolell, be it hon. Seeruttun, be it hon. Bodha, be it hon. Prime Minister, they have all contributed their share towards our agricultural sector. I am very glad today that hon. Hurdoyal is Minister Agro-Industry because I do reckon, way back in 2006 and 2007, we worked together and he is a pure product of young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector under the Labour-PMSD Government, giving the chance to everyone to develop their skills in the agricultural sector. So, we are very proud that today he is an hon. Minister representing the young entrepreneur that has succeeded in the agricultural sector, and I salute him to be the Minister of Agro-Industry today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, this Bill is not just about running a national wholesale market with regard to recommendations made by Cabinet Gressard in 2014 or by the Business Plan proposed by BDO & Co. in 2021. It is about adaptability of this national wholesale market on how to make it run, how to make it work. We heard the apprehensions of hon. Bodha with regard to the investments that have been made and whether in the months or years to come, we will be able to use that facility to its optimum. So, that is why the proposal of hon. Dr. Boolell with regard to reforming the Agricultural Marketing Board ought to have been or should have been the

crux of this Bill. You cannot run the national wholesale market with the current stature of the Agricultural Marketing Board. So, without a major reform or major revamping as to the way the Agricultural Marketing Board is being run, you cannot run such a big facility as a national wholesale market. And I do understand that it might be envisaged by the hon. Minister to go in certain regions as well to delocalise this national wholesale market.

So, I propose that the hon. Minister should have also come with amendments to Section 4 of the main Act, that is, the Constitution of the Board. At least the constitution of the Board because with the establishment of the national wholesale market, you have got various concerns with regard to customer protection, also, protection of the auctioneers, the planters, the consumers. So, in a modern era whereby you are talking about accountability, it would have been very important to have a relook of the constitution of the Board. Why not having a representative of planters on this Board? Why not having a representative from the auctioneers on this Board? Why not having a representative from the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce on this Board or a representative from a protection consumer organisation? So, this would have made this Board more proactive to look after the national wholesale market. So, I am of the humble view that it should go in pair with this amendment, that is, reforming the Agricultural Marketing Board so that it is run in a very independent and fair manner.

I would not criticise or say who is at the Head of the Agricultural Marketing Board now because it won't serve any purpose but suffice to say that it is a missed opportunity in this Bill not to look at section 4 of the main Act, that is, the constitution of the Board. And I would also invite the hon. Minister if he could consider maybe it's a typing error, at Clause 7, with regard to new sections being introduced at section 25BB – Auctioneers at sub paragraph 2, you would see it reads as follows –

“(2) Any person who intends to conduct the wholesale by auction of locally-produced products shall make an application to the Board in such form and manner as the Board may approve.”

It should be ‘form’, not ‘from’. Maybe it's a typing error, maybe at a later stage you might come with an amendment to same.

And with regard to the powers being bestowed upon the Agricultural Marketing Board, with regard to the Board to grant or reject an application, who will be an auctioneer? We need checks and balances. Why not a specific committee? An appointment committee or a committee comprising of various people to look at those applications so that it acts as checks and balances because you cannot have an authority being run as the regulator but also as the promoter of the National Wholesale Market. Maybe there should

have been a line of demarcation as to the regulator and to the function of running the National Wholesale Market. So, these are, in my humble view, a pertinent point that the hon. Minister should consider.

With regard to the points raised by hon. Leader of the Opposition, with regard to facilities at the disposal of people using the National Wholesale Market, I understand through the speech of the hon. Minister that all these issues will be addressed with regard to the announcing system or with regard to electronic balances and all those facilities over there with regard to a canteen or a food court. So, I believe that reading through the speech of the hon. Minister, I tend to say that this will be addressed in the weeks or months to come, and also I would tend to ask the hon. Minister in his summing up to give us a timeframe with regard to the Phase 2 of the National Auction Market because there are loads of works that need to be completed because as I understand, the vision of Government is to make this region an agricultural hub.

So, for it to be an agricultural hub, for the time being hon. Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we do not have at least an ATM, we need because it is far from other places. Over there, in the National Auction Market, many people they deal with cash and an ATM within the precinct of the National Wholesale Market would have been something very helpful because you are talking about odd hours whereby you cannot, at that point in time, where there is an auction going on, if somebody is short of cash, they do not have the facilities around. When we had it at Vacoas, for example, I can talk for Vacoas, ATMs were very near.

So, all those should be catered for in this National Auction Market and I would conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by saying that true it is that we have invested more than Rs470 m. over there but I think it should be a one-stop shop, I would say we should make it an agricultural mall whereby when people are visiting it, like we have it in many European countries, it is a one-stop shop with regard to equipment, with regard to information, with regard to attractability, attract young entrepreneurs, young people to fall in love with agriculture and start their business as an entrepreneur. We need a race of people, of entrepreneurs. We need people like hon. Hurdoyal. I am taking his example because I have seen the growth of a young entrepreneur. So, that is why I am saying that it should be an agricultural mall, it should be a one-stop shop, it should be a place to attract not just our youngsters, we are an island where many tourists visit us. We should also be attractive to the tourists like for example, our local market here in Port Louis. It's a tourist attraction. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister will move ahead with major renovation works there but we do have a building whereby more than 450 million has already been invested.

Consider transforming this region as an agricultural hub but this piece of land and building as an agricultural mall for the benefit of the people of Mauritius and also for us to assure food security.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Jagutpal, please!

(10.26 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you so much. It is a pleasure for me to give my views on this important piece of legislation. I commend my colleague, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal for bringing such a piece of legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, listening to the speakers from both sides of the House, we all agree that it was high time to address the issues of the vegetables and fruits auction market. Strategically speaking, Government has a well-defined plan comprising of a modern infrastructure and obviously improved processes taking into consideration the Mauritian realities of planters, climate change, and all these based on a solid legislative framework. We may not agree on the priorities, but we all agree that it is high time to address this issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I won't speak much because I will only focus my speech on the involvement of the Ministry of Health that is –

- to ensure compliance of the National Wholesale Market with the provisions of the Food Act and the Food Regulations;
- to provide inputs to improve quality standards of vegetables supplied by food crop producers;
- to advise on mode of storage and sale;
- to provide technical inputs on establishing a clean/disinfection and pest control procedures;
- to monitor water quality;
- to provide technical inputs on projects of food processing;
- to minimise loss of food crops and produce value added products;
- to ensure establish a sampling plan for the assessment of chemical and microbiological standards of food crops with special emphasis on the

monitoring of pesticide residues jointly with the Pesticide Control Unit of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, and

- to ensure technical inputs to facilitate compliance with good hygiene practice in the wholesale of food crops.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the National Wholesale Market fits in Government's vision of a modern country that promotes food security to its population and responds to the needs of the planters. This Market provides a more hygienic space for planters to sell their products to wholesalers and customers in an effective and efficient way. For the feasibility of this project, the three existing auction markets at Port Louis, Flacq and Vacoas had to shift to Wooton. And these sites were found inappropriate for the volume of fruits and vegetables traded during auctions due to –

- One is the absence of control because of odd operating hours. It was difficult for the Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate to carry out their duties due to these odd hours that is, from midnight onwards.
- Very poor hygienic conditions were noted. This has been the case for decades. The Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate has already carried out 7 inspections at the Warehouse since its opening. So, this is in good track.

And during these inspections all discrepancies have been addressed.

The discrepancies are also taken up at Committee Operations level to ensure remedial measures; all these are being implemented.

Previously, there was high risk of contamination due to food crops being exposed at ground level, in the open environment, whilst awaiting the wholesale process to start. Consequently, all food crops were being exposed to risks of contamination.

At the New Warehouse, a sheltered structure has been erected to conduct the wholesale process. Planters are being requested to bring their vegetables in appropriate containers and auctioneers are being requested to expose their food products at least 300 millimetres above ground level.

Previously, there was no traceability of products. The new wholesale market management is undertaking all necessary steps to ensure that traceability factors such as source, nature and quantity information are being made available through the registration of suppliers, producers, agents, buyers as well as the nature and quantity of products being auctioned.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it was found that previously there was minimal compliance to the Food Act and Food Regulations and other legislations by the relevant stakeholders. At Wooton, the Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate is mandated to ensure that the provisions of the law are being respected. This new market management is being requested by the representatives of the Ministry of Health and Wellness to ensure that all stakeholders are being sensitised on pertinent food statutory and regulatory issues to ensure compliance through persuasion during the initial stage failing which enforcement processes will ensue.

The National Wholesale Market invariably improves all aspects of marketing of fruits and vegetables by promoting traceability, food safety, normalisation of products and standardisation, thus, improving compliance with food safety norms.

However, several representations have been made in respect of illegal auction markets of fruits, vegetables and flowers at Port-Louis, Flacq and Rose-Belle amongst others. And as a result, auctioneers duly registered with the Agricultural Marketing Board and law abiding are being penalised as the volume of their business has decreased due to these illegal auction markets.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not have much to say on this Bill. In fact, after the operationalisation of this wholesale market, there has been a lot of improvement on safety of food.

In conclusion, I would like to, once again, commend the Government led by the Prime Minister for having introduced such a National Wholesale Market. I also commend the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, hon. Hurdoyal, for the amendments being made.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Maudhoo, please!

(10.34 p.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): M. le président, je suis honoré de pouvoir prendre part aux débats autour de ce projet de loi. Comme mon collègue, l'honorable ministre Hurdoyal l'a si bien expliqué, notre système de vente en gros des fruits, légumes et fleurs n'est plus adapté à notre ambition de devenir une économie moderne. Bien sûr, la sécurité alimentaire est la base de toute économie.

Mais avant de commencer mon discours, M. le président, je voudrais attirer l'attention encore une fois – je le répète à chaque fois – le pseudo défenseur de nos braves planteurs et encanteurs, le leader de l'opposition bien sûr, l'honorable Xavier Duval, brille par son absence légendaire. Je le comprends, *inn ler pou coq mont lor pie be ki pou fer !* Alors ça c'est déjà ça.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, coming from a planter family and having myself attended vegetables auction at Port Louis market on so many occasions, I have witnessed myself the harsh conditions in which planters and auctioneers often have to transact their products. This is the reality of things; we have to act and we have to accept that any change toward modernity is likely to take an adaptation time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we have a leader who has the vision, the courage and the determination to take the right action at the right time to bring changes for the welfare of our people. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill of November 2023 is without reservation a revolutionary strike towards endorsing principles of hygiene, cleanliness, exceptional sanitary conditions and professionalism. This legislative initiative holds the power to both uplift and fortify our dedicated cultivators, wholesalers and buyers who through unwavering commitment, patience and significant sacrifices contribute to providing essential products to our population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill marks a pivotal moment in recognising and dignifying the honest toil of those individuals engaged in the cultivation and trade of fruits and vegetables. The establishment of the National Wholesale Market at Five Ways, near Wootton which is strategically positioned at the heart of our island, is a testament to this Government's commitment to acknowledging these sincere and vital contributors to our economy. The advent of the wholesale market was long overdue and now stands as a tangible reality, but, of course, unfortunately, jealousy weighs on the other side of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in observing global benchmarks particularly in developed nations, wholesale markets operate as integral components of the agricultural landscape. The Five Ways Wholesale Market inaugurated under the visionary leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, not only addresses this gap but also underscores a calculated initiative geared towards ensuring the cultivation, production, sale and consumption of high quality fruits and vegetables in our country.

Regrettably, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Members of the Opposition seem inclined to disparate this transformative project. It is deserting to witness what appears to be a weekly

ritual of unfounded criticisms, as if their sole purpose is to cast aspersions on every Governmental endeavour. *Les spécialistes des zet labou* as the majority of the population now know them. This is their trademark if not there tagline.

This very morning, our Prime Minister paid tribute. *Alors*, in the words of the late and esteemed Mauritian, Mr Dev Virahsawmy: one might be compelled to label such rhetorically as – in creole we say *démagogie* – a tribute to this exemplary Mauritian.

Thus, during the intervention of the hon. Dr. Boolell, he made some remarks with regard to the fish auction market, the vegetable auction market; he made some remarks with regard to the fish auction market. I wish to address the remarks made by the hon. Dr. Boolell regarding the fish auction market. It is crucial to revisit the Budget Speech of 2007/2008 when the then Minister of Finance, Dr. Rama Sithanen, highlighted this initiative on page 17, clause 99 of his budget speech, he stated that, I quote –

“To integrate our fishermen into the mainstream and allow them to increase their income, we are moving forward with the construction of a ‘fish auction market’ at a cost of Rs 25 million at Trou Fanfaron.”.

It is noteworthy that hon. Dr. Boolell served as the Minister of Fisheries during that time. A report from l’Express newspaper dated 02 May 2014 with this headline – I think they don’t have short term memory lost, it was the Labour Party which was in power – ‘Rs 35 M à l’eau: le Fish Auction Market coule à pic’.

An hon. Member : Titanic !

Mr Maudhoo : Le projet consistait à permettre aux pêcheurs de vendre leurs poissons à la criée mais ce concept n’a toujours pas trouver preneur, etc.

Alors, du coup, le ministre de la pêche abandonne le projet and all the refrigeration equipment, even the generator, were removed and sent to AMB as scrap.

So again, the Audit report at paragraph 15.1 for the year ended 31 December 2012 drew attention that two years after the completion of the construction of the Fish Auction Market, no potential investor had been found to operate it. Even the construction led to numerous negative observations from the Director of Audit and amazingly, no provision was made for liquidated damages. So, this is Labour Party Government, *kass dan poss*, it is Labour Party, not us.

(Interruptions)

Similarly, time and again, with the creation of the Fishermen Investment Trust (FIT) which hon. Arianne Navarre-Marie keeps on crying during her numerous

interventions, all the funds of the FIT went for payment of their nominated *protégés politiques* which led to the closure of this trust along with the purchase of one fishing boat which was never delivered but partly paid to a company belonging to a famous political financier of MMM and Labour Party. This is it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to assure the House that my Ministry is committed to reclaiming this building from the NCG and to revamp for the fisheries sector. Once again, *oui, M. le président, ils sont des professionnels, le leader de l'opposition et tous les membres. Des vrais professionnels, oui, de la démagogie, ça c'est là.* And, this is the naked truth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in reviewing the Press articles, the discussion I had with some really objective people from the local Press while diligently working on this Bill, I discovered a resounding wave of satisfaction among cultivators, wholesalers, buyers and consumers alike. The overwhelming sentiment of contentment underscores the positive impact of the Five Ways Wholesale Market on our agricultural landscape.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, several measures have been announced by my colleague, hon. Minister Hurdoyal. I would not like to go back, I will leave it to him during his summing up. But, *M. le président, il est indéniable que la rétrospection à travers la machine à remonter le temps, nous offre une perspective saisissante sur les conditions qui prévalaient avant l'avènement du National Wholesale Market de Five Ways. Des scènes déplorables de légumes et de fruits négligemment dispersés sur des sols dépourvus de toute sécurité et d'hygiène, soumis à des enchères dans des environnements infestés de rats et de divers bestioles nuisibles ont été monnaie courante.*

Il est singulier d'observer et d'entendre les membres de l'opposition autoproclamés fervents défenseurs de la propreté. Il est où celui-là, l'honorable Juman? Alors, de la santé, de l'hygiène, de l'esthétique, particulièrement ceux qui se revendiquent comme photographes et vidéastes encore, critiquer avec virulence une réalisation forte et révolutionnaire de ce gouvernement. Cette loi, M. le président, s'inscrit pourtant logiquement dans la volonté du gouvernement de préserver les intérêts de la population. La proximité du futur centre d'*Agro processing* avec – annoncé bien sûr par notre gouvernement – le *National Wholesale Market* est une synergie pour le futur de notre agriculture. Avec plus de valeur ajoutée, cette synergie va renforcer notre industrie agricole et notre sécurité alimentaire.

Alors, M. le président, imaginez un instant une population contrainte de consommer des fruits et des légumes ayant servis de terrain de dance à des cancrelats, à des rats, atterrissant dans leurs assiettes – rats, cancrelats, l’honorable membre de l’opposition, pour ne mentionner que cela. Alors, il est difficile de concevoir que l’opposition souhaite persister dans une telle réalité, seulement pour ensuite s’adonner à la prise de photographes et de vidéos. Cette opposition, dépeinte comme un oiseau de mauvaise augure, semble plus inclinée à tout voir en noir, à jouer le rôle de Cassandre – j’espère qu’ils comprennent c’est quoi Cassandre –

(Interruptions)

An hon.Member: *Mo pa connais c’est quoi Cassandre.*

Mr Maudhoo: C’est une personne qui prédit une issue défavorable aux événements ou de ne pas être crue bien sûr par la population – alors, sans réellement contribuer à l’élaboration des solutions constructives. Alors, il est véritablement regrettable de constater comment des individus, supposément bien intentionnés, peuvent préférer des propos infondés à l’encontre d’une réalisation qui au final suscite la fierté d’une population s’engageant résolument dans une ère de modernité.

Heureusement, M. le président, alors comme je suis en contact avec de nombreux cultivateurs, encanteurs comme l’a bien dit mon collègue, l’honorable Deepak Balgobin et même une encanteuse, je crois que l’honorable Nando Bodha l’a rencontrée dans ma circonscription de Flacq. Je crois qu’elle est la présidente et je fréquente également d’autres circonscriptions avoisinantes. Je suis familiarisé avec leurs sentiments à l’égard du marché de gros. Alors, ils en sont enchantés, l’apprécient et l’adorent.

M. le président, au départ du projet, il est vrai que des résistances s’y sont manifestées, mais au fil des discussions d’abord avec mon collègue, l’honorable Mahen Seeruttun, puis avec l’honorable Maneesh Gobin, un réel partage des idées a eu lieu surtout au niveau des encanteurs et des planteurs. Oui, des échanges fructueux, dénoués de toute démagogie ont eu lieu et beaucoup a été accompli pour satisfaire l’ensemble des parties prenantes, qu’il s’agisse des planteurs, des encanteurs, ou des vendeurs de fruits et de légumes. Notre gouvernement, M. le président, conscient de l’importance du dialogue, de la communication et du bien-être de chacun au sein de notre nation, a œuvré avec détermination.

M. le président, nous avons toutes les raisons de croire en les bienfaits engendrés par le *National Wholesale Market*. J’invite les pseudos photographes et vidéographes à explorer d’autres horizons car la vente en gros des fruits et des légumes se fait désormais

de manière ordonnée, contrairement à l'époque précédent l'avènement du bijou qui se dresse à Five Ways. À Five Ways, la sécurité des opérateurs est désormais grandement assurée, évoluant dans un environnement propre, paisible et attractif. Le marché de gros de Five Ways a considérablement réduit les vols de produits grâce à un control minutieux à l'arrivée et au départ des marchandises.

M. le président, encore une fois comme à l'accoutumée, les membres de l'opposition et une section de la Presse se sont empressés de faire circuler des fausses informations concernant ce nouveau projet de loi. Mon collègue, l'honorable Hurdoyal l'a bien dit, ce sont des rumeurs infondées. Au contraire, je suis convaincu que ce changement va apporter plus de soutien à la communauté des planteurs et leurs doléances seront prises en compte pour aboutir au meilleur système possible pour que nous les accompagnions dans ce changement vers plus de modernité.

In conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *ils sont perplexes, moi aussi je suis perplexe. Alors, I am left with a perplexing choice between shedding tears of sorrow or laughter in response to the Opposition's criticism. The reality on the ground as evidenced by the widespread joy among stakeholders paints a stark contrast to the Opposition's stance. It is my sincere hope that in time, they will come to recognise and appreciate the transformative and positive impact of this revolutionary endeavour. So, let us hope so. Otherwise, Members of Opposition, keep getting your vegetables from là où les cancrelats et les rats dansent. Alors, avec ceci, M. le président, with this said, I proudly support this Bill.*

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Bholah!

(10.49 p.m.)

Mr Bholah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly

ADJOURNMENT

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 21 November 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Is there anyone raising their hand?

(Interruptions)

Okay, hon. Deputy Whip! Please sit down! Please sit down! It is not over! We will listen to hon. Ms Tour.

MATTER RAISED

(10.50 p.m.)

RICHE TERRE, ST MICHEL STREET, CITE ROMA – VANDALISM & THEFT – POLICE PATROLS

Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable Premier ministre et j'interviens ce soir au nom des habitants de la rue St Michel à Cité Roma, Riche Terre. Ils font face à un problème de vandalisme et de vol depuis un moment déjà, et le bâtiment de PADCO qui est actuellement inoccupé est devenu un repère pour les trafiquants de drogue et s'en suit les problèmes de prostitution. Je demanderai donc à l'honorable Premier ministre de bien vouloir augmenter les patrouilles de Police, et éventuellement, d'arranger une réunion entre la Police et le *Neighbourhood Watch* qui s'y trouve afin d'y assainir l'environnement à cet endroit.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Grateful for your request. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will pass on the message to the Prime Minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Alright, now we can all rise and have a safe trip!

At 10.51 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 21 November 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

NEW DIGITAL IDENTITY CARD - GENERAL ELECTION - USE

(No. B/1442) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the new digital identity card, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if provision has been made for the use thereof for the authentication of voters electronically in the next General Election and, if so, indicate the type of equipment to be used to read the card.

Reply: With regard to the use of the National Identity Card for authentication purposes at the time of voting, I am informed by the Electoral Commissioner that there are well-established and regulated procedures already in place. In fact, Regulation 27 of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that –

- “(1) Every elector desiring to record his vote shall present himself to the presiding officer in the appropriate voting room at the polling station at which he is entitled to vote, state his name and produce his National Identity Card or any other acceptable proof of his identity.
- (2) The presiding officer, after satisfying himself that the name of the elector appears on the copy of the part of the register containing the names of electors entitled to vote in that voting room, shall, subject to regulation 29, deliver a ballot paper to the elector.”

Regulation 2 of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 defines “acceptable proof of identity” as such document establishing the identity of a person as the Electoral Commissioner may, after consultation with the Electoral Supervisory Commission, determine.

I am further informed by the Electoral Commissioner that after consultation with the Electoral Supervisory Commission, the Electoral Commissioner determined the following documents as acceptable proof of identity in the 2014 and 2019 National Assembly Elections –

1. National Identity Card;
2. Passport;
3. Driving Licence, and
4. Bus Pass.

A communiqué was issued by the Electoral Commissioner to that effect in respect of both elections.

However, since the Village Council Elections 2020, the only acceptable proofs of identity, as determined by the Electoral Commissioner after consultation with the Electoral Supervisory Commission, are the National Identity Card or Passport. This measure was also adopted for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections 2022 and will be adopted for all future elections.

I am informed by the Electoral Commissioner that on the voting day, the process for authentication of the voter is as follows –

- (i) in order to cast his vote, a voter has to produce his National Identity Card or Passport as acceptable proof of his identity, to the Presiding Officer in the voting room, at the polling station where he is entitled to vote;
- (ii) the Presiding Officer verifies the ID number and the name of the voter in the Presiding Officer's Copy of register of electors, and after satisfying himself that the name of the elector appears on the copy of the part of the register containing the names of electors entitled to vote in that voting room, delivers a ballot paper to the elector;
- (iii) the Presiding Officer's Copy of Register contains the surname and other names, NID, address, gender of the elector as well as the elector's number, and
- (iv) ascertain that the photo appearing on the National Identity Card or Passport of the voter bears reasonable resemblance with the voter. This physical verification of the National Identity Card or Passport is made to ensure the identity of the voter.

I am also informed by the Electoral Commissioner that Regulation 30 (6) of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that –

- “(a) No person shall, by means of –
 - (i) a camera;
 - (ii) a mobile phone
 - (iii) a photographic or an electronic device, or any other device through which a photograph may be taken or a film may be made, take a photograph, or make a film, of a ballot paper, whether the ballot paper is marked or unmarked.”

In the light of these Regulations, the use of a mobile phone, camera or any photographic or an electronic device is prohibited in the voting room.

I am further informed by the Electoral Commissioner that the Digital version of the National Identity Card will not be used to authenticate voters electronically. The existing voting process will be maintained for the next National Assembly Elections and both the current and new physical Identity Cards will be used for visual verification of the voter.

INTERCEPTION ORDER – COMMUNICATION PRIVACY – APPLICATIONS, PURPOSES & OUTCOMES

(No. B/1443) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to application made to a Judge in Chambers for an Order to intercept, withhold or disclose audio and other telecommunication messages, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof for each of the years 2019 to 2022 and for the period January 2023 to date, indicating in each case the purpose and outcome thereof.

Reply: Mauritius is an “*Etat de droit*” where the fundamental rights and freedom of any individual are guaranteed by our Constitution. Sections 3 and 12 of the Constitution guarantees the right to the protection for the privacy of one’s home and other property which includes the privacy of communication made within the home, including any communication requiring the use of telephone apparatus.

However, for the purpose of enquiry and criminal proceedings, Police is empowered to make an application before a Judge in Chambers, to intercept and withhold any communication under the following legislations –

- (i) Section 32 of the Information and Communication Technologies Act (ICTA) 2001;
- (ii) Section 29 of the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021;
- (iii) Section 56 of the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000, and
- (iv) Section 25A of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002 (POTA).

The Commissioner of Police has informed that from 2019 to 09 November 2023, no such application has been made by the Police.

TROU D'EAU DOUCE – CONCERT INCIDENT – ENQUIRY

(No. B/1444) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the incidents which occurred during a concert at Trou-d'Eau-Douce on 05 November 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the name of the organiser of the concert thereat, indicating if all relevant permits were obtained therefor;
- (b) the security measures provided thereat;
- (c) the number of persons injured as a result thereof, and
- (d) if an enquiry has been initiated thereinto.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Sunday 05 November 2023 from 09:30 hours to 19:30 hours, the Village Council of Trou d'Eau Douce in collaboration with *Groupement pour le Soutien du Trou d'Eau Douce* organised three successive events at Trou d'Eau Douce, as follows –

- (i) A pacific march from 'Four à Chaux' to 'Debarcadère' from 09:30 hours to 10:30 hours;
- (ii) A regatta competition at 'Debarcadère' as from 13:00 hours to 16:30 hours, and
- (iii) A cultural show in an open space at 'Debarcadère' near the seaside from 17:00 hours to 20:30 hours.

The organisers had sought and obtained necessary clearances to hold these events.

The Commissioner of Police has, *inter alia*, imposed certain restrictions namely –

- (i) prohibition of the sale of alcoholic beverages in public place;
- (ii) adherence to the provision of the Environment Protection Regulations;
- (iii) provision of a security boat;

- (iv) the crafts were to be seaworthy and equipped with necessary amenities, and
- (v) ensuring that the different events end at scheduled time.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the pacific march and the regatta unfolded without any incident.

However, at the end of the concert at around 20:30 hours, some 40 to 50 metres away from the place where the concert was held, a group of persons started fighting on the road. The Police proceeded immediately to the spot and found a male person who was later identified as Mr A.F.A, lying unconscious on the ground with a head injury. He was immediately conveyed to Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital where he was given medical treatment at the Casualty Ward. Thereafter he was discharged against medical advice on the same night.

Three other persons were also injured during the incident and they were all conveyed to Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital where they were admitted after treatment. Two of them have been discharged from hospital on 06 and 07 November 2023 respectively, whilst the third victim, a 40-year-old lady is still under observation.

As regard part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the organisers requested the services of the Police for the maintenance of law and order and for regulating traffic during these events.

A total of 59 Police Officers under the supervision of an Assistant Superintendent of Police, were deployed for duty in connection with the three events starting from 09:00 hours until the end of the concert.

Following the incident, Police has, during the course of enquiry, arrested four persons on 10 November 2023. They will be provisionally charged for the offence of “Assault with premeditation” before the District Court of Flacq.

Enquiry into the case is proceeding.

POLICE MEDICAL OFFICER – MEDICINAL CANNABINOIDS PRESCRIPTIONS

(No. B/1445) Mr A. Ittoo (Third 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

medicinal cannabinoids, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if any Police Medical Officer has prescribed the use thereof as at to date and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the number thereof, and
- (b) follow up thereon as a result thereof, if any.

(Withdrawn)

MBC – FIFA WORLD CUP 2023 BROADCASTING RIGHTS' COSTS & UEFA EURO 2024 RETRANSMISSION

(No. B/1446) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the cost incurred to acquire the broadcasting rights for the free-to-air package for the FIFA World Cup 2023, giving details thereof, and
- (b) if negotiations for the retransmission on television of the UEFA Euro 2024 to be held in Germany have been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

ELECTORAL COOPERATION – MAURITIUS & INDIA – MOU

(No. B/1447) 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 electoral cooperation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to if a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed recently by the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius with his Indian counterpart thereon and, if so, give details thereof and table copy thereof.

Reply: I am informed that the most recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which has been signed by the Electoral Commissioner with his Indian counterpart dates back to 2020.

The MoU, which is valid until January 2025, makes provision for, *inter alia* –

- (a) the exchange of information, material, expertise, and technical know-how relating to electoral processes and systems;
- (b) organisational development and capacity building;
- (c) the production and dissemination of material pertaining to electoral systems, voting technology, and voter education, and
- (d) training of personnel and development of human resources.

As requested by the hon. Member, a copy of the MoU signed in 2020 between the Office of the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius and the Election Commission of India is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

PRIVY COUNCIL – JUDGEMENT – MEASURES

(No. B/1448) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second 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 the light of the Judgment in the Appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the case of Surendra Dayal v Pravind Kumar Jugnauth & others and following the dismissal and/or withdrawal of the 14 electoral petitions lodged since the 2019 General Election, he will state the measures he proposes to take following the comments and recriminations made on the reputation and credibility enjoyed by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission with a view to repairing the damage caused to the public trust and confidence therein.

(Withdrawn)

MV WAKASHIO GROUNDING – COURT OF INVESTIGATION REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1449) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the report of the Court of Investigation set up to look into the grounding of the MV Wakashio, he will state the findings of the Inter-Ministerial Committee set up to examine the recommendations contained therein, indicating –

- (a) where matters stand as to implementation thereof, and

- (b) if he will now table copy thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

DRUG PROLIFERATION – MEASURES

(No. B/1450) 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 drugs, he will state the additional measures taken to address the proliferation thereof amongst the youth.

Reply: The preventive measures undertaken by the Police Force include the following –

- (a) organising education and sensitisation programmes with youngsters, parents, educators at educational institutions and youth clubs by Police Officers posted to the Education Cell of Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU), the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU) and the Brigade pour la Protection de la Famille (BPF);
- (b) educating youngsters through leaflets and booklets to ensure a better understanding of drugs, its effects and the drug nexus, and
- (c) maintaining frequent and visible preventive patrols near school's premises, bus stands, shopping malls, commercial areas, public gardens, public beaches, gaming houses and other places usually frequented by youngsters to prevent them from loitering and becoming easy prey of drug peddlers.

In addition to these preventive measures, the Police regularly interact with youngsters during youth programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the National Youth Civil Service, the National Young Volunteers Scheme organised by the concerned Ministry during school holidays. During the sessions, Police from different adjuncts of the Force such as BPF, CPU, Police Training School (PTS), Special Mobile Force (SMF), Police Band and National Coast Guard (NCG) have the opportunity to educate the children and young persons on the ill effects of drug abuse, as well as on other recreational activities and how they can motivate themselves to adopt a healthy life style and keep away from such social evil. Some such activities are –

- (a) Sports and other outdoor games by the Police Physical Instructors, and

- (b) Free music courses delivered by volunteered Police Band Officers to youngsters.

The Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has a five-pronged drug prevention approach which are Prevention, Education, Reporting, Monitoring and Psychosocial intervention.

Sensitisation campaigns are being carried out in educational and training institutions in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders such as ADSU and Harm Reduction Unit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

In line with the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023 and the international standards for drug use prevention, an evidence-based drug use prevention programme, “Get Connected” has been introduced in secondary schools across the island. The target group for the programme is students of Grade 8. The programme uses a life skills concept model with the aim of deterring tobacco, alcohol and drug initiation among the adolescents.

With a view to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for the school community, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology is deploying all necessary efforts to educate and empower our students with drug resilience skills to counter the drug scourge.

Another prevention programme known as REBOUND has been developed for students aged 14 to 25 years to achieve long-term effects in contrast to quick fix attempts. The goals include cognitive, developmental and environmental dimensions for Grade 10 students. It is a media-based life skill and risk education programme which would act as a booster to the Grade 8 Get Connected drug use prevention programme. 520 educators have been trained to be acquainted with the drug use prevention programmes being set up.

Other measures being taken by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology are –

- i. Student Care and Counselling Desk (SCCD) is already fully operational in all state secondary educational institutions;
- ii. four activity periods per week in secondary school time table have been introduced to encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities such as *Natation Scolaire*, After School Sports and Fitness Programme (ASSFP) Primary & Secondary, Outdoor Education Programme, observance of International Days on specific themes like Health and Drug Prevention, World No Tobacco Day and International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit trafficking;

- iii. a range of concepts related to the effect of harmful substances and drug use prevention has been infused in subjects, using a spiral approach in the primary and secondary school curricula;
- iv. a standard protocol for reported serious indiscipline incident detailing all necessary actions to be taken in case of suspected possession/consumption of illicit substances have been included in the Student Behaviour Policy;
- v. a multi-disciplinary team has been constituted so that the students and parents are given the right support in these hard times. ADSU is immediately contacted, and follow up is ensured at the level of the school, Disciplinary Committee, Pastoral Care committee, the Student Care and Counselling Desk (SCCD), the NECS, and other stakeholders, and
- vi. a series of psychosocial interventions at different tiers such as Peer counselling, SCCD, *Service D'écoute* are being carried out to assist with the reintegration and follow up of learners as well as promoting mental health and well-being within schools.

The Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation also organises a series of programmes aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing addictive behaviour among young people. The programmes are as follows –

- (i) In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a series of sensitisation training are conducted all over the island under of Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drug (YEPAD). The programme is run all over the island, targeting members of the community, including young people and specifically vulnerable groups in outreach regions. Youth Officers intervene during the programme by providing insights on the different activities that are organised by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation where young people can get involved and at the same time, keep them away from social ills, like addictive behaviours and other harmful practices;
- (ii) Special Youth Outreach Programme (SYOP) is also carried out. It is an ongoing peer education programme aimed at preventing substance abuse and sensitising youth on health issues. The programme is run by trained Animateurs who work with around 400 vulnerable youth, in the following

regions: Folles Herbes at Bambous, Cassis, Residence Argy at Flacq, Residence La Chaux at Mahebourg, Residence Ste Claire at Goodlands, Residence Anoska at Forest Side, Residence Kennedy at Candos, Residence Beau Vallon at Mahebourg and Residence Barkly at Beau Bassin. Mental wellbeing, being an important aspect of health, the Animateurs have also been trained to provide a *Service d'Écoute* to emotionally vulnerable youth and at the same time sensitise young people on other health issues;

- (iii) Life Skills Education Programme which is a ten-week comprehensive youth health programme and designed to support adolescents in making healthy life choices are also being conducted. The programme comprises topics such as Healthy Lifestyles (healthy eating habits, hygiene and the need for regular physical exercise), Adolescents Reproductive Health, prevention of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS among others. A special holiday programme, Special Vacances/Vacans Zen during school holidays is run to engage students in healthy and fun activities. These activities include hiking, mountaineering, water-based activities and other meaningful fun sports activities;
- (iv) In all the 25 youth centres around the island, ongoing daily activities are held, which include, Yoga, Karate, Judo, Boxe, Badminton, Aerobics, Zumba, and Tai Chi. All these activities are meant to promote the health and wellbeing of our youth.
- (v) The National Youth Civic Service which is a 12-week training programme targeted at young people aged 17-25 years old is also being provided. It helps them develop a set of competencies geared towards character building, positive lifestyle, and employability;
- (vi) The Duke of Edinburgh International Award is a programme that promotes individual achievement and autonomy among young people aged 14-24 years old. It operates at three recognised levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold – with the following four aspects at each level: Voluntary Service, Skills, Physical Recreation, Adventurous Journey and a Residential Project for Gold level participants;
- (vii) The *Programme pour la Promotion de L'Entreprenariat Jeunesse (PPEJ)* is a three-month training programme targeted at young people aged 18-35

years old. The programme supports the development of entrepreneurial culture, relevant skills and an active economic participation among young people;

- (viii) The National Young Volunteer Scheme (NYVS) is a programme which aims at fostering civic participation and community engagement among young people aged 18-35 years old. The programme includes four components, which are, Nation Building, Solidarity, Education, and Environment.
- (ix) Informal education activities are also organised in Youth Centres across the island including, leadership training, community-based programmes, holiday programmes, educational tours, sensitisation on human values, Blue Venture diving initiation, and creativity projects for handicapped youth.
- (x) The regular practice of physical exercises is being encouraged in all the programmes of the Ministry to keep young people away from social ills and to enable them to be physically fit and enjoy a sound health.

The House would recall that in my reply to PQ B/1381, I informed the House that a national campaign against drugs entitled '*Unis contre la drogue*' was organised by my Office, and a first community event was organised at Souillac Youth Hub, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, whereby some 100 youths were gathered to reflect and discuss on the thematic of drug.

Moreover, I had also engaged personally with the youth of Dr. Maurice Curé State College in Vacoas to discuss drug related issues. Similar activities were carried out in other locations around the island where I had an interactive session with the young participants where the latter were able to share their thoughts, comments, and insights on topics like –

- i. the reasons for drug use among young people;
- ii. the ways parents and teachers could guide and protect against drug use and other related harm;
- iii. how to empower young people to get out of drugs, and
- iv. the capacity of the country to fight against drugs more effectively.

MR B. L. - ALLEGED DRUGS POSSESSION CASE – INQUIRY

(No. B/1451) **Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle)** 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 arrest Mr B. L. on 04 November 2022 for an alleged case of possession of drugs, 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 therein.

(Withdrawn)

MS H. O. R. – ARRIVAL DETAILS & VISIT PURPOSE

(No. B/1452) **Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Ms H. O. R., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the date of arrival thereof in Mauritius;
- (b) the purpose of her visit, and
- (c) if she has applied for a residence permit, indicating the date of –
 - (i) application, and
 - (ii) approval therefor, further indicating the grounds therefor.

(Withdrawn)

FOREIGN WORKERS – ILLEGAL STAY – REPATRIATION MEASURES

(No. B/1453) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to foreign workers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Passport and Immigration Office, information as to the number thereof whose work permit have expired and are currently staying illegally in the country, indicating the measures taken for their tracking and repatriation.

(Withdrawn)

LOTTO PLUS – NEW FORMULA – INCREASED DRAWS

(No. B/1476) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Lotto Plus, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to the reasons for the introduction of a new formula which has resulted in the increase of the weekly draws.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL LAND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – PREPARATION & DELAY

(No. B/1477) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the preparation of the National Land Development Strategy initiated in 2019, he will state the reasons for the delay for the finalisation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR – INNOVATION & INVESTMENT – MEASURES

(No. B/1478) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the renewable energy sector, he will state the measures being taken to foster innovation and investment therein with a view to ensuring sustainable and eco-friendly energy future for the country.

Reply: Government has demonstrated its commitment to address the impact of climate change and build a climate resilient and low emission country, in its pledge to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and in its Nationally Determined Contributions. It has also announced the establishment of the Green Energy Industry as a cornerstone of our economy.

The strategy concerning the Renewable Energy Sector is outlined in the national Renewable Energy Roadmap for the Electricity Sector 2030, published in May 2022. This roadmap serves as a crucial reference for potential investors, showcasing the opportunities available in our country for deployment of various RE technologies. The document is moreover useful to policy makers and executing agencies responsible for designing and implementing schemes and incentives to attract both local and international investors.

The Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities with the support and collaboration of the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency, the Central Electricity Board, the Energy Efficiency Management Office, the Economic Development Board, the Utility Regulatory Authority and other important stakeholders is implementing various schemes and measures to foster research and development, stimulate innovation, promote investment in the green energy sector, develop a robust, modern and resilient infrastructure to support renewable energy integration while ensuring the wide participation of the different segments of the population in the green energy transition.

With a view to fostering Research and Development and stimulating industrial innovation, the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency (MARENA), Central Electricity Board (CEB) with the collaboration of the Mauritius Research and Innovative Council (MRIC) launched the “National Scheme for Emerging Project Concepts based on Renewable Energy Technologies” (NSEPCRET), to support innovative, emerging and promising Renewable Energy technology projects. The first scheme was launched in 2019 and open to innovative projects in the RE sector with a capacity not exceeding 200 kilowatts. This scheme was revamped subsequently to further boost innovation and developers were allowed to export energy up to 2 Megawatts (MW) against a more favourable tariff of Rs4.00 per kilowatt hour. Seven projects have been retained of a total capacity of 10.4 MW with a combined investment of around Rs5.6 billion in the last round of the scheme.

Additionally, several financial incentives have been put in place to assist businesses investing in renewable energy projects to benefit from subsidies, low-interest loans, favourable feed-in tariffs and tax incentives. These include –

- (1) the exemption from land conversion tax for the purposes of setting up of a power station for the supply of electrical power using renewable energy and for the production of electrical power using biomass or through a solar farm or agri-solar farm;
- (2) Concessional loans of up to Rs250,000 by the Development Bank of Mauritius to individuals at an interest rate of 2% for solar PV kits;
- (3) Exemption from interest derived by individuals and companies from debentures, bonds or sukuk issued by a company to finance renewable energy projects;
- (4) Solar energy investment allowance eligible for tax deduction, and

- (5) Several schemes have been introduced by the Central Electricity Board with Buyback Guarantee whereby Prosumers under the SSDG and MSDG can offset their current electricity consumption with a buy back of MUR 4.20.
- (6) Custom Duty and VAT exemption in respect of Solar PV equipment among several other incentives and schemes.

Moreover, the CEB is investing significantly in the development of a robust, modern and resilient infrastructure to support renewable energy integration, such as the smartening of the grid, the replacement of Air-insulated switchgear (AIS) by Gas-insulated switchgear (GIS) stations and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). A study is moreover on-going for the potential of integrating more variable energy on the grid. The successive requests for proposals issued by CEB for RE projects have attracted considerable local and international interest demonstrating high investor appetite in the RE sector. After onshore solar and wind projects, CEB is now moving into deployment of floating PV projects.

The CEB has also introduced various schemes to ensure a wide participation of the different segments of the population in the green energy transition, namely vulnerable households, NHDC residents, NGOs, women associations, religious and charitable institutions, educational institutions, smart cities, owners of electric cars, public entities, and industrial sector operators and so on.

Emphasis is also being laid on Public Awareness Campaigns through mass media and social platforms to educate the public about the benefits of sustainable and eco-friendly energy, to create a demand for clean energy solutions and to encourage a culture of energy saving and energy efficiency. In addition to sensitisation, the Energy Efficiency Management Office of the Ministry has taken the necessary steps to prevent importation of energy inefficient appliances, set standards for importers of LED lights, ban incandescent lamps in a phased manner, introduce mandatory labelling on several household appliances, etc.

RUISSEAU DU POUCE – FLOOD MITIGATION WORKS

(No. B/1479) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood mitigation at Ruisseau du Pouce in the vicinity of Tranquebar, Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the construction of elevated river banks and removal of debris thereat.

Reply: Reference is made to reply to PQ B/712 at the Sitting of 06 June 2023 where details were given on the drain project implemented near the entrance of Ruisseau du Pouce and where it was mentioned that the “Construction of floodwall at Nazareth, Tranquebar” would be undertaken by the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd (DICL).

The DICL informed that necessary clearances have now been obtained from all authorities and the bidding document for the project has been finalised. Bids will be invited through a National Bidding exercise by next week and bidders will be given some one month to submit their proposals.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis, on its part, has awarded a contract for the cleaning and desilting of Ruisseau du Pouce, including the removal of debris in September 2023. Some 40 lorry loads of debris have already been collected and carted away so far. Works are expected to be completed by the end of this week.

COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL LEGAL EDUCATION – 2023 EXAMINATION – CANDIDATES

(No. B/1480) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Council for Vocational Legal Education, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of candidates who sat for the 2023 –

- (a) barristers;
- (b) Attorney, and
- (c) Notary Public examinations thereof, indicating in each case the number thereof having –
 - (i) passed, and
 - (ii) obtained a resit.

(Withdrawn)

MEDICINES & ALLIED PRODUCTS – STORAGE & WAREHOUSING

(No. B/1481) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to warehouses for the

storage of medicines and allied products by his Ministry, he will state the number thereof

—

- (a) available, and
- (b) rented, if any, giving details of the —
 - (i) lease agreement thereof, and
 - (ii) amount paid therefor since January 2023 to date.

(Withdrawn)

HERMITAGE – SOCIAL HOUSING UNIT CONSTRUCTION – CONTRACTORS

(No. B/1482) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the construction of social housing units at Hermitage in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the New Social Living Development Co. Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) number thereof being constructed;
- (b) names of the contractors, consultants and project managers selected therefor, if any, and
- (c) surface area and locations earmarked to be used as green spaces and parks, giving details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

BANK OF MAURITIUS – GOVERNOR & DEPUTY GOVERNORS –CAR ALLOCATION DETAILS

(No. B/1483) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to when the Governor and the Deputy Governors thereof were last allocated with a new car, indicating in each case the –

- (a) the cost thereof;
- (b) type and model, and
- (c) date of acquisition.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to question B/1461 which relates to the same subject matter.

COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL-CEB POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT – CONDITIONS

(No. B/1484) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement signed between CEB and Corexsolar International for the purchase of electricity from Renewable Energy Hybrid Facilities, in particular in relation to 2 projects of SPV 30 mw, he will state if the company fulfilled all of the conditions precedents set forth in Clause 3.1.2 of the Power Purchase Agreement within the period of 9 months as from the 'Long Stop Date' and, if not, why not, indicating the actions envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

MARE TABAC REGION – FLOODING – MEASURES

(No. B/1485) **Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the recent flooding in the region of Mare Tabac, he will state if an assessment thereof has been made and if so, indicate the measures he proposes to take in relation thereto.

Reply: The village of Mare Tabac comprises residential and agricultural areas which are located downstream of River Tabac and are often prone to flooding caused by stormwater flows. The Land Drainage Authority (LDA) has consequently declared the region of Mare Tabac as a high-risk flood-prone area.

With a view to mitigating flooding in the region of Mare Tabac, the National Development Unit (NDU) has already implemented drain projects in two phases amounting to some Rs97.8 m., namely –

- i. Phase I – Drainworks along School Lane and upgrading of River Tabac to the tune of Rs51.3 m., and
- ii. Phase II – Drainworks along B82 Road and Mandhub Lane to the tune of Rs46.5 m.

In addition, the desilting of Feeder Marron and Madame Chouchou and cleaning works to the tune of Rs2.1 m. have also been carried out by the NDU.

The LDA has confirmed that the drain projects have been very effective and have significantly alleviated the problem of flooding in the region.

However, during the heavy rainfall of 07 November 2023, there was significant volume of stormwater runoff onto the lateral road off SSR Lane, Mare Tabac and this had caused water accumulation and local flooding in the premises of the inhabitants of the region.

In this respect, the LDA has carried out an assessment of the causes of the flooding thereat and it was found that the existing feeder, commonly known as Madame Chouchou, downstream of Joli Bois Bridge and located along B82 New Grove Road, had been obstructed by debris and waste materials by a private land owner. These obstructions have subsequently resulted in the partial diversion of an important volume of stormwater from the feeder Madame Chouchou and caused the flooding. The LDA has, consequently, initiated action for serving a Notice to the private land owner concerned.

The District Council of Grand Port has, with a view to improving the flow of stormwater, already initiated actions for –

- (i) cleaning of the roadside drain along SSR Street;
- (ii) removal of those obstructions and debris (which included the branches and trunk of a litchi tree) from Madame Chouchou downstream;
- (iii) removal of concrete cover slabs along SSR lane, and
- (iv) desilting and widening of the existing watercourse.

After the implementation of Phase I and Phase II in Mare Tabac, the NDU is now finalising Phase III to further alleviate the occurrence of flooding in the region. Phase III comprises drain works along the main road in Morcellement Savannah, dredging and upgrading of Feeder Marron near junction of the main road and Shivala road.

Presently, the NDU is having consultation with ENL Ltd to finalise the alignment with a view to avoiding canals bringing water to Omnicane, irrigation lines and private properties, and for securing Right of Entry on the required lands. The NDU will then proceed with the construction of a cut-off drain and an earth swale of a length of 1.3 km, of width ranging from 3 to 5 metres and depth ranging from 1.4 metres to 5 metres upstream of Morcellement Savannah, crossing the main road and intercepting Feeder Marron to a discharge point at Rivère du Poste.

Concurrently, the relevant clearances are being sought and works on site are expected to start shortly.

**LA VIGIE-FLIC EN FLAC LINK ROAD – LA MARIE ROUNDABOUT –
UPGRADING**

(No. B/1486) **Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the La Vigie Flic en Flac link road, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to if his Ministry has a project for the upgrading of the roundabout at La Marie to the South through Petrin and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICES – INFRASTRUCTURE – SENIOR
CITIZEN & PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

(No. B/1487) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to Social Security Offices, she will state if the infrastructure thereof is adequately equipped to ease access thereto for persons with disabilities and senior citizens.

(Withdrawn)

SPORTS ACT – CONSULTATIONS & PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

(No. B/1488) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Sports Act, he will state where matters stand as to the proposed amendments to be brought thereto, indicating if there have been further consultations, if any, with National Sports Federations thereon and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Reply: With regard to the proposed amendments to be brought to the Sport Act 2016, I wish to inform the House that officers of my Ministry have had several meetings with representatives of the Mauritius Football Association, the Registrar of Associations, the Mauritius Olympic Committee, and the Attorney General's Office. The proposed amendments are being finalised.

BUDGETARY MEASURE – CHILDCARE FACILITIES IN WORKPLACE

(No. B/1489) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the budgetary measure to make it compulsory for all companies with more than 250 employees to provide the necessary childcare facilities in the workplace, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION – GRANT-IN-AID SCHEME

(No. B/1490) **Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the free pre-primary education, she will state where matters stand as to the implementation and the defining of the modalities for the Grant-in-Aid scheme thereof.

(Withdrawn)

RATS & RODENTS' PROLIFERATION – BAITING EXERCISES

(No. B/1491) **Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to rats, he will state if any study has been carried out to assess the damage resulting from the proliferation thereof other than causing septic pneumonia, epidemic jaundice and other related diseases and, if so, indicate the measures taken for the elimination thereof, further indicating if trapping, poisoning, gassing and fumigation are being resorted to.

Reply: Rats and rodents are known to be carriers of several types of diseases that can lead to serious illness such as plague, rat bite fever and in some cases, even death. Transmission of diseases usually occurs through several routes –

- a) Exposure to infected rodent waste.
- b) Bites from infected rodent or insect.
- c) Handling of infected rodents or insects.

I am informed that there is no specific study that has been carried out in order to assess the health-related damages resulting from the proliferation of rats.

The Rodent Control Unit of my Ministry is responsible for carrying out regular baiting exercises to prevent rodent infestation at the level of regional hospitals,

mediclinics, area and community health centres, central medical store, port and airport and around 172 other government institutions.

However, the population of rodents can only be controlled but not eradicated. Control of rodents is exercised by using an integrated pest management approach that includes environmental sanitation, proper food storage, rodent-proofing, trapping and poisoning.

METRO EXPRESS LTD – FREE TRAVEL SCHEMES – DISBURSMENT

(No. B/1492) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Free Travel Schemes, he will state the amount of money paid to bus operators and the Metro Express Ltd., over the past two years, indicating if the mode of payment thereof will be reviewed and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Free Travel Scheme aims at enhancing the mobility of senior citizens and persons with disabilities while at the same time allowing students to proceed from their place of residence to their educational institutions and back, free of charge. The purpose of the Free Travel Scheme is to allow improved accessibility in the public transport system to the above categories of travelers. Bus operators are compensated by Government for this service.

The Free Travel Scheme which was previously applicable to buses only, was subsequently extended, by this Government, to the Metro Express as from the commercial operations thereof in January 2020 so that senior citizens, persons with disabilities and students could travel freely onboard the light rail.

The following disbursement has been made by the National Land Transport Authority, over the past two financial years, to the bus operators and Metro Express Ltd., respectively –

Financial Year	Bus Operators MUR	Metro Express Ltd MUR
2021/2022	1,243,053,731	12,852,000
2022/2023	1,233,199,299	19,966,500
TOTAL	2,476,253,030	32,818,500

The bus operators are paid a monthly fixed sum of money, under the Free Travel Scheme, and the present disbursement methodology basically hinges on the number of buses in operation and on an estimated population of senior citizens, persons with disabilities and students conveyed by the bus operators. As regards the Individual Bus

Operators, their monthly subsidies will be in accordance with the routes on which they operate.

The amount of free travel for the light rail is based on the number of operational light rail vehicles released by MEL to provide passenger services.

Accordingly, as the current payment methodology for the bus operators was framed since the inception of the Scheme, my Ministry intends to come up with a new mechanism with regard to the Free Travel Scheme upon the introduction of an integrated Cashless Ticketing System for the public transport as this would provide the NLTA with an appropriate basis for the computation of the disbursement.

SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS – GRANT FORMULA – REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/1493) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether she will state if she has received representations from the managers of private secondary institutions with regard to the new grant formula and, if so, indicate the actions being envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

SME INFORMAL SECTOR – ACTIONS TAKEN

(No. B/1494) 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 SME informal sector, he will state the actions envisaged to align same with the formal sector.

(Withdrawn)

ROSE HILL - ILLEGALLY OPERATING NURSERY – INCIDENT & INQUIRY

(No. B/1495) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the 9-month-old infant who suffered second degree burns in a nursery allegedly operating illegally in Rose Hill, she will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the actions taken in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

ASBESTOS – REPORTED CASES – TREATMENT

(No. B/1496) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to asbestos, he will state the number of reported cases of diseases resulting therefrom, if any, over the past 8 years and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) treatment prescribed therefor and
- (b) accompanying support, if any, available in public hospitals to those diagnosed therewith.

(Withdrawn)

NIC & MAUBANK LTD – SALE PROCESS

(No. B/1497) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the sale of the National Insurance Company Ltd. and MauBank Ltd., he will state where matters stand following the report of the respective Transaction Advisers thereof.

Reply: La Chambre se souviendra que le paragraphe 196 du discours sur le budget 2019-2020 prévoyait que "Nous céderons également certains actifs non stratégiques afin de réduire le niveau de la dette publique."

Par ailleurs, en réponse à la PQ B/675 du 30 juillet 2019, le Premier ministre avait annoncé que le Gouvernement mettrait en place un Comité de pilotage pour gérer l'ensemble de l'opération relative à la cession des actifs non stratégiques identifiés.

Un Comité directeur sur la cession des actifs non stratégiques a été mis en place au sein de mon ministère pour, entre autres, identifier les actifs du gouvernement à céder et aviser un processus de cession optimal dans le meilleur intérêt public.

La première réunion a eu lieu le 28 janvier 2020 et, à ce jour, le comité s'est réuni à 12 reprises.

Le comité est présidé par un représentant de mon ministère et comprend des représentants du bureau du Premier ministre, de mon ministère, du ministère de l'Énergie et des services publics, du bureau du Procureur Général, du bureau du Comptable général et de la State Investment Corporation Ltd (SIC).

La National Insurance Company Ltd et la MauBank Ltd ont été identifiées parmi les actifs non stratégiques à céder.

En janvier 2022, le comité de pilotage a recommandé que ces deux sociétés entament les procédures nécessaires à la désignation d'un conseiller en transactions pour les assister tout au long du processus de cession.

En ce qui concerne la National Insurance Company Ltd (NIC), je suis informé qu'en avril 2022, la NIC et la NIC General Insurance Co. Ltd ont lancé un appel d'offres pour

recruter un "conseiller en transactions" parmi les grandes sociétés de comptabilité et de conseil.

Le conseiller en transactions est tenu d'évaluer les activités sous-jacentes, de proposer et de conseiller les meilleurs moyens de maximiser la valeur et de la réaliser pour l'actionnaire.

À la suite de l'appel d'offres et de l'exercice de sélection, Ernst & Young (EY) a été désigné comme conseiller en transactions à compter du 25 juillet 2022. Le conseiller en transactions a déjà soumis un rapport d'évaluation.

En ce qui concerne MauBank Ltd, une demande de proposition a été effectuée en avril 2022 pour retenir des services de conseil en matière de transaction en relation avec la cession des actions détenues par MauBank Holdings Ltd dans ses filiales.

Suite à cet exercice, MauBank Holdings Ltd a désigné le Consortium composé de Priscus Finance, Gibraltar Advisory et VERDE comme *Transaction Advisor* à compter du 23 juin 2022.

Le conseiller en transaction a soumis plusieurs rapports portant sur l'examen des opérations et l'évaluation de la banque, afin de s'assurer que la documentation pertinente est préparée pour inviter les acheteurs potentiels à manifester leur intérêt.

Le 22 septembre 2022, le conseiller en transactions a publié, au nom de MauBank Holdings Ltd, une manifestation d'intérêt, par le biais d'un appel d'offres international, afin d'inviter les soumissionnaires potentiels à mettre en œuvre un programme de désinvestissement pour MauBank Holdings Ltd.

À la suite de cette manifestation d'intérêt, le conseiller en transactions a reçu 20 offres de pré-qualification de la part de parties intéressées.

Sur ces 20 offres, 10 soumissionnaires ont été retenus pour une offre non contraignante après avoir passé l'évaluation des critères.

Le conseiller en transactions a procédé à une vérification préalable des soumissionnaires présélectionnés et en a ensuite présélectionné cinq qui ont été invités à passer à l'étape de l'offre contraignante.

À l'issue de la phase d'offre ferme et de l'évaluation, le conseiller en transactions a recommandé d'accorder au soumissionnaire préféré un statut d'exclusivité pour une période de trois semaines en vue de la cession.

En mars 2023, le soumissionnaire retenu s'est vu accorder le statut de soumissionnaire privilégié et d'exclusivité.

Un accord d'achat d'actions a été signé entre MauBank Holdings Ltd et le soumissionnaire retenu le 20 avril 2023.

Un dépôt remboursable de 10 % du prix d'achat devait être effectué par le soumissionnaire retenu dans les 15 jours suivant la signature du SPA.

Cependant, étant donné que le soumissionnaire n'a pas rempli cette condition dans le délai prescrit, la date limite a été prolongée à trois reprises par MauBank Holdings Ltd.

Malheureusement, le soumissionnaire préféré n'a pas versé l'acompte sur le prix d'achat et la période d'exclusivité pour ce soumissionnaire préféré a donc expiré.

En conséquence, le conseiller en transactions a recommandé de clore l'exercice et de procéder à la sélection d'un autre soumissionnaire privilégié pour la cession.

Le nouveau processus de cession est toujours en cours avec des candidats intéressés.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 15 – DRAINS MAINTENANCE – COST

(No. B/1498) 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 cleaning and maintenance of existing drains in Constituency No. 15 Vacoas and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix, information as to the –

- (a) list of regions having benefitted therefrom;
- (b) maintenance works being undertaken thereat, and
- (c) total costs thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MUNICIPAL CITY COUNCIL, PORT LOUIS – CENTRAL MARKET – FISH, MEAT & POULTRY SECTION – RENOVATION

(No. B/1499) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the project for the renovation of the Fish, Meat and Poultry section of the Central Market of Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if the discussions initiated thereon with the UNESCO have been completed and, if so, indicate where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that on 25 August 2023, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage has no objection for the Council to proceed with the implementation of the renovation of the market as per the recommendations of the overarching Heritage Impact Assessment and the Visual Impact Assessment Report.

However, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage has informed the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it has to seek the approval of the Planning Committee at the level of its Ministry before implementation of the project. The Consultant working on the project has been instructed to integrate the recommendations of the overarching Heritage Impact Assessment and the Visual Impact Assessment Report in the project and finalise the bill of quantities accordingly.

I wish to inform the House that in the Financial Year 2018/19, an amount of Rs90 m. was earmarked for the project including consultancy fees. Now, the project cost would have to be reviewed as five years have lapsed since the first estimate was worked out by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis.

I personally chaired a meeting on 09 October 2023 to look into this project in the presence of all stakeholders, namely, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage, the National Heritage Fund, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis and the Consultant for the project.

It was agreed that once the project is finalised by the Consultant, then the approval of the Planning Committee of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage would have to be sought. In parallel the Municipal City Council of Port Louis would have to seek approval for the increase in the project value prior to invitation of bids as per the Capital Project Process Manual. It is expected that by end December 2023 the clearance of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage would be sought and by February 2024, the bidding documents would be submitted to the Central Procurement Board for vetting.

The bids are expected to be invited by April 2024 and an award of contract could be made by July 2024. The successful bidder would be allocated 18 months to complete the project.

ANSE LA RAIE – STATE LANDS - LETTER OF RESERVATION

(No. B/1500) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State lands in the region of Anse La Raie stretching from Paradise Cove Boutique Hotel to Anse La Raie Fish Landing Station, he will give a list of the letter of reservation issued therefor to date, if any, indicating in each case the extent and purpose thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LA GAULETTE – INCIDENT AT SEA – DEATH & INQUIRY

(No. B/1501) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of

Tourism whether, in regard to the accident at sea involving an off-board and a catamaran which occurred at La Gaulette, on 02 November 2023, causing the death of a woman, he will –

- (a) state if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto by his Ministry to ascertain the causes thereof, and
- (b) obtain information as to if the off-board and the catamaran held the necessary permits to operate in the said region and, if so, indicate in each case –
 - (i) the validity period thereof;
 - (ii) if the skippers thereof have a valid licence, and
 - (iii) the list of security equipment available thereon.

(Withdrawn)

GRA – PETIT GAMIN RACING TRACK – LICENSE ISSUANCE

(No. B/1502) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Horse Racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if a licence has been issued to any Horse Racing Organiser (HRO) to organize horse races at the Petit Gamin Racing Track and, if so, indicate –

- (a) since when and to whom;
- (b) if all the necessary clearances have been sought and obtained by the HRO, including fire certificate and operational permit from the Pamplemousses District Council, indicating in each case the date of issue thereof, and
- (c) the number of race days allocated and expected starting date thereof.

(Withdrawn)

STC & BETAMAX COURT PROCEEDINGS – COST & ADVISERS

(No. B/1503) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the legal fees and costs in the arbitration proceedings and court cases between the State Trading Corporation and Betamax Ltd., in connection with the termination of the contract of affreightment, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the amount thereof claimed and paid by the Corporation, indicating in each case the –

- (a) name of the legal advisers, and
- (b) amount of fees paid thereto.

(Withdrawn)

2023 U.S.-SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION - OUTCOME

(No. B/1504) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the 2023 U.S.-sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation (AGOA Forum) held recently in Johannesburg, South Africa, he will state if he has had a meeting with the United States Trade Representative and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the outcome thereof as to the renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act program, and
- (b) if discussion on the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement also formed part of the agenda.

Reply: The AGOA Forum was held on 3-4 November 2023 in Johannesburg. It was preceded by a meeting of the AGOA Ministerial Consultative Group on 2 November 2023 where AGOA eligible countries take a common stance on issues of interest to them.

The central focus from the perspective of the AGOA eligible countries was to strongly lobby for the long term extension of AGOA which expires in September 2025. For Mauritius, it was also important to ensure that the issue of graduation for countries having reached the high country status (based on the World Bank threshold) be addressed side by side with the extension of AGOA beyond 2025.

I would like to inform the House that, on 1st November 2023, before the inauguration of the Forum, the US President, Joe Biden, issued a statement expressing strong support for, I quote –

“the re-authorisation of the AGOA”

In a timely fashion and to modernise it to allow business operators both in the US and AGOA beneficiary countries to tap the economic opportunities for the coming decade. The US President further took the commitment to work with the US Congress and the African countries to renew the Act.

The message from President Biden, circulated at the Forum, therefore confirmed the commitment of the US Administration to seek a timely and long term extension of AGOA to deepen trade relation between the US and Sub Saharan African countries.

The commitment at the highest level of the US Administration set the tone for the consultations between all the stakeholders of AGOA. Beneficiary countries, business operators, and organised labour and civil society organisations were unanimous in calling for an early decision for a long-term extension of AGOA.

It is important to note, in this respect, that a letter was also issued to the Majority and Minority leaders of the US Senate by a bi-partisan caucus of 13 senators on 26 October 2023 calling for the long term extension of AGOA and urging Congress to act expeditiously, and I quote –

“to extend the program into the next decade”

There is, therefore, bi-partisan support for the extension.

Besides and as I hinted to earlier, the need for an early extension of AGOA, Mauritius faces the issue of graduation from the programme as one of the conditions of the AGOA is that High Income Countries, with high per capita Gross National Income, cannot enjoy AGOA privileges. We are currently at risk, in the near future, to lose AGOA privileged access to the US market.

Revisiting the eligibility rules of the AGOA programme will, therefore, be necessary to prevent Mauritius and the region from a disruption in production, exports, employment and stability.

In Johannesburg, the position adopted by the AGOA Ministerial consultative meeting, which was presented to the AGOA Forum both with respect to the extension of AGOA and the issue of graduation, was fully in alignment with the persistent calls for a renewal of the AGOA regime.

I will highlight the salient features of that position and I quote –

“We express the need of urgent renewal of AGOA with non-controversial amendments for a minimum of 10 years to provide the required predictability and certainty to the markets and urge the US to make the decision as early as 2024 but not later than September 2024;”

“We call for AGOA renewal and the issue of graduation should be addressed side by side in order not to jeopardise the results so far yielded and further avoid the exclusion of some African countries based on GNI per capita.”

With regard to part (a) of the question, I had, indeed, a very fruitful meeting with the US Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine Tai on 5 November 2023. I raised both the issue of the renewal of AGOA and the need to address the graduation issue after thanking her for the commitment expressed by the US President to support African economic development.

I took this opportunity to explain the challenges that we face as a SIDS and the negative impact of graduation on regional integration which has been made possible by access to the US market under AGOA. The use of the GNI per capita does not accurately capture our inherent vulnerabilities as a SIDS.

I also emphasized that graduation from the AGOA programme should not be a punishment but rather an opportunity for enhanced engagement for our bilateral economic exchange.

The USTR expressed a high level of confidence that the US Congress will address the issue of re-authorisation (or renewal) of AGOA positively before its current expiry as had already emphasised by US President Joe Biden in his Statement.

I can reassure the House that the US Administration has duly noted the concerns of Mauritius with regard to the graduation issue. We will see how best to address it at the appropriate time.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I also raised the issue of Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the USTR and proposed that the Agreement be revived. She proposed to send a representative on a scoping mission to Mauritius early next year to discuss issues that may be considered at the US-Mauritius TIFA Council. A meeting of the TIFA Council may, therefore, be expected to be held in Mauritius next year following the scoping mission.

I have written to the USTR to request that the Expert Mission visit Mauritius be held early next year.

I would like to inform the House that, in another meeting I had with staffers of Congressmen of the Ways and Means Committee of the US Congress, both Republican and Democrat staffers wanted to ascertain our interest in considering a bilateral arrangement to solve the issues that would arise if Mauritius graduates from AGOA when it reaches the High Income Country status because of its GNI per capita.

**VESSEL MV PEROS BANOS – ACQUISITION COSTS & DELIVERY
DATE**

(No. B/1505) 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 Vessel MV Peros Banos, he will state the final cost for the acquisition thereof, indicating the expected date of delivery.

(Withdrawn)

**STATISTICS MAURITIUS – EMIGRATION – AGE GROUP &
EMPLOYMENT SECTORS**

(No. B/1506) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to emigration, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Statistics Mauritius, information as to the number thereof, since 2019 to date, on a yearly basis, indicating the respective –

- (a) age group, and
- (b) employment sectors concerned therewith.

Reply: Statistics Mauritius m’a informé qu’il ne recueillait pas de données sur l’émigration.

**RESIDENCE L’OISEAU COMMUNITY CENTER - COMITÉ DE
GESTION COMPOSITION**

(No. B/1507) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Residence L’Oiseau Community Center in Floréal, she will state –

- (a) the composition of the Comité de Gestion thereof, and
- (b) if she has been made aware of the current state of the center and the surroundings thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CASINO DE MAURICE – ATTENDANCE BONUS

(No. B/1508) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Casino de Maurice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation Management Services Co. Ltd., information as to if an Attendance Bonus for year 2023 will be paid to the employees thereof and, if so, indicate the amount and conditions attached thereto and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

DR. A. G. JEETOO HOSPITAL – ELEVATORS FUNCTIONALITY

(No. B/1509) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the elevators at the Dr. Jeetoo Hospital, he will state the –

- (a) total number thereof, and
- (b) the number thereof which are currently out of order, indicating in each case –
 - (i) since when, and
 - (ii) the remedial measures that will be taken in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed that there are 11 elevators, also known as passenger lifts at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital and that all the passenger lifts are operational except for two lifts, which are out of use as follows –

- (i) One passenger lift make Thyssen, which was installed near the Catering Unit of Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital since the year 2000, broke down in January 2022. As the lift is considered to be beyond economical repair and given that it only gives access to one ward, namely L2, the administration of Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital considered that it was not a priority at this stage for an immediate replacement. Arrangements have been made to replace same in the next financial year at the estimated cost of 8 million. In the meantime, the specifications are being prepared by the user department.
- (ii) I was also informed this morning that another passenger lift make Kone, which is located near the Cardiac OPD at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital is out of order since last evening. The Service Provider responsible for repairs and maintenance has been requested to look into the matter.

In the meantime, there are two other passenger lifts which are available for patients and staff as they are located nearby on the ground floor near the X-Ray Department and the Cardiac OPD.

SUPREME COURT – PUBLIC OFFICERS - RECRUITMENT & PROMOTION CANCELLED

(No. B/1510) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to recruitment and/or promotion of public officers, he will state the number thereof having been cancelled by the Supreme Court since January 2018 to date, giving a detailed list thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CSG DISABILITY ALLOWANCE – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/1511) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* Disability Allowance of Rs2,500 allocated to persons suffering from a disability between 40 and 59 per cent as announced in the 2023-2024 Budget, she will state the criteria to benefit therefrom, indicating the –

- (a) type of disabilities concerned therewith, and
- (b) number of beneficiaries thereof since July 2023 to date.

(Withdrawn)

PORT-LOUIS, MUNICIPAL CENTRE & SPORTS COMPLEX – NOISE DISTURBANCES

(No. A/12) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the ongoing activities being held at the Municipal Centre and Sports Complex along Monseigneur Leen Street opposite Marie Reine De La Paix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if the Council is in presence of a formal complaint regarding disturbances caused to the residents of the locality by excessive high noise levels generated from these two premises until late hours at night and, if so, give details of the actions and mitigating measures being taken by the Council to address same.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it has not received any complaint with regard to any alleged disturbance or noise pollution emanating from the Municipal Centre or the Sports Complex located along Monseigneur Leen Street opposite Marie Reine de la Paix.

In addition, no such formal complaint has been addressed to the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

With regard to the Municipal Centre, which is also known as Mgr Leen Municipal Hall, the premises are rented to members of the public for social gatherings against a rental fee of Rs5,000 for an individual and Rs1,500 for an association.

All events organised at the Municipal Centre are required to end at latest by 22 00 hours in view of avoiding any disturbance in the neighbourhood. Moreover, Police assistance on site is mandatory in case alcoholic drinks are served at these events.

With regard to the Sports Complex, I wish to inform the House that the hours of operation are as follows as from 01 August 2023 –

- a) Mondays to Fridays: from 16.30 hrs to 20.30 hrs, and
- b) Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays: from 15.30 hrs to 20.30 hrs.

The closing time was reviewed from 21 30 hours to 20 30 hours by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis as the building is located in a residential area.

LE CORNU, VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES – DRAIN PROJECTS – DELAY

(No. A/13) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to drain infrastructure projects being undertaken in the region of the Institute of Islamic & Secular Studies at Le Cornu, Vallée des Prêtres, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to the reasons for the delay in the implementation thereof.

Reply: The NDU had awarded a contract to Sotravic Limitée in June 2020 for the project ‘Drainworks at Morcellement La Vallée, Le Cornu’ for a sum of Rs140,812,418.15. The scope of works which covered the region of the Institute of Islamic and Secular Studies comprised –

- (a) cleaning of existing drains over a stretch of approximately 700 metres;
- (b) construction of drains over a length of 4 kilometres;

- (c) full width road reinstatement of some 2 kilometres;
- (d) relocation of existing services, and
- (e) road reprofiling.

It is worth noting that the Land Drainage Authority had, in October 2019, declared the region of Morcellement La Vallée, Le Cornu, as being a flood prone area. The causes of flooding are –

- (a) the Institute of Islamic and Secular Studies was constructed on a natural water path;
- (b) there was considerable run-off flowing from the mountain during heavy rainfall events;
- (c) the absence of an appropriate drainage system to capture surface run-off from the mountain, and
- (d) the hydraulic inadequacy of the existing drainage system present within the residential area.

Works started on 27 July 2020 with expected completion date on 17 January 2022. However, the completion date had to be revised due to the COVID-19 restrictions, adverse weather conditions and additional road resurfacing works.

Works were subsequently completed on 08 December 2022 and the site was handed over to the Municipal City Council of Port-Louis. The question of delay in the implementation of the project which has already been completed, in particular in the region of the Institute of Islamic and Secular Studies, therefore, does not arise.

However, during the heavy rainfall event of 06 March 2023, it was observed that even after the implementation of the project ‘Drainworks at Morcellement La Vallée, Le Cornu’, the region was inundated. The impact would have been disastrous had the project not been implemented at all. As an immediate measure, the Municipal City Council of Port-Louis cleaned the existing drain network which was loaded with silts and debris following the heavy rainfall. As a permanent measure, the NDU will be undertaking the construction of three retention ponds. Currently, land is being acquired.

Moreover, Government has, in April 2023, agreed to put on hold residential morcellement projects in the region of Morcellement La Vallée, Le Cornu. I am informed

that seven applications for Morcellement permits had not been approved by the Morcellement Board in a bid not to compromise the effectiveness of the newly constructed drains and at the same time safeguarding people's lives in Morcellement La Vallée.

**ANSE LA RAIE – STATE LAND APPLICATIONS – ADVERTISEMENT &
SELECTION CRITERIA**

(No. A/14) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the State land at Anse La Raie, he will state –

- (a) if an open advertisement had been made calling for applications therefor;
- (b) the criteria considered by his Ministry for the selection of the first five applicants therefor, and
- (c) under whose recommendation, if any, a letter of reservation was issued to Luxury Suites Ltd.

(Reply not available)