



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 20 JULY 2021

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 25 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 20 July 2021

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No XIII of 2021). (In Original)

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

The Annual Report of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for July 2018 to June 2019.

C. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

(a) The Annual Reports of the Financial Intelligence Unit for the year ended 31 December 2015 and for the 18-months period January 2016 to June 2017.

(b) The Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Recovered Assets Fund Committee for the years ended 30 June 2016.and 2017

D. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

(a) The Consumer Protection (Maximum Price of Essential Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 162 of 2021)

(b) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 4) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 163 of 2021)

(c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Maximum Price of Essential Goods) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 164 of 2021)

(d) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 20) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 165 of 2021)

E. Ministry of Health and Wellness

(a) The COVID-19 (Quarantine) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 160 of 2021)

(b) The COVID-19 (Closing Down of Premises and Restriction of Activities) (No. 3) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 161 of 2021)

F. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report 2019/2020 of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I received my approved PNQ five minutes ago, with some substantial parts missing. Nevertheless, I will proceed.

MAURITIUS INVESTMENT CORPORATION LTD - FINANCING - APPLICATIONS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd., he will state the measures taken to ensure transparency as to the applications for financing that have been approved and disbursements effected to date by the Corporation.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, de prime abord, permettez-moi de remercier l'honorable Leader de l'opposition pour cette question et de remettre la création de la *MIC* dans son contexte, pour éviter toute démagogie.

Celui du 1^{er} trimestre de 2020, en plein éclatement de la crise de la Covid-19. Pour la première fois, nous avons enregistré un choc économique mondial d'une telle ampleur qu'il a affecté simultanément l'offre et la demande.

La pandémie de Covid-19 a ainsi déclenché la pire récession mondiale depuis la Grande Dépression, qui était jusqu'alors le point de référence des économistes. Les répercussions économiques sans précédent de cette crise ont été ressenties comme un séisme aux quatre coins de la planète. A tel point que toutes les régions sans exception ont vu leur PIB se contracter.

M. le président, nous n'avons pas été épargnés. C'est la pire crise de notre histoire. Le confinement et les mesures d'endiguement et de distanciation sociale ont entraîné une forte réduction de la demande pour de nombreux biens et services, pour tous les secteurs d'activité.

L'incertitude mêlée à la contraction des revenus des travailleurs et des flux de trésorerie a augmenté le risque de défaillance des entreprises et a ainsi mis en péril la stabilité de notre système bancaire et financier et *in fine*, la pérennité de notre structure économique.

M. le président, nous avons ainsi connu une contraction sans précédent de 14,9% de notre PIB l'an dernier, et sommes toujours en train d'affronter la crise. Rendez-vous compte, nous sommes revenus à un niveau de PIB, de richesse, de *GDP* équivalent à celui de 2015.

Cette crise nous a fait perdre 5 ans de richesse. Et nous savons que l'inaction aurait entraîné un effet domino, nous conduisant dans les bas-fonds du cercle vicieux socio-économique où plus de défauts de paiement, entraînent plus de faillites qui entraînent plus de licenciements, ainsi de suite.

Rappelons-nous des propos de l'ancien Président Chirac –

« Dans un environnement qui change, il n'y a pas de plus grand risque que de rester immobile ».

Notre stratégie était claire :

- Empêcher les défauts de paiements,
- Limiter les faillites, et
- Préserver l'emploi.

M. le président, c'est dans ce contexte, pour répondre à cette crise exceptionnelle que les autorités mauriciennes, et notamment la Banque de Maurice, ont pris des mesures exceptionnelles. Nous nous sommes appuyés sur une politique fiscale efficace et monétaire accommodante, qui a d'ailleurs été saluée par le FMI dans son récent communiqué. Cela a été possible car la Banque centrale, mandatée par le Gouvernement depuis 1967 pour gérer les réserves du pays, a pu constituer un important excédant de réserves depuis début 2015.

Je rappelle que les réserves appartiennent au pays et constituent un levier d'action à utiliser en temps difficiles. Permettez-moi de préciser qu'à la fin décembre 2014, les réserves internationales officielles brutes du pays s'élevaient à 124,3 milliards de roupies, soit 3,9 milliards de dollars. Cela ne représentait qu'environ 6,5 mois d'importations de biens et de services.

A la fin du mois d'avril 2020, les réserves ont plus que doublé pour atteindre 280,6 milliards de roupies, c'est-à-dire, 7 milliards de dollars, soit une couverture de 12,8 mois d'importations de biens et de services.

Cette stratégie a permis de multiplier par deux le montant des réserves en l'espace de 5 ans, et de dégager un excès de réserves d'environ 3 milliards de dollars. Et c'est précisément grâce à cela que la Banque de Maurice a pu créer la *MIC* et ainsi être un acteur essentiel dans la lutte contre la propagation de la crise.

M. le président, une partie de ces réserves excédentaires accumulées, à hauteur de 2 milliards de dollars, a ainsi été utilisée à bon escient pour créer la *MIC*.

Dans le cadre de la *COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020*, la *Bank of Mauritius Act* a été amendée pour, entre autres, permettre à la Banque de Maurice de souscrire et de détenir des actions, de fournir du capital ou d'investir dans toute société ou entreprise créée dans le but de faciliter le développement économique.

C'est dans cette optique que la *Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd* a été créée l'an dernier par la Banque de Maurice comme une subsidiaire.

D'après sa constitution, les principaux objectifs de la *MIC* sont –

- d'aider les sociétés ou entreprises systémiques et viables qui ont été financièrement impactées par la pandémie de la Covid-19 ;
- de soutenir et d'accélérer le développement économique de Maurice, et
- de générer des revenus pour constituer une base d'épargne pour les citoyens mauriciens d'aujourd'hui et de demain.

M. le président, à cet effet, il m'a été indiqué et confirmé par les éléments publiés sur le site de la *MIC* que cette dernière a déjà approuvé des facilités de financement totalisant un montant de près de 30 milliards de roupies. Ces entreprises bénéficiaires de la *MIC* représentent plus de 30,000 emplois directs et 90,000 emplois indirects, avec un apport de ces secteurs d'activités d'environ 50 % de notre PIB.

Sans ce support, la stabilité financière du pays aurait pu être mise à mal, entraînant des conséquences durables sur l'ensemble de la structure de notre économie. Sans *MIC*, notre économie et notre population auraient plongé dans le chaos économique et social.

M. le président, pour répondre à la question de l'honorable Leader de l'opposition, qui est aussi un ancien ministre des Finances, un expert-comptable, et qui a une responsabilité en tant qu'expert-comptable de ne pas aller dans les dévoilements des informations confidentielles, je précise d'entrée que la *MIC* est régie par la *Companies Act*.

Conformément à sa constitution, la *MIC* fonctionne comme un organe privé et autonome. Telle que l'est une banque commerciale ou une banque d'investissement. L'entité possède en effet des administrateurs indépendants et son propre comité d'investissement. L'ensemble des décisions qui sont prises par la *MIC* le sont en conformité avec les meilleurs standards de transparence et de bonne gouvernance. D'où l'importance des membres qui

constituent son conseil d'administration. Pour en faire la démonstration, je vais élaborer plus en détail l'ensemble des procédures auxquelles la *MIC* s'astreint à ces fins.

Premièrement, le conseil d'administration de la *MIC* a approuvé le 6 août 2020 une politique d'investissement et une charte d'investissement qui sont scrupuleusement respectées par la *MIC*. J'ai été informé par le management de la *MIC* que cette charte et les documents relatifs à la politique d'investissement seront rendus publics sous peu à travers la publication du rapport annuel de la Banque de Maurice.

Il existe ainsi des procédures bien établies en ce qui concerne l'approbation, le déboursement et le suivi des fonds décaissés. Ces procédures sont d'ailleurs dans le domaine public, accessible sur le site web de la *MIC*.

Comme pour toute société d'investissement et les banques, les demandes de fonds sont soumises à un exercice d'évaluation avant d'être soumises au comité d'investissement indépendant de la *MIC*.

Par ailleurs, il revient au comité d'investissement de faire des recommandations au conseil d'administration. Ces recommandations peuvent être positives ou négatives. Le conseil d'administration passe alors en revue les recommandations et décide d'approuver ou de rejeter ces demandes.

M. le président, conformément aux dispositions de la *Bank of Mauritius Act* et de la *Banking Act*, nous ne pouvons pas dévoiler les informations confidentielles sans un ordre de la Cour, sur les transactions entre des entités privées. De plus, selon les *Standing Orders* 21(1) et 21(2) de cette auguste Assemblée, je ne peux répondre pour le compte d'entités qui ne sont pas placées sous ma tutelle. En outre, en vertu de la section 22(1) des *Standing Orders*, une question supplémentaire ne peut pas être posée si la réponse a déjà été apportée auparavant.

Néanmoins, je souhaite informer la Chambre que la *MIC* dispose d'un site web qui, entre autres, permet d'avoir en temps réel des informations sur le nombre de demandes de fonds approuvées ainsi que le montant déboursé par secteur d'activité.

Les membres de l'Assemblée, mais également les parties prenantes et le public en général, peuvent donc accéder à ces données de façon directe et continue. C'est sur la base de ces informations que j'ai communiqué il y a quelques minutes les chiffres relatifs aux montants totaux approuvés par la *MIC*.

M. le président, un rapport détaillé sur les activités de la *MIC* est soumis sur une base trimestrielle au conseil d'administration de la Banque de Maurice en ligne avec la constitution de la *MIC*. Selon les informations qui ont été portées à ma connaissance, le dernier rapport a été présenté au conseil d'administration de la Banque centrale le 24 juin dernier. Ce qui démontre que les activités de la *MIC* sont régies par des règles de bonne gouvernance. Je dois faire ressortir que la *MIC* est une compagnie privée régie par la *Companies Act*.

En tant que subsidiaire de la Banque de Maurice, les comptes audités de la *MIC* seront consolidés dans les comptes audités de la Banque centrale qui sont rendus publics, en toute transparence, dans un délai de quatre mois après la fin de son année financière au 30 juin de chaque année. Ces comptes sont déposés à l'Assemblée nationale et sont publiés sur le site web de la Banque de Maurice.

J'ai été informé que dans certains cas ceux qui font des demandes de fonds sont des compagnies qui sont cotés à la Bourse de Maurice. Ces compagnies sont soumises aux *Listings Rules* de la *Stock Exchange of Mauritius* et ont donc le devoir de communiquer au public les assistances financières dont elles ont bénéficié de la *MIC*.

Par contre, les compagnies privées ne sont pas nécessairement soumises aux mêmes règles. De ce fait, la *MIC* ne peut en aucun cas dévoiler les informations confidentielles y afférant, car cela concerne la stratégie même de ces entreprises de droit privé.

M. le président, pour conclure ma réponse, j'ai été informé que la composition du conseil d'administration de la *MIC* vient d'être renouvelée, puisque la première année d'opération est arrivée à son terme. Ainsi, les membres du conseil d'administration de la *MIC* sont depuis le 15 juillet 2021 :

- M. Mark Florman, en tant que Président du conseil d'administration ;
- M. Mardayah Kona Yerukunondu, *First Deputy Governor* ;
- Mme Hemlata Sadhna Sewraj-Gopal, *Second Deputy Governor* ;
- M. Jean Michel Louis Rivalland, *CEO* de *Swan* ;
- M. Ragen Swaminathan ;
- M. Neemalen Gopal, et
- M. Swadicq Nuthay.

Merci.

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will not be drawn into the creation of the MIC or the gross international reserves that increase every time you borrow from overseas. I will not go into that, for this will be there for another PNQ.

I want to ask Dr. the hon. Minister concerning a statement made by the Governor of the Bank in May 2020, which I am sure he is aware of, and this is what the Governor said when the MIC was set up.

‘Transparency, good governance and independence will be the bywords - *les maîtres-mots en français* - of the MIC.’

This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, what a few days ago, what turns out now to be the previous Chairman of the MIC, I do not know if it was the reason why he was fired or he has left, but this is what Lord Desai, the previous Chairman - we have learnt that he has just left the Board - said: all the papers relating to the applications and their examination by the Investment Committee are there, and I am sure that the MIC will make them available for public consultation.

Now, we have no interaction in this House with the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius and you are the representative of the Bank of Mauritius in this House vis-à-vis all the Members of Parliament. This is why I am asking you the question: whether there is an attempt by you to put into effect the transparency that, obviously, the Chairman wants and, if so, why are you refusing transparency and what are you hiding?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, tout d’abord, je vais reprendre l’article de Lord Desai, professeur émérite de *LSE*, où il était en train de répondre aux polémiques créées concernant ce que le FMI a dit. Il avait tout simplement dit –

“Let IMF say what it says. Who cares?”

Mr X. L. Duval: Answer the question!

Dr. Padayachy: Je peux répondre ou...

Mr X. L. Duval: No. Answer the question!

Dr. Padayachy: Laissez-moi répondre ! Vous avez ...

Mr Speaker: Allow the hon. Minister to ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Jagutpal *bis*, *ki sa?*

Mr Speaker: What is happening? What are these kinds of comments?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais vous dire quelque chose. Je crois que l'honorable Leader de l'opposition n'aime pas les attaques personnelles, et j'aimerais qu'il commence par enlever ce genre d'attaque personnelle '*Jagutpal bis*' ou 'incompétent' ou je ne sais quoi, parce qu'il n'a pas cette autorité-là. Personne ne l'a désigné comme une autorité suprême pour décider qui est compétent et qui n'est pas. Donc, je me permets de répondre à sa question.

Mr Speaker: So, can you stop there?

Dr. Padayachy: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, withdraw whatever word you said.

Mr X. L. Duval: '*Incompétent*' comes from his own words.

Mr Speaker: No, withdraw it! Withdraw it and we continue.

Mr X. L. Duval: What is wrong with '*Jagutpal bis*'? It could be a compliment.

Mr Speaker: Do not lose your time. The time is yours, don't lose it.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is a compliment.

Mr Speaker: You withdraw it? Okay!

Mr X. L. Duval: And no doubt, it is a compliment, Mr Speaker, Sir. Why would I withdraw it? I am complimenting him.

Mr Speaker: But withdraw without any condition, you withdraw that?

Mr X. L. Duval: What?

Mr Speaker: The word you used. I do not want to canvass on it.

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not know what I used. I did not use 'incompetent'. So, I do not know what it is all about.

Mr Speaker: So, without condition. Okay!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have never said the word. How can I withdraw it? Please!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je reviens sur ce qu'il dit: est-ce que Lord Desai a été licencié? Vous savez, réellement on a eu de la chance d'avoir cet honneur d'avoir ce Professeur comme Président pour lancer la *MIC*, et j'ai entendu quelque part certains qui disent qu'ils aimeraient avoir le montant de ses revenus ; il touchait 1,500 dollars par mois. Il avait accepté, sous condition, qu'il va lancer la *MIC* et qu'il va résigner au bout d'un an de

mandat et qu'on va devoir trouver un remplaçant, et je l'avais dit dans une réponse dans cette auguste Assemblée. Donc, pour revenir sur ce que l'honorable membre vient de dire concernant la publication de *MIC*, *MIC* fera les publications, je viens de le dire, à travers le rapport annuel de la Banque de Maurice et à travers son site web, mais *MIC* ne peut pas aller contre la loi. S'ils ont des engagements avec les sociétés privées ou ils ne peuvent divulguer les informations privées parce qu'ils ont signé des clauses de confidentialité, on ne peut le faire.

M. le président, j'ai été moi-même un ancien gouverneur adjoint de la Banque de Maurice. J'ai signé ce genre de document. Vous savez combien d'informations étaient venues à ma connaissance concernant des sociétés de change, concernant des transactions de cartes douteuses ? Est-ce qu'une seule fois, j'ai fait référence à ces transactions ici dans cette auguste Assemblée ? Jamais ! Parce qu'il nous faut respecter les clauses de confidentialité.

Donc, monsieur le Leader de l'opposition, vous qui êtes un expert-comptable, vous êtes au courant de ces règles de confidentialité. Ce que *MIC* peut publier, il va publier. Il a déjà publié beaucoup d'informations, mais il ne peut pas publier pour faire plaisir et ils doivent vérifier la légalité avant de pouvoir publier les informations, et ce ne sera pas à moi de le faire. Ce sera à *MIC* de le faire à travers son site web ou à travers la Banque de Maurice.

Merci.

Mr X. L. Duval: Is the hon. Minister saying that MIC has been granted a Banking License by the Bank of Mauritius? Is that what he is saying or is he just saying that it is a private company like any other private company, to which here in this House, every week, hon. Ministers reply; on Metro-Express, on Côte d'Or Multisports Infrastructure, on SIC. On every single private company, this Assembly, the hon. Ministers answer the questions. Is it that he is trying to hide by pretending that MIC has a Banking License, which it does not have?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, toutes les sociétés d'investissement ont des comités d'investissement par rapport à une stratégie, et l'honorable membre qui a travaillé pour le secteur privé le sait très bien. Cette stratégie, je ne peux pas la dévoiler et la *MIC* n'a pas l'autorité pour dévoiler. Eux, ils ont travaillé sur des dossiers et ils vont publier en temps et lieu les informations relatives. Est-ce que l'honorable membre veut savoir toutes les informations de tous les hôtels et toutes les entreprises du privé ? Il faut qu'il en fasse la demande, et qu'il fasse une vraie demande. A ce moment-là, on va demander à la *MIC* de

fournir toutes les informations qu'elle peut fournir sans enfreindre la loi. A ce moment-là, on aura la réponse. Je ne peux pas venir aujourd'hui, parce que l'honorable Leader de l'opposition a posé une question, dévoiler les informations qui ne sont pas avec moi. Et je répète, encore une fois, selon les *Standing Orders* 21(1) et 21(2), je ne peux répondre sur des entités qui ne sont pas sous ma tutelle.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, he is the Minister responsible for the Bank of Mauritius and represents the shareholder of the Bank of Mauritius and ultimate shareholder of the MIC Ltd. That, he cannot deny, and he is the Minister responsible.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether, in fact, he is aware of some very, very fishy business going on where; in fact, la *bonne gouvernance* is very far from the truth and, in fact, it could be that his refusal to answer here, to Members of the Assembly, regarding our international reserves being used for fishy business, could be that there is something to hide and is proving that there is something to hide. And I will come to the fishy business.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président...

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, I will come to the fishy business.

Dr. Padayachy: Oui, je vais répondre à cette question. M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, nous avons été heurtés par la pire crise économique et tous les secteurs ont été affectés, et toutes les entreprises sont venues vers l'Etat pour demander de l'aide, que ce soit à travers la *SIC*, que ce soit à travers la *DBM*, que ce soit à travers *MIC* pour avoir de l'aide financière pour pouvoir tenir pendant un an. Je rappelle que pendant un an, on n'a pas eu un seul touriste. Presque tous les hôtels, sinon tous les hôtels, de nombreuses entreprises dans le secteur manufacturier, presque toutes les PME sont venues demander de l'aide de l'Etat et nous avons financé, et on n'a pas regardé. On a financé pour qu'il n'y ait pas un effondrement du système économique à Maurice, et comme je l'ai déjà dit, je me réfère à ce qu'a dit Blanchard : on a aidé tout le monde, quitte à aider aussi les entreprises qui auraient fait faillite quoi qu'il arrive. Mais nous, nous n'avons pas à faire ce choix pendant cette période difficile. On verra, quand on va sortir de la crise, ce qui va se passer. D'où ma question, M. le président. Si l'honorable membre est au courant de *fishy business*, comme il est en train de le dire, il peut aller voir son ami ou il peut aller déposer.

Mr X. L. Duval: A l'*ICAC*!

Dr. Padayachy: Peu importe où. Où il y a les autorités compétentes pour faire sa déposition, parce que je pense qu'il a la possibilité d'aller déposer si jamais il y a des *fishy*

business. Je n'autorise pas, M. le président, qu'on vienne dans cette Assemblée jeter comme ça des arguments, sans aucune preuve.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will give you a few.

Dr. Padayachy: Allez-y ! Donnez-nous les preuves !

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

Dr. Padayachy: Je suis là. Je vais écouter moi aussi.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes. On 12 May 2021,...

Dr. Padayachy: Oui.

Mr X. L. Duval: ...the Investment Committee turned down a very fishy application from a Company called Akai Fisheries Ltd.

Mr Speaker: No, I will stop you there. You cannot judge whether it is a fishy application or whatever. This is your own judgement and opinion, and that is a way of imputing motives.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is called Akai Fisheries, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is why it is fishy. It is called Akai Fisheries...

Mr Speaker: I am asking you this time...

Mr X. L. Duval: To remove 'fishy'.

Mr Speaker: ...to withdraw the word 'fishy'!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay, it is not fishy, but it is fisheries. Akai Fisheries Ltd, for Rs250 m., without any other guarantee that their fishing boat itself; highly risky. This Committee, on 12 May, turned down the application, but it was sent...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, we should be fair. The hon. Minister has said that he cannot get into the administration and all the details. He has to preserve the confidentiality between the various parties, and now you are disclosing everything in Parliament. You cannot use parliamentary immunity to do this kind of way.

(Interruptions)

And the others, quiet!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am happy to repeat everything that I have said outside. I have got no issue with that. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not his money. The money does not belong to Governor Seegolam or to anybody else.

Mr Speaker: No, no, do not mention these names!

Mr X. L. Duval: This money does not...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition! In this Parliament, we do not have the right to do certain things and I will be severe about that.

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. This money does not belong to him, does not belong to the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker: And you are still again saying that money does not belong to X, Y, Z.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not allowed to say the Governor's name?

Mr Speaker: No!

Dr. Boolell: Why?

Mr Speaker: You are not allowed. Others, quiet!

Dr. Boolell: What do you mean 'others quiet'?

Mr Speaker: Others, quiet!

Dr. Boolell: Who are you talking to?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Others, quiet! Hon. Dr. Boolell, you are challenging my authority?

Dr. Boolell: I am not challenging your authority. I am saying that...

Mr Speaker: And this is what you are doing! You do not have the floor!

Dr. Boolell: I am...

Mr Speaker: You do not have the floor!

Dr. Boolell: But...

Mr Speaker: Quiet! You do not have the floor!

Dr. Boolell: You are not talking to your kid!

Mr Speaker: I am telling you, quiet, you do not have the floor! Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber!

Dr. Boolell: Shame! Shame on this Chamber!

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Shame!

Dr. Boolell: Shame to this Chamber!

Mr Speaker: I am naming you!

Dr. Boolell: You are a shame to this Parliament!

Mr Speaker: I am naming you!

Dr. Boolell: Naming you...

Mr Speaker: I am naming you! Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Ale aprann!*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: *Bachara...!*

Mr Speaker: Oh!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

I am suspending the Sitting!

At 12.02 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 12.19 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated!

MOTIONS - S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes, Dr. Boolell, I beg under Standing Order 17(3) to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move, under Standing Order 29(1), to present a motion without notice.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes, Dr. Boolell, I beg to move that the hon. First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes, Dr. Boolell, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's and the next eight Sittings.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may continue. You have a few minutes!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have seven minutes; I calculated, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, may I ask the hon. Minister, once again, since we are dealing with public money and, therefore, on this particular matter I raised, this project was refused by the Investment Committee, yet that decision was reversed by the Board of Directors. Does he find that to be good governance?

Mr Speaker: No! Again, hon. Minister, I will intervene. That was my ruling which brought the House on fire! So, hon. Leader of the Opposition, bear with me, I disallow this question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, bear with me, after having heard of what *magouille* has been happening at the State Trading Corporation (STC), all coming at...

Mr Speaker: No, what are you talking about?

Mr X. L. Duval: The House...

Mr Speaker: There is no reference! There is no comparison, nothing! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you listened to the Minister. He said that no supplementary question may emanate from his statement. So,...

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

Mr Speaker: ...if you do not have a supplementary question related to the main topic, then...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the main topic is transparency in the affairs, which has been even suggested and brought about by the ex-Chairman himself. So, I feel totally empowered and right on behalf of all the 1.3 million of Mauritians who are taxpayers, who have reserves at the Bank of Mauritius, to ask the hon. Minister where information has come to me concerning fishy business there. Now, I cannot go to the ICAC because I, myself...

Mr Speaker: Again, you are saying 'fishy business', all these things. You have been a Minister of Finance, you have been an acting Prime Minister; you know how things work in this country.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will move on.

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: I will move on, Mr Speaker Sir.

Mr Speaker: Only two minutes left.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will move on to another case, one of Mr Vinash Gopee who has taken...

Mr Speaker: Do not mention any names. Please withdraw that name!

Mr X. L. Duval: I withdraw 'Mr Vinash Gopee'. He has, Mr Speaker, Sir, taken up to now Rs500 m. on one project...

Mr Speaker: No, I disallow this question, and if you have no further questions, then Question Time is over. We move...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have further questions.

Mr Speaker: Let me hear your next question, exceptionally.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am keeping my calm as you can see. I want to ask the hon. Minister how many cases have been approved directly by the Board of Directors although the

Governor himself and the website of the Bank of Mauritius say that all should be processed by the IC? How many cases, including the case of Omnicane for Rs4.5 billion, not considered by experts of IC; dealt with directly? Is not that a scandal, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker: I disallow this question because it is breaking the clause of confidentiality.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is breaking ...

Mr Speaker: I have my duty as Speaker. So, time is over! I think you do not have many supplementary questions for this time. So, let us move to Prime Minister's Question Time!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQs B/726 and B/728 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister. PQ B/709 has been withdrawn.

Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

MR G.F.W. - DEATH - INQUIRY

(No. B/702) 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 death of Mr G.W. at Mare aux Vacoas on 18 May 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to express my deepest sympathy to the bereaved family of late Mr G.F.W. who passed away in tragic circumstances. He was a Zimbabwe national who obtained Mauritian nationality on 11 December 2017, was a Director of D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd and resided at *Morcellement Maingard Tamarin*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Tuesday 18 May 2021, Officers of Vacoas Police Station were called by the Water Resources Unit to attend to a case at Mare aux Vacoas Reservoir and on reaching thereat, that is, about 10:15 hours, they found SAMU personnel giving medical attention to Mr G.F.W., aged 54, who was lying inert on the reservoir bank.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also been informed by the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities that in March 2020, D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd was awarded a contract by the

Water Resource Unit (WRU) to carry out temporary repair works to the submerged external surface of the La Marie Intake Tower of Mare aux Vacoas Reservoir where leakages had been detected. Under this contract, D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd intervened underwater on 27 May, 28 May 2020 and 17 June 2020 to attend to the repair works. Before effecting the repairs, D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd had already carried out an exploratory dive at the site in February 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that prior to the arrival of Police Officers, officers of the Water Resources Unit (WRU) and the Central Water Authority who were present on site have reported the following –

- (i) with a view to carrying out permanent repair works at the La Marie Intake Tower of Mare aux Vacoas Reservoir, the Water Resources Unit of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities enlisted the services of D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd to undertake a survey of the external surface of the Tower on 18 May 2021;
- (ii) prior to undertaking any diving operations, officers of the WRU accompanied Mr G.F.W. and Mr B.J.C. of D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd inside the La Marie Intake Tower of Mare aux Vacoas Reservoir to take stock of the condition of the structure;
- (iii) on the same day at 09:20 hours, after having taken stock of the conditions of the structure of the Tower, Mr G.F.W. carried out a briefing exercise with his other five employees. Thereafter, Mr G.F.W. and Mr B.J.C. dived to conduct the survey;
- (iv) after some 10 to 15 minutes, Mr B.J.C. came to the surface of the reservoir and informed all present thereat that Mr G.F.W. was having difficulties under water;
- (v) officers of the WRU immediately called the SAMU, Fire and Rescue Services, National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre, and
- (vi) the Police who in turn called the *Groupe d'Intervention de la Police Mauricienne* (GIPM).

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that officers of the Fire and Rescue Services arrived on site at around 09:55 hours to carry out rescue operation. Before starting the operation, the officers carried out a risk assessment and they went down approximately 7 meters inside the Intake Tower.

Thereafter, the Fire and Rescue Services Team returned to the top of the Tower and they saw the body afloat and the employees of D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd were trying to pull out Mr G.F.W. with a rope which had already been attached on the top of Intake Tower. The Swift Water Rescue Team of the Fire and Rescue Services brought Mr G.F.W. on land and the latter was handed over to SAMU, which was already on site.

SAMU attempted to reanimate Mr G.F.W. In the meantime, Officers of the Vacoas Police Station reached the site. Subsequently, the Police Officers of Vacoas Police Station cordoned the area.

Shortly afterwards, SAMU certified that Mr G.F.W. had passed away. Subsequently, the body was removed from the spot and conveyed to the mortuary of Victoria Hospital for autopsy, where the Police Medical Officer attributed the cause of death as being ‘asphyxia due to drowning’. Thereafter, the body was handed over to relatives of the deceased for burial.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a Police inquiry has been initiated and is ongoing.

Ms J. Bérenger: Je me joins au Premier ministre pour partager à nouveau mes sympathies à la famille du défunt. Je suis sûre que le Premier ministre sera d’accord que toutes formes d’empathie et d’humanité aident à traverser les épreuves difficiles telles que le deuil. Mais il se trouve que dans cette situation, comme dans beaucoup d’autres que nous avons entendues dans le passé, pas plus tard que la semaine dernière, les autorités concernées non seulement ne communiquent pas leurs sympathies à la famille, mais surtout ne communiquent pas le décès, lui-même, au parent le plus proche, ce qui a pour conséquence que les proches de la famille du défunt peuvent être amenés à vivre un autre traumatisme en apprenant la nouvelle du décès dans les médias ou sur les réseaux sociaux. Donc, j’aimerais demander au Premier ministre s’il peut nous dire quel est le protocole d’information ou la prise en charge des familles dans de telles situations où un accident mortel survient dans un lieu qui est sous la responsabilité de l’Etat, et qu’est-ce qu’il fera pour s’assurer que ce protocole sera respecté à l’avenir?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure that, at the level of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, and at the level of the WRU and of the CWA, they must have a process whereby, in case of any accident involving a person, information is immediately passed on to the family of that person. I do not have the detail with me, but I can find out first

about what is the protocol, and second, about what was done in terms of communicating such information to the bereaved family.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I also join the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Member to pass on my sympathy to the family. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House if the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has also initiated an inquiry?

The Prime Minister: I am informed that when the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Ministry learnt about the case of late G.F.W., and in line with section 24 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2005, the Acting Divisional Occupational Safety and Health Officer and one Occupational Safety and Health Officer started an investigation on Tuesday 18 May 2021, which in fact did actually take place on that date, and also on Tuesday 01 June 2021. In the course of this investigation, I am informed that different persons have been interviewed. But since the deceased was one of the directors of D.A.Y Marine & Services Ltd and not an employee thereof, I am informed that the advice of the DPP has been sought in a letter dated Thursday 17 June 2021 on the way forward, and I am informed that the reply is being awaited.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: Thank you. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the Ministry has asked and obtained a proper risk assessment report prior to commencement of work on site?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I know and what I have been informed, the company's services were retained in the past by the Water Resources Unit and the very same concerned persons had, on two occasions, carried out repairs at the Intake Tower and on four occasions they had conducted underwater survey.

These activities were effected in 2020, but I am informed that prior to that, they carried out exploratory diving at the site in order to assess how they would be carrying out those repairs in the future. I do not have the details with regard to what kind of exploratory diving they did and it would not be appropriate for me, even if the details would have been communicated to me, to mention them. In fact, it would be for the inquiry to reveal all such information and see what was done and what should maybe have been done.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Merci, M. le président.* May we know from the hon. Prime Minister how the valve, which should have been closed prior to the dive, was easily closed manually a few metres from the accident by a member of the Fire Department which arrived some time later to recover the body? How this could not have been done by the members of the Water Resources Unit and the CWA who were present and who could have saved a life?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is up to the inquiry to reveal whether the valve could, in fact, have been closed or not, but I also have information that when in 2020 they undertook this first - not first diving because I do not know whether, before, their services had been retained - diving for carrying out a survey prior to their doing the works later on, I am informed, and I say this *sous réserve*, that the valve had remained open even at that time; and it was not closed. Whether it was defective or whether it could have been closed, I cannot say, but I am informed that the valve had always remained open and they did, in fact, carry out the survey and the repairs before. This is the information that I am giving. I am not passing any judgment with regard to that case.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that late Mr G.W. had any medical condition that would have contributed to his drowning, Mr G.W. being a *chevronné* in undertaking underwater diving? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: I am informed that he is, in fact, a professional diver, well-qualified to undertake this kind of job. I do not know whether he had any medical condition. I do not think it would be proper, even if I had this information, to reveal it to the House, but, anyway, I am sure that issue will also be addressed in the course of the inquiry.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Ms J. Bérenger: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister give the guarantee that the necessary training is being given to those officers of the Water Resources Unit and of the CWA to know the functioning of every valve, pipe and security measures for the Mare aux Vacoas so that this kind of accident does not happen again and that this affair will not be brushed under the carpet? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, when I learnt about this case and even more so, when a question is addressed to me, I have, of course, asked for further information, and I

can assure the hon. Member that the Police have already started an inquiry. Statements have been taken and statements will also be taken from all those who can enlighten the Police about this case.

With regard to training, I am sure that proper training is normally given to officers, whether of the Water Resources Unit or of the CWA. The issue to be determined is about this valve, whether it was in good working condition or not. Only the inquiry will reveal that, but rest assured that we shall see light, and I am sure that the Police will do everything necessary to establish how the accident occurred.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

MEDIA TRUST – BOARD & ACTIVITIES

(No. B/703) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Media Trust, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) present composition thereof and
- (b) activities carried out thereat since January 2020 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Section 5 of the Media Trust Act provides that the Board of Trustees of the Media Trust shall consist of –

- (a) a Chairperson;
- (b) a representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of information;
- (c) a representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of finance;
- (d) a representative of registered Associations of Journalists;
- (e) a representative of the Electronic Media, and
- (f) four representatives of the Press, two of whom shall be Editors-in-Chief, elected by the Press.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Media Trust, which was inactive since 2006, was constituted in June 2015 and thereafter reconstituted in 2017 and 2019. The Board is now fully operational.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, the present composition of the Board of Trustees of the Media Trust is as follows –

The Chairperson: Mr Chayman Surajbali, PMSM, and the Members –

- (i) Mrs K. Fulena-Boodhoo, representative of the Government Information Service;
- (ii) Mrs Geerisha Devi Nunkoo-Moorut, representative of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development;
- (iii) Mr Taluck Beeharry, representative of the Electronic Media;
- (iv) Mr Michael François, Editor-in-Chief, representative of the Press;
- (v) Mr Jean-Claude Le Roy, Editor-in-Chief, representative of the Press;
- (vi) Ms Fateema Capery, Journalist, representative of the Press, and
- (vii) Mr Jean Marie Gangaram, Journalist, representative of the Press.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that in line with its objectives, the Media Trust has, since January 2020 to date, conducted 18 activities, namely 10 in 2020 and 8 as at Monday 19 July 2021. The activities include training, workshop, seminar and webinar destined for members of the Press.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the list of activities carried out by the Media Trust since January 2020 to date.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his answer, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned Section 5 of the Media Trust Act, where he mentioned about a representative of registered Associations of Journalists. Could the hon. Prime Minister give us more detail about this? Because as far as we know, I do not think we have a registered Association of Journalists. Thank you.

The Prime Minister: I am informed that the Registrar of Association was consulted on Monday 02 August 2019 when the Board was being reconstituted. I am also informed that there was no registered Association the name of which included the word ‘journalist’. I suppose that means that there is no such registered Association. Probably, but I do not know if there is one under another name, but this is the information which has been communicated to us by the Registrar of Associations.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In 2010, if I am not mistaken, there was a report on Media Law and Ethics in Mauritius, which some quarters of the media

qualified as, I quote, '*Brouillon d'un futur Media Commission Bill*'. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House where matters stand please?

The Prime Minister: I can recall that since 2006, the Media Trust has not been functioning properly. I can also recall that several questions have been put in this House to the then Prime Minister who stated, I think since 2007, that a reform will be undertaken and that the reform with regard to media in general, including, of course, the Media Trust, is being worked out; since the same year of 2007. And you can imagine, even in the year 2014, it was still being worked out. I think one will appreciate the response each time question was put with regard to that. But this is a different issue. I want to focus on the question itself with regard to the Media Trust. I am happy that we got it started and functioning, and I am sure that members of the Board together with their Chairperson will continue to carry out activities in furtherance of the welfare of the media people.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know from the Prime Minister how many Board meetings they have had since January to date?

The Prime Minister: The number of meetings is as follows –

- (i) 2018: 12;
- (ii) 2019: 10;
- (iii) 2020: 11, and
- (iv) 2021 at present: 5

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: The question has already been canvassed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Media Trust Act, which dates since 1994, mentions about the object of the Trust whereby it says that one of the objectives is to carry out such other activities as the Board may decide. With the advent of the digital media and also with the increasing disinformation currently, following the COVID-19 pandemic, could the hon. Prime Minister consider to extend the purview of the Media Trust, the functioning of the Media Trust, instead of only being there for training; if it could go way beyond this so that to give more further support to journalists?

The Prime Minister: If you look at the objects according to law, they have a number of activities that they can run for those who are in that sector, like organised seminars, conferences, workshops and training courses, and also carry out any such activities as the Board may decide. I am sure, *et je pense, M. le président, qu'ils vont aussi bouger avec le temps ; surtout les gens de la presse, que ce soit écrite ou parlée. Donc, ils vont sûrement se servir des technologies qui sont appropriées.* That is already there and it is then up to the Board to take initiatives with regard to any project they want to undertake or any incentive that they want to give to those involved.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that question B/728 has been withdrawn. Hon. Uteem!

PLAINE SOPHIE - WIND FARM PROJECT - FORGERY IN BANK WRITING

(No. B/704) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police inquiry into the complaint made by the Central Electricity Board, in November 2018, in an alleged case of forgery in a bank writing relating to the wind farm project at Plaine Sophie, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of persons –

- (a) interviewed;
- (b) arrested;
- (c) prosecuted, and
- (d) convicted in connection therewith.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 30 November 2018, a case of Forgery in Bank Writing was reported to the Central Criminal Investigation Department by the Central Electricity Board.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that during the course of an inquiry in this case, eight persons have been interviewed.

Regarding parts (b), (c) and (d) of the question, I am also informed that, so far, one Mr A. I. has been arrested. No person has as yet been prosecuted or convicted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that the inquiry into the case is ongoing.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister just mentioned that the case was reported two and a half years ago. Does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal that up to date, no one from the Central Electricity Board has been inquired in connection with this case?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did say in my answer that eight persons have been interviewed, but, unfortunately, statements of persons who have been interrogated, for example, are not normally communicated to me. I cannot thus say whether or not, amongst those eight persons, there is anyone from CEB. But I can, of course, find out, without giving any name. I can find out whether anyone has been questioned.

Mr Uteem: But if this was in relation to two forged bank guarantees that were given by a consortium to the Central Electricity Board, does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal that after these two forged bank guarantees had been given for a public project, the CEB did not consider it necessary to terminate the contract with that consortium?

The Prime Minister: I think it has been terminated. I saw that information somewhere.

Mr Uteem: It was terminated by the consortium on 30 September, one and a half years later.

The Prime Minister: The contract has been terminated, but I need to find out; I saw it in my notes somewhere. But, anyway, I do not want to take the time of the House. I do not have it with me.

Mr Uteem: Does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal that this company continued, not only with this project with the CEB, but also with other tenders? Does not he find it necessary to give a good signal, that anyone guilty of forgery in a public procurement exercise would be disqualified from participating in any tender exercise or whatever public contract involved?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Member being a lawyer should the more so himself realise that there is an inquiry which is ongoing. The case has not yet gone to Court. So far, no one has been convicted. We can say that the subject of the inquiry is a forged document. Each one can come to his own conclusion. But it is not for me, it is not for the hon. Member to pass a judgement and to say that there is already a conviction. It is for the

Court to decide. So, let the case proceed. First of all, when the investigation is concluded, it will go to the DPP; the DPP will then advise, and then the matter goes to Court. Then, we will see whether there is a conviction, and then, of course, we can decide, based on that conviction. Otherwise, it is going to be quite arbitrary to pass a judgment and decide before a conviction.

Mr Speaker: Time over! I suspend the Sitting for one and a half hour.

At 12.56 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.32 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Quirin!

COVID-19 VACCINE - FAKE CERTIFICATES - INQUIRY

(No. B/711) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the recent discovery of alleged fake COVID-19 Vaccine Certificates, he will state if his Ministry has initiated an inquiry thereinto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been reported in the media that a watchman posted at the James Burty David Gymnasium Vaccination Centre was found with some Vaccination Cards at his home on 04 July 2021 by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit.

I am also informed that the watchman was arrested and remanded to Police cell on Monday 12 July 2021 and he was released on bail on 14 July 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the statement made by hon. Dr. Aumeer on Tuesday 15 June 2021, two officers from the Counterterrorism Unit falling under the Prime Minister's Office, called at my Ministry on Thursday 17 June 2021 and enquired as to whether the Ministry was aware that fake COVID-19 Vaccination Cards were being circulated.

The vaccination plan and the different steps for the vaccination process were explained to the officers. I am further informed that an inquiry is still in progress.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, peut-on connaître de l'honorable ministre, à ce stade, le nombre de faux certificats de vaccin qui sont en circulation ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the inquiry is on; we do not have the figures yet. Once the figures will be provided by the Police, I will be able to give the numbers.

Mr Quirin: Puisque ce type de certificat laisse présager qu'on peut facilement falsifier, est-ce que l'honorable ministre, au niveau de son ministère, préconise de revoir le type de certificat de façon à ce que ce soit beaucoup plus *safe* à l'avenir ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, the Ministry of IT - particularly the hon. Minister, his personal commitment - is developing a secured system for the capture of the COVID-19 Vaccination Card and the Ministry is developing a digital COVID-19 Vaccination Pass that will carry information about –

- the holder's name;
- the name of the vaccines administered;
- the number of doses administered, and
- the date of vaccination.

This pass will also be digitally signed and will carry out a QR code for verification purposes. This is in the pipeline; it is being developed.

Mr Quirin: Peut-on savoir aussi, M. le président, si les détenteurs de ces cartes - des nouvelles cartes qui seront remises aux détenteurs - ceux qui se font vacciner - pourront prendre connaissance eux-mêmes des données de cette carte si jamais ils veulent se rappeler de la date qu'ils ont été se faire vacciner la première dose, deuxième dose, quel vaccin, etc., est-ce qu'il sera possible pour ces détenteurs d'avoir accès à ces informations ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Any personal detail for somebody who is detaining a card, he will have access to his personal information.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/733 will be replied by hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

PQ B/736 will be replied by Dr. the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

PQ B/778 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

PQs B/745, B/746, B/747, B/748, B/760, B/761, B/762, B/763, B/764, B/765, B/768, B/770, B/772 and B/773 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Quirin, next question!

FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS 2020-2021 - RESUMPTION

(No. B/712) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the football championships 2020-2021, he will state where matters stand as to the proposed resumption thereof following his recent meeting with the Mauritius Football Association.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, with your permission, I would like to convey my deepest sympathy to the relatives of Mr Hervé Flore, who passed away on 18 July 2021. Mr Hervé Flore was actively involved in the field of sports, in particular cycling. He had been the President of the '*Fédération Mauricienne de Cyclisme*' for the period 2008 to 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question, as we are all aware, sport activities came to a halt since last March following sanitary restrictions. However, athletes preparing for major international competitions in view of the Olympic and Paralympic games have been allowed to train.

As regards football, all tournaments were put on hold. Since mid-June 2021, I have had several meetings with representatives of the Mauritius Football Association (MFA) to prepare for the resumption of the football championships 2020-2021 as soon as sanitary conditions would allow.

During these meetings, I reiterated the fact that we are in favour of the resumption of the football championships 2020-2021, provided that sanitary protocols are strictly adhered to. I even offered my full support to the MFA by putting at its disposal our stadiums with the possibility of waiving rental fees and providing transport facilities for the conveyance of players, if required.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the MFA on 16 July 2021 that its Managing Committee had decided to declare the season 2020/21 null and void. It thus informed that there would be no declared championships, promotions or relegations for all the national leagues. On 15 July 2021, the MFA issued a communiqué towards that end.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je pense que l'honorable ministre - il vient de le dire d'ailleurs - a pris connaissance comme nous tous du communiqué émis par la MFA jeudi soir. De ce fait, peut-il nous dire si la MFA a effectivement écrit à la FIFA pour demander une extension de ces compétitions à un certain moment ? Est-ce que l'honorable ministre a pris

connaissance de cette lettre, s'il existe, et s'il dispose d'une copie de cette lettre de bien vouloir la déposer sur la table de l'Assemblée nationale?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, la *MFA*, à plusieurs reprises dans les différentes réunions que nous avons eues, a informé le ministère que l'Association a écrit à la *FIFA* pour demander une extension de la ligue. Nous avons écrit à la *MFA* pour demander une copie de la lettre afin qu'éventuellement je puisse déposer à l'Assemblée. Malheureusement, nous n'avons pas eu de retour et dans une des réunions j'avais même dit à la *MFA* que nous, au niveau du ministère, nous allons écrire à la *FIFA* pour demander des clarifications en ce qu'il s'agit de la demande d'extension faite par la Fédération Mauricienne de Football.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tour!

Mrs Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May we know from the hon. Minister whether the MFA receives any funding from the Ministry in the positive, what is the quantum?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, depuis l'année dernière la *MFA* ne bénéficie d'aucune allocation de budget de la part du ministère. Ce que le ministère fait, c'est bien sûr le support aux clubs, que nous avons toujours fait à travers le *regionalisation grant*. Donc, ce sont les clubs qui reçoivent une allocation et ce n'est pas la *MFA* qui reçoit une certaine somme.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Would the hon. Minister tell us why they have stopped football tournaments in Rodrigues despite we are COVID free; there is not any case of COVID-19 in Rodrigues?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, dans la correspondance de la *MFA* il est stipulé que toutes les ligues ont été *cancelled* et je suis tout à fait d'accord avec l'honorable membre.

Mr Toussaint: La ligue à Rodrigues aurait pu continuer vu qu'il n'y a aucun cas et que les activités sportives, il n'y a aucune restriction sur Rodrigues. Ça a été une décision du *Managing Committee* de la *MFA*. Enfin, je suis tout à fait d'accord avec l'honorable membre. Je trouve cela regrettable.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, trois mois sans compétition, les clubs ont consacré beaucoup de temps et d'énergie alors que des millions de roupies en terme de *grants* de l'Etat

ont été alloués aux clubs. Le ministre ne trouve-t-il pas cela inconcevable que pour la deuxième année consécutive que les différents championnats de Football sont annulés, pas de rencontre internationale depuis 2019 et tout cela à cause de l'incompétence de certains à la tête de la *MFA* ? N'est-il pas temps que le ministère des Sports écrive à la *FIFA* pour dénoncer cette situation?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, je trouve moi aussi très regrettable que les ligues ont été annulées. Cependant, ça a été une décision du *Managing Committee*. Je ne puis faire interférence dans la gestion de la *MFA*. Comme je l'ai dit précédemment, au niveau du ministère et avec l'accord de la *MFA*, nous avons déjà écrit à la *FIFA* pour demander des éclaircissements en ce qu'il s'agit de la demande de la *MFA* pour l'extension de la ligue. Donc, on va attendre une réponse et à partir de là on va voir quelles sont les autres actions que nous pouvons prendre.

Mr Speaker: Next substantive question!

Mr Quirin: Je peux avec une dernière question supplémentaire ?

Mr Speaker: On a eu cinq questions. C'est bon là.

Mr Quirin: J'ai eu deux seulement.

Mr Speaker: You have three questions.

Mr Quirin: No, that is the second one I have just asked.

Mr Speaker: Now, you are starting discussing with the Chairperson.

Mr Quirin: If you want me to go to the next, I will go to the next. Okay.

Mr Speaker: Please listen! Is it for a Member to ask question to the Chair?

Mr Quirin: I am not asking question. I am just telling you that you have given me only two supplementaries. That is all. I am not arguing with you at all.

Mr Speaker: Are you putting your question or not? The next question?

Mr Quirin: B/713!

Mr Speaker: That is it.

Mr Quirin: Thank you.

HIGH-LEVEL SPORTS ASSISTANCE SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES - ALLOWANCE

(No. B/713) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)

asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to grants allocated to athletes through the High-Level Sports Units, he will state if his Ministry has decided to apply a decrease in the quantum thereof and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) reasons therefor, and
- (b) new quantum in each case.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, at the very outset, I would like to pay a special tribute to the Mauritian delegation which is presently in Tokyo for the Olympics Games. All our best wishes and encouragement go to the whole delegation, in particular the eight athletes and their coaches and like I always said, *Allez-Maurice!*

With regard to the present question, I would like to inform the House that a sum of Rs16.9 m. was disbursed for the payment of a monthly allowance to the beneficiaries of the High-Level Sports Assistance Scheme for financial year 2020-2021. My Ministry had maintained the same quantum during the last financial year in spite of lack of visibility of our athletes in regional and international games. I am conscious of the fact that though such allowance is not a salary per se, it contributes to a large extent to the physical and mental well-being of our high-level athletes. As the House is aware, the COVID-19 pandemic being the trouble-maker, has impacted negatively on our economy leading to a decrease in the financial resources allocated to most ministries for the financial year 2021-2022, not sparing my own Ministry.

In such case, my Ministry inevitably had no choice but to decrease the allowance payable to beneficiaries of the High-Level Sports Units. A decrease of 25% in the quantum of financial assistance allocated to them with effect from July 2021 will thus be applicable. In this context, officers of my Ministry had consultative meetings with the representatives of the National Sports Federations concerned. Nevertheless, the High-Level Sports Unit is giving a special allowance on a case-to-case basis to athletes participating in major international competitions. Likewise, the eight athletes as well as the three para-athletes participating in the Tokyo Olympics Games and Paralympic Games, respectively, have received a special allowance for their preparation.

For the moment, we have three para-athletes qualified but we have just been informed that there is another para-athlete who has received her qualification and as soon as the Federation sends an official letter to the Ministry, we will cater for her also. Moreover, as

announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022, a one-off grant of Rs10,000 will be provided to listed high-level athletes for the purchase of sports equipment. Arrangements are underway for the disbursement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this context, I seize this opportunity to thank again the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for this exceptional measure in these challenging economic times.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information relating to part (b) of the question.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, à mon tour - j'ai omis de le faire précédemment - de présenter mes vives sympathies aux proches de M. Hervé Flore qui est décédé tout récemment. Donc, je suppose que l'honorable ministre a dû prendre connaissance des déclarations de certains athlètes de haut-niveau à ce propos. Entre autres, je citerai l'haltérophile Roilya, je dis ce qui a été dit et rapporté dans les medias, ceux qui ont exprimé leur déception par rapport à la baisse de leurs bourses. De ce fait, j'ai bien compris les difficultés du moment, etc. mais l'honorable ministre compte-t-il revoir cette décision qui paraît contraire à la promotion du sport de haut-niveau, dans un proche-avenir ou dans quelques temps?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, je comprends tout à fait ce que l'honorable membre est en train de dire mais comme je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, nous allons au cas par cas, ceux et celles qui se préparent pour des compétitions internationales, nous allons au cas par cas les aider financièrement, avec des équipements et d'autres facilités. Et puisque l'honorable membre a cité le cas de notre haltérophile Roilya, qui se trouve actuellement à Tokyo, donc, Roilya reçoit une assistance de R 19,500 mensuellement du *high-level* et elle reçoit aussi une assistance financière de R 15,000 mensuellement de la part du *Mauritius Olympics Committee*. *This is called the Olympics Solidarity.*

Et, additionnellement, dans le cadre de sa préparation spécifique pour les JO de Tokyo, nous avons déboursé une somme d'à peu près R 262,500 pour la préparation spécifique de Roilya. Elle a été en stage, bloquée à Pointe Jérôme, avec son entraîneur et, donc, dans les R 262,500, cela comprend les repas, le massage, les *food supplements*, les services d'une nutritionniste, d'un psychologue et aussi nous avons donné une allocation additionnelle dans le cadre de cette préparation à Roilya, une allocation de R 4,000

additionnelle pour cette préparation aussi bien que pour son coach qui a lui aussi reçu une allocation additionnelle de R 2,000.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to this scheme, can the hon. Minister tell us how many Rodriguans are involved into such scheme?

Mr Toussaint: Certainement, M. le président, nous avons des athlètes d'origine Rodriguaise qui font partie de ce *scheme*. Il y a une longue liste.

De mémoire, je sais que par exemple, Mervin Clair, qui est d'origine Rodriguais et qui se retrouve à Tokyo actuellement, notre boxeur, et *we cross fingers for him*, fait partie de ce *scheme*.

La handisport, Brigila Clair, fait partie de ce *scheme*. Récemment, nous avons présenté Eddy Capdor, para-athlète, qui va aller lui aussi à Tokyo pour les Jeux paralympiques, est d'origine Rodriguais. Donc, il y a plusieurs. Il y a plusieurs, je peux rassurer l'honorable membre et certainement nos frères et nos sœurs de Rodrigues, qu'il y a des athlètes d'origine Rodriguaise, qui bénéficient du *High-Level Support Assistance Scheme*.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire si tous ces athlètes sont couverts par une police d'assurance? Nous avons eu dans le passé, il y a eu pas mal d'athlètes qui ont eu des problèmes durant l'entraînement, pendant les compétitions et même après, et qui ont souffert beaucoup de préjudice. Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire si, pour tous ces athlètes, il y a une police d'assurance globale, sectorielle qui couvre ces athlètes?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, en ce qu'il s'agit de l'assurance des athlètes, cela revient bien sûr à la fédération d'assurer leurs athlètes. Mais, je n'ai pas ces renseignements avec moi, c'est une longue liste à compiler. Donc, je vais chercher les renseignements avec les différentes fédérations.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Quirin: Oui, merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il donner la garantie à la Chambre que cette baisse dans les allocations des athlètes de haut niveau ne risque en aucun cas de provoquer une démotivation sur les athlètes de haut niveau?

Mr Toussaint: Non, moi je ne peux pas donner une garantie que les athlètes ne soient pas démotivés. Ça, c'est personnel. Mais, je peux donner la garantie que moi, personnellement et mon ministère et tout le gouvernement, nous allons soutenir nos athlètes autant que possible. Et, je dois dire aussi, M. le président, que nous avons un financement pour différents types de compétitions.

L'année prochaine dans le cadre des Jeux de la CJSOI, nous avons un budget de 5 millions de roupies, qui va aider à la préparation de nos athlètes.

Les Jeux des îles arrivent vite. Ce sera en 2023 à Madagascar, dans 2 ans. En 2019, à pareil époque, nous étions en plein dans les Jeux des îles et pour la préparation de nos athlètes pour les Jeux des îles dans 2 ans, il y a un autre budget de 5 millions de roupies.

Donc, nous avons quand même, pas mal de budget au fur et à mesure que les compétitions arrivent pour soutenir nos athlètes et je remercie le ministre des Finances, je remercie le Premier ministre, qui depuis qu'il est à la tête, il a compris l'importance que nous accordons aux athlètes.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/741, B/742, B/752, B/753, B/754, B/755, B/756, B/757, B/758, B/759, B/766 and B/767 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Quirin, move to your next question!

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION & CARER'S ALLOWANCE – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/714) 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 Basic Invalidity Pension payable to persons suffering from physical and/or mental disability, she will state, in financial years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 respectively, the number of –

- (a) beneficiaries thereof, indicating the criteria applied therefor, and
- (b) beneficiaries thereof who ceased to benefit thereunder, indicating the number of appeal cases in respect thereof lodged before the Medical Board as at to date.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since our Government took office in 2014, we have had the best interests of persons with disabilities at heart. A series of measures have been taken to improve their lives. One of the landmark measures is the significant increase in the Basic Invalidity Pension and the Carer's Allowance.

The Basic Invalidity Pension has increased from Rs3,267 prior to December 2014 to Rs5,000 in December 2014, and then to Rs9,000 in December 2019.

The Carer's Allowance has also increased from Rs2,286 prior to December 2014 to Rs3,000 in December 2014, and then to Rs3,500 in 2019.

The House will also recall that in 2015, our Government corrected a major injustice towards children with disabilities, aged less than 15 years, suffering from a disability of not less than 60%.

These children were not eligible to the Basic Invalidity Pension. They were only receiving a social aid which is means tested. We took the decision to extend the Basic Invalidity Pension to children aged less than 15 years. This measure was a relief for many families.

Moreover, in the Budget 2020-2021, the age criteria for persons who are bed ridden or severely disabled to benefit from monthly domiciliary medical visits were removed. Around 25,000 beneficiaries benefited from the monthly domiciliary visits. Furthermore, to offer better and timely service to our beneficiaries, my Ministry has recruited 250 additional medical practitioners.

I wish to inform the House that according to section 8(1) of the National Pension Act: 'an applicant is eligible for the Basic Invalidity Pension, where he or she suffers from a physical or mental disablement of 60% or more which is likely to last for at least 1 year, and he or she is under the age of 60.'

I am informed that for the financial year 2019-2020, 33,697 beneficiaries were benefitting from a Basic Invalidity Pension. Out of the 33,697 beneficiaries, payment of Basic Invalidity Pension was discontinued for 2,104 beneficiaries as they were found to be no longer eligible during reboarding. Out of the 2,104 cases, 1,064 beneficiaries made an appeal to the Medical Tribunal and 82 appeals were allowed.

I am further informed that for the financial year 2020-2021, 34,746 beneficiaries were benefitting from a Basic Invalidity Pension. Out of the 34,746 beneficiaries, payment of Basic Invalidity Pension was discontinued for 3,200 beneficiaries as they were found to be no longer eligible during reboarding. Out of the 3,200 cases, 1,616 beneficiaries made an appeal to the Medical Tribunal and 103 appeals were allowed.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, il y a souvent des cas similaires qui viennent vers moi, soit sur la suppression par le *Medical Board* de la pension d'invalidité ou du *Carer's Allowance*, alors que l'état des bénéficiaires en question n'a guère évolué positivement. De ce fait, la ministre peut-elle nous dire, même si elle a donné des chiffres, si elle est vraiment informée de cette situation où l'état des personnes n'évolue pas positivement mais dont la pension est supprimée, est-ce qu'elle a déjà discuté de cette affaire avec le *Medical Board* ?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that at the time the Basic Invalidity Pension is awarded, beneficiaries are informed in writing that the pension is being awarded for a period of one year. So, the beneficiary knows well in advance that the pension will be awarded for a certain period of time.

Now, three months prior to the expiry of the said pension, the beneficiary is reboarded unless the pension has been awarded on a permanent basis. If the beneficiary is not satisfied with the findings of the Medical Board, he can appeal against the findings of the Medical Board to the Medical Tribunal, which consists of 2 specialist medical doctors in the relevant fields and a lawyer of the State Law Office. If the appeal is disallowed, he can still make a fresh application after a period of 6 months.

As you can see, there is a proper mechanism which has been put in place. They are several avenues available if a beneficiary is not satisfied with the decision of the Medical Board and the Medical Tribunal. But, I wish to highlight also, Mr Speaker, that the decision to grant such pension and Carer's Allowance is not within my discretion. So, I stand guided by the findings, the clinical assessment made by the Medical Board and the Medical Tribunal.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Je pense que l'honorable ministre a dû prendre connaissance effectivement car je lui avais remis des documents par rapport à la personne qui a vu son *Carer's Allowance* être supprimé. Donc, j'ai en ma possession une copie d'un courrier adressé à la personne, *discontinuation of claim*, où il est fait mention –

« *Your additional basic invalidity pension has been discontinued (...) because the Medical Board has found that you are not so disabled as to need the constant care and attendance of another person* ».

'Not so disabled,' vraiment je suis un peu surpris de ce qui est libellé dans cette lettre. 'Not so disabled,' je ne comprends pas trop ce que ça veut dire. *Relatively disabled* – c'est le mot qu'on s'en sert en ce moment, 'relatively.'

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I am just responding to what you have just read. I am not happy with the way the letter has been written, so I will have a look at it and make the necessary correction, because this is not the proper words to be used in a letter sent to a beneficiary. This is administrative procedure. I will have a look at it and rest assured I will make the necessary correction.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

CUREPIPE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL - BANYAN TREE BANK - ACCOUNT

(No. B/715) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Rs90 m. placed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe in the Banyan Tree Bank, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to the actions taken for the recovery thereof following the going under judicial administration of the said bank.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, as I informed the House in a reply made to PQ B/949 at the Sitting of 24 November 2020, the Municipal Council of Curepipe has on 12 February 2019 deposited an amount of Rs87.75 m. on a fixed deposit account at the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd at an interest rate of 4.45% per annum.

On 19 March 2020, the Municipal Council requested the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd to transfer the amount of Rs91,654,875, that is the principal and interest, to the Council's bank account held at the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd. However, the request was not executed promptly and on 01 April 2020, pursuant to section 65 of the Banking Act 2004, the Bank of Mauritius has appointed a Conservator for Banyan Tree Bank Ltd.

On 09 April 2020 the Council requested the Conservator to transfer the sum of Rs91.65 m. to its State Bank of Mauritius' account as its initial request predates the Conservatorship.

However, on 10 April 2020, the Conservator informed the Council that he had suspended the repayment or withdrawal of deposits and other liabilities of the Bank as provided under section 66 (3) (a) of the Banking Act and as such all withdrawals had been suspended until further notice. Accordingly, the totality of the fund of the Municipal Council of Curepipe, that is, an amount of Rs91.65 m. was placed in a savings account at the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd.

Nevertheless, the Council was of the opinion that despite the country was in lockdown since 20 March 2020 due to COVID-19, the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd had ample time to transfer the amount of Rs91.65 to the its account at the State Bank of Mauritius Limited prior to the appointment of the Conservator, which occurred on 01 April 2020. Hence, on 29 September 2020, the Council reported the matter to the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius for any action deemed necessary against the Management of the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd.

Moreover, the Municipal Council has on numerous occasions reiterated its request to the Conservator of the Banyan Tree Bank Ltd to transfer the amount Rs91.65 m. to its account at the State Bank of Mauritius, but to no avail. In this connection, on 06 January, 25 January, 04 May and 04 June 2021 the Conservator kept the Council informed about actions it took to complete the transaction as safely as possible while protecting the interest and, *inter alia*, preserving the funds of the depositors, account holders and other creditors of Banyan Tree Bank Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that, on 01 July 2021, the Conservator apprised the Council that in accordance with the direction of the Bank of Mauritius, he was reviewing the potential offers from potential investors and their respective salvage plans for the reacquisition of the Bank. In this connection, one substantially responsive proposal with a plan to restructure whole or part of the existing current deposits in the form of new fixed deposit instruments governed by revised terms and conditions was submitted to the Council.

However, the Council rejected the proposal in view of Circular No. 6 of 2019 of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development which has requested all Ministries, Departments and Non-Financial Public Sector Bodies to invest all surplus funds in the Treasury Bill.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire si selon l'enquête qui a été menée par le ministère des Finances, si je ne me trompe pas, si l'enquête a révélé des quelconques pressions qui auraient été subies par les fonctionnaires de la municipalité de Curepipe pour ne pas effectuer le transfert de l'argent de la *Banyan Tree Bank* à la *SBM* au moment où il le fallait ?

Dr. Husnoo: Yes, you are right and an investigation was carried out by the internal control of the Ministry of Finance but there was no pressure put on anybody.

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: You have one question? Go ahead.

Ms J. Bérenger: Donc, depuis avril 2020, comme nous le savons tous, les comptes ont été gelés et selon nos informations la banque centrale aurait déjà identifié un repreneur. Donc, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous donner aujourd'hui la garantie que tous les dépôts, y compris celui de la municipalité de Curepipe, seront remboursés avec intérêt ?

Dr. Husnoo: I cannot give you the guarantee. That would depend on the Conservator.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Banyan Tree Bank, before the Municipal Council deposited its amount to his bank was already a loss-making entity. And despite being a loss-making entity and the decision of the Council to transfer the money from the Banyan Tree Bank to the State Bank of Mauritius, the CEO refused to sign the letter to retrieve the money from the bank to the State Bank of Mauritius, and my information is the CEO has only been given a warning letter.

Mr Speaker: Your question?

Mr Ameer Meea: Can I ask the Minister why is it that no sanction has been taken against the CEO, whereby he clearly has faulted by not agreeing to the decision of the Council?

Dr. Husnoo: You are right, Mr Speaker, Sir. When the decision was taken, there was a delay in executing a writing to the bank to recoup the money, but following the investigation that was done by the internal control, reprimand was given to the CEO for the action.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

NON-LISTED ACTIVITIES – PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

(No. B/716) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the non-listed activities, he will state the number thereof in respect of which he has requested the persons carrying out or proposing to carry out same to submit a Preliminary Environmental Report or an application for an Environment Impact Assessment licence by reason of the nature, scope, scale and sensitive location thereof likely to have an impact on the environment or on the zoning of an area, since November 2019 to date.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that Section 17 of the Environment Protection Act 2002 (as amended) makes provision to empower the Minister, notwithstanding Section 15 of the Act, where in his opinion a project or activity by virtue of

its nature, scope, scale and sensitive location is likely to have an impact on the environment or on the zoning of an area, to request the person carrying out or proposing to carry out same to submit a Preliminary Environmental Report (PER) or an application for an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) licence.

M. le président, depuis novembre 2019 à ce jour, sept projets de développement résidentiel et industriel, de relocalisation et de gestion des déchets ont été déclarés comme *scheduled undertaking*, nécessitant un *EIA licence* en raison de leur ampleur, de leur étendue et des risques potentiels de nuisances environnementales. De plus, au cours de la même période, trois projets de développement résidentiel ont été déclarés comme *scheduled undertaking* nécessitant un *PER approval* en raison de l'ampleur des projets et de leur emplacement sensible.

Ms J. Bérenger: Actuellement, même si un projet est soumis à l'obligation d'établir un *Preliminary Environment Assessment* ou un *Environmental Impact Assessment*, le *PER* ou les informations additionnelles demandées par les autorités dans le cadre de l'application pour une licence *EIA* ne sont pas accessible au public.

The fact is that in all EIA licences, mention is made that the development shall be undertaken as per the mitigation measures stated in the EIA report and the additional information submitted. So, for the sake of transparency, can I ask the hon. Minister to give the guarantee that amendments will be brought to the Environment Protection Act so that PER reports will be made public, additional information submitted during the environmental process will be made public, and that the reason for granting and rejecting an EIA licence will be compulsory and made public?

Mr Speaker: That is a PNQ!

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je pense que la question de l'honorable membre est très claire, cela concerne spécifiquement *the number*. Donc, le nombre d'activités qui ont été déclarées par le ministre.

M. le président, une question aussi précise mérite une réponse précise. Je peux rassurer l'honorable membre que nous sommes dans toute cette phase *to revamp the Environment Protection Act* et, bien sûr, toutes les questions de l'*EIA*, de *PER* sont en train d'être reconsidérées au niveau du comité. Et je dois dire que nous sommes dans cette phase de consultation, de préparation et je peux dire que nous avançons surement et que très

prochainement nous rendrons public toutes les propositions en ce qui concerne le *revamping* de l'*Environment Protection Act*.

Mr Speaker: Your next question!

Ms J. Bérenger: J'ai une dernière question supplémentaire, s'il vous plaît, M. président. Juste une deuxième ; c'est ma deuxième ! Est-ce que je peux, s'il vous plaît?

Mr Speaker: But do not be long!

Ms J. Bérenger: Donc, les ONG locales et la société civile n'ont cessé de tirer la sonnette d'alarme concernant plusieurs projets qui ont un impact négatif sur les zones écologiquement sensibles qui se situent à proximité, voire même parfois sur le site concerné. Et ce sont des projets qui ne sont pas listés justement et décrits dans la loi comme étant des activités nécessitant un *PER* ou un *EIA* malgré le fait que de par leur nature et leur localisation, des études environnementales et sociétales devraient être faites concernant ces projets. Je peux citer en exemple un projet *PDS* à Bel Ombre, par exemple. D'ailleurs, je sou mets ...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Ms J. Bérenger: ...sur la table de l'Assemblée des documents y relatifs. Un accès piétonnier à Mahebourg, des constructions des villas à Grand Gaube etc. Donc, j'aimerais savoir du ministre, dans ces cas-là, s'il n'utilise pas la prérogative qui lui est accordé par la section 17 de l'*Environment Protection Act*, comment compte-t-il s'assurer de la protection des zones écologiquement sensibles dans ces cas-là et comment compte-t-il s'assurer que nos patrimoines naturels ne sont pas mis à risque?

Mr Ramano: Nous avons une deuxième *PNQ* dans la même séance, M. le président. Je pense avoir répondu à la question, M. le président, j'ai été très clair. Je pense que le libellé de la question concerne *whether, in regard to the non-listed activities, he will state the number thereof in respect of which he has requested the persons to carry out, etc., etc.*

M. le président, je ne vais surtout pas répéter ma réponse, mais s'il y a des cas spécifiques, je demanderai à l'honorable membre – maintenant, elle maîtrise très bien les différents *Standing Orders* - de venir de l'avant avec *a substantive question* et moi je donnerai *a substantive answer*. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

INTEGRATED SUPPORT CENTRE SERVICE – DIGITAL TABLETS

(No. B/717) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Integrated Support Centre Service, she will state if expert advice for the procurement of digital tablets was sought and obtained and, if not, why not, indicating the actions taken regarding the faulty tablets.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Integrated Support Centre Services of my Ministry aims at offering a platform to the members of the public in order to report cases of domestic violence and child abuse on a 24/7 basis through the hotlines 139 and 113, respectively. This is in order for the Ministry to be able to provide immediate, consistent, coordinated and timely support to victims of such violence.

The Integrated Support Centre (ISC), Mr Speaker, Sir, is also meant to align officers to attend to calls after office hours. And to that effect, the Avaya Telephony Network System which is currently being used to host the ISC provided by Mauritius Telecom, has to connect to another digital service. Mauritius Telecom advised that digital tablets be used and provided the specifications thereof to my Ministry and following a procurement exercise the digital tablets were purchased from another company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the second part of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member and the House that the digital tablets are not faulty, rather, the operation of the ISC services relies on cross-platform information system requirements that need to be fully meant for its success.

As a matter of fact, bugs were identified during the Go Live phase causing session time out with the tablets and despite several software upgrades, the bugs could not be resolved. As a remedial measure, smartphones using android operating system are presently being successfully used by the officers of my Ministry to access the ISC services after office hours and this service is being monitored.

As regards the use of the digital tablets, the latter are being reconfigured and tested in order to grant access to other services of my Ministry, for example the DOVIS which is a system where cases of domestic violence are recorded.

Ms J. Bérenger: Can the hon. Minister state whether a tender exercise was carried out to select Mauritius Telecom for manning the Centre, and in the negative, why is it the case?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, given that Mauritius Telecom was more conversant with the technical specificities of the equipment and the software of the ISC, Mauritius Telecom was deemed to be in a better position to advise the Ministry on the compatible tablets.

Ms J. Bérenger: As per the National Audit Report, the delays in addressing the issue of bugs with the tablets made that each of the hotlines 139 and 113 remained busy and not easily accessible to public as only one officer attended to calls instead of four officers after office hours. Can she confirm that there is a causal relationship between the failure of the Integrated Support Centre Services project and the increase in cases of domestic violence and child abuse during that year?

Mr Speaker: Are you putting a question or asking the Minister, please?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: There are so many questions!

Mr Speaker: Are you putting a question?

Ms J. Bérenger: I am asking if there is a causal relationship...

Mr Speaker: No, listen to me first! You are putting a question asking the Minister to confirm. You know, strictly speaking, you cannot ask the Minister to confirm. So, I allow the question but bear that in mind.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are quite a number of questions being put within that supplementary question; I will try to answer to the best of my ability. It is incorrect to say that there is only one person who is on call after office hours; there are four people who receive calls successfully on their android mobile application, on their phones. If the hon. Member is aware of a case where there has been a report of only one person answering the calls, I would kindly invite her to put forward this case to me and I shall investigate and get back to the House.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Ms J. Bérenger: This information is in the National Audit Report. Can we know why after one and a half years the Integrated Support Centre Agreement has not been signed between the company and the Ministry and why is it that no time frame was defined for the implementation of the project?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that an MoU was signed between the Ministry and Mauritius Telecom in March 2019.

So, I am not very sure whether you are...

Ms J. Bérenger: It has been mentioned in the National Audit Report.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Okay, I do not have this data with me on hand. I shall look into it and revert back to the House.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

COVID-19 HOME SELF-TESTING KIT

(No. B/718) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kit, he will state –

- (a) the number of requests received therefor, and
- (b) if his Ministry has established a protocol to ensure that those who are COVID-19 positive tested through the use thereof report to the COVID-19 Treatment Centres.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Quarantine (Control of Sale and Use of COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kit) Regulations 2021 have been promulgated so as to control the sale and use of COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kits including analysis of samples and reporting of results.

According to the provisions under the regulations, Private Health Institutions, Medical Practitioners, Wholesale and Retail Pharmacies and Private Laboratories and companies involved in the importation of laboratory reagents which are duly registered with my Ministry are allowed to import the COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kits.

Moreover, a Standing Committee at the level of my Ministry assesses the applications received for importation of the COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kits and make appropriate recommendations to the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection which thereafter issues authorisation to the successful applicants for importations of COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kits.

In reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Standing Committee has already evaluated nine applications as at date and recommendations have been submitted to the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection accordingly. Three additional applications have been received from the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection and would be perused by the Standing Committee.

As regards part (b) of the question, Section 10 of the Quarantine Act 2020 makes provision for disclosure of information in respect with communicable diseases as follows –

- (i) Any person who suspects that he –
 - a. has, or may have, a communicable disease;
 - b. is, or may be, infested with vectors; or
 - c. has, or may have, been in contact with a person who has, or may have, a communicable disease, shall accordingly forthwith inform a quarantine officer.

Under the Quarantine (Control of Sale and Use of COVID-19 Home Self-Testing Kit) Regulations 2021, provisions have also been made for a person who has been tested to be COVID-19 positive by means of a Self-Testing Kit to forthwith inform the Quarantine Authority.

Any person who contravenes the provisions under the Act shall commit an offense and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs500,000 and imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House about how those patients who are using the Self-Testing Kit dispose of the Kit if ever they are found to be positive?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Self-Testing Kits come with a small plastic container specially provided for disposal. Once the test is done; the swab, the tube, the strip are put in the plastic container and disposed in the waste bin just like any other waste.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister for this answer. Furthermore, there have been some queries from people asking whether the pharmacist will guide them in doing the test because there are some people who are not well versed with these kits. So, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether pharmacists are allowed to assist those patients?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a home Self-Testing Kit and the one who is willing to test for himself has to take it back to his place and then the test should be done. It is not appropriate for the pharmacist to do the test, it is a self-testing instrument and it should be used at your place.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

**LE HOCHET, TERRE ROUGE - SEVENTH HEAVEN *MORCELLEMENT*
PROJECT - LICENCE**

(No. B/719) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Seventh Heaven Morcellement Project, at Le Hochet, in Terre Rouge, he will state if an Environmental Impact Assessment licence was issued in respect thereof and, if so, when.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je tiens à informer la Chambre qu'aucune demande au nom de *Seventh Heaven Morcellement Project*, à *Le Hochet, Terre Rouge* pour un *Environmental Impact Assessment licence* a été reçu à mon ministère. Aucun *Environmental Impact Assessment* - donc, licence n'a été délivrée.

Cependant, il y a bien eu une *first application of EIA licence* qui a été reçue par l'intermédiaire du *National E-Licensing Platform* au nom de *Golden Land Holdings Ltd* le 18 février 2021. Le projet consiste à morceler des terrains en 304 lots à usage résidentiel à Ste Croix.

D'après les informations recueillies auprès de *Blueprint Consult Ltd* le consultant du projet, *Seventh Heaven Morcellement Project* est le *Marketing name*, le nom commercial du même projet de lotissement de terrain à usage résidentiel que celui soumis par *Golden Land Holdings Ltd*.

M. le président, après vérification préliminaire de l'*EIA Report* soumis par le demandeur, *Golden Land Holdings Ltd*, ce dernier a été informé le 19 février 2021 que le *EIA Report* devait être révisé car il manquait de nombreuses informations techniques importantes et pertinentes comme l'exige l'*Environment Protection Act* de 2002. A ce jour, des informations supplémentaires demandées n'ont pas été soumises à mon ministère et la demande d'*EIA Licence* n'a pu être traitée davantage.

Mon ministère est d'ailleurs informé par le consultant du projet que le promoteur a l'intention de retirer la demande d'*EIA* faite précédemment en vue de soumettre une nouvelle application.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister for the information. Can I just draw the attention of the hon. Minister that the *Seventh Heaven Morcellement Project* is actually being there as exposed to the people, to those who want to buy it so they are actually the plot

of land without having that EIA Licence. So, I would request him to use his good Office to see to it that they respect all the requirements before proceeding for any sales. Thank you.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, donc tout morcellement doit être en conformité avec le *Morcellement Act*. Donc, le *Morcellement Act*, il y a plusieurs étapes à franchir avant que le *Morcellement Permit* soit délivré à un *applicant*. Donc, un des permis nécessaires c'est la *Letter of Intent* qui permet à l'*applicant* de commencer les travaux d'infrastructures. Même à ce stade-là, du fait que c'est un projet de cette envergure, cela nécessite un *EIA Licence*.

Je peux rassurer l'honorable membre qu'il n'y a aucun *EIA Licence*, aucun *Letter of Intent* qui a été délivré tel quel parce que cela requiert au préalable l'*EIA Licence*. Donc, si tel est le cas par rapport à ce qui est avancé par l'honorable membre, c'est un cas qui mérite d'être rapporté au *Morcellement Board*, donc à mon niveau, au vu des informations fournies je vais transmettre les informations de l'honorable membre au *Morcellement Board*.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

BANK OF MAURITIUS - CONSOLIDATED FUND - DIVIDENDS

(No. B/720) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the payment to the Consolidated Fund of dividends by the Bank of Mauritius, he will state the quantum thereof for each of the years 2015 to 2020 and since January 2021 to date, indicating the arrangements made, if any, in respect of future payments thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, l'exercice financier de la Banque de Maurice s'étend du 1^{er} juillet au 30 juin de chaque année.

Concernant les informations demandées par l'honorable parlementaire pour les exercices financiers clos du 30 juin 2015 au 30 juin 2020, je dépose les informations relatives aux dividendes versées au *Consolidated Fund* par la Banque de Maurice au cours de cette période.

Concernant l'année financière allant du 1^{er} juillet 2020 au 30 juin 2021, j'ai été informé par la Banque de Maurice que les comptes sont actuellement en train d'être finalisés et audités comme le veut la procédure.

Conformément à la section 32 (3) de la *Bank of Mauritius Act*, La Banque dispose de 4 mois après la clôture de son exercice financier pour établir et soumettre au ministre une

copie des comptes annuels certifiés. Ces derniers seront ensuite déposés à l'Assemblée nationale. Merci.

Mr Uteem: According to the Estimates in the Budget, dividend paid by the Bank of Mauritius for the last year 2019-2020 was 71 million and nothing before that. Is the hon. Minister of Finance aware that the Bank of Mauritius has published a Public Notice where it states, in respect of the Rs28 billion advanced to Government is being treated as –

“advance against future profits distributable to the Government.”

So, if we take Rs28 billion, we divide by the Rs71 m. of dividend that we receive from the Bank of Mauritius, it will take the Bank of Mauritius 394 years of dividend. Is the hon. Minister of Finance aware of that?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est sûr que si on le met en isolation ça fait peu, R 71 millions. Mais, je tiens à rappeler que le 30 juin 2017, ils avaient payé R 476 millions, et que sous la période 2000 à 2005, il y a même eu une période où ils avaient fait un *advance payment* de plus d'un milliard de roupies au gouvernement d'alors. Donc, c'est selon les périodes, en fonction de la profitabilité de la Banque de Maurice, on verra, on doit attendre un petit peu, voir comment évolue la situation, parce ce que de toute façon, maintenant, il y a un autre élément qu'il faut prendre en compte, c'est la profitabilité de *MIC* qui va entrer en jeu par la suite, concernant la consolidation des comptes au niveau de la Banque de Maurice. Merci.

Mr Uteem: Under section 11 of the Bank of Mauritius Act, there is a statutory obligation on the Central Bank to distribute 85% of its net profit to the Consolidated Fund. Has the hon. Minister of Finance taken any legal advice to see whether the arrangement between the Government and the Central Bank, whereby the Government is not going to receive dividend for a number of years, is not in breach of this section 11 of the Bank of Mauritius Act?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, de tout temps, il y a des discussions entre le Gouverneur de la Banque de Maurice et le ministre des Finances, entre l'autorité monétaire et l'autorité fiscale concernant les enjeux macroéconomiques, en particulier le niveau du taux de l'inflation, le taux de chômage, ou encore le taux de croissance économique. La particularité d'une Banque centrale, ce n'est pas de faire des profits, et au niveau du ministère des Finances, ce n'est pas d'aller chercher les profits de la Banque centrale. Donc, c'est sûr que selon les règlements, nous demandons à la banque de verser 85% de ses profits au

Consolidated Fund, mais cela reste à la discrétion du ministère des Finances. De temps à autres, et même très souvent, on ne demande pas de payer ces 85% parce ce que pour l'autorité fiscale, pour le ministère des Finances, le plus important c'est que la Banque centrale dispose de moyens suffisants pour gérer et pour pouvoir adopter une politique efficiente au niveau de politique monétaire. Merci.

Mr Uteem: Sorry to say, but I do not share, as a lawyer, the interpretation of section 11 which is very clear; there is no discretion from the Minister of Finance. But, being given that the hon. Minister of Finance just spoke about arrangement, is he prepared to table a copy of the arrangement made between the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Mauritius, with regard to the repayment of the Rs60 billion, the treatment of the Rs60 billion that has been contributed by the Central Bank to the Consolidated Fund last year?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, encore une fois, au niveau du ministère des Finances, cela a été une allocation - un *one-off grant* - de la part de la Banque de Maurice pendant une période exceptionnelle. Ça a été une mesure exceptionnelle faite par la Banque de Maurice au ministère des Finances avec les 60 milliards de roupies. Sur les 60 milliards de roupies, si j'ai bien compris, il y a 28 milliards de roupies au niveau du bilan de la Banque de Maurice où on est en train de regarder concernant les *advance payment on profit* pour l'Etat.

De notre côté, il n'y a pas d'accord écrit à cette période ; je l'avais dit l'année dernière, on était dans cette période de pandémie, il nous fallait trouver des mesures pour pouvoir soutenir l'économie mauricienne. Et, la Banque de Maurice est venue avec une mesure non conventionnelle encore une fois, mais tellement efficace pour qu'on puisse traverser cette crise sans trop de casse sociale. Et, aujourd'hui, quand on est en train de sortir de cette crise et que on est en train d'arriver avec l'ouverture programmée pour le 1^{er} octobre, l'important c'est de ne pas regarder en arrière pour se dire, où sont les accords, etc., c'est de voir si cela a marché.

Jusqu'à présent, nous n'avons pas eu avec cette mesure, d'impact significatif au niveau des prix avec l'inflation. En 2020, l'inflation a été modérée, à un taux modéré entre 2% et 4%. Ce sont les chiffres, je sais que l'honorable membre va venir sur *Statistics Mauritius* par la suite ; ce sont les chiffres avancés par *Statistics Mauritius*. Donc, cette politique a porté ses fruits, mais comme je l'avais dit l'année dernière et je le redis cette année, c'est une politique qu'on ne peut faire qu'une fois, pendant des périodes où la crise est très, très importante. Les 60 milliards de roupies, on l'a fait l'année dernière. C'était une

mesure non conventionnelle qui a été acceptée par tous. Et aujourd'hui, la Banque centrale est en train d'établir le repaiement de ces 60 milliards de roupies. Je leur laisse le soin de procéder.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

STATISTICS MAURITIUS – GDP GROWTH PROJECTIONS & CHAIRMAN RESIGNATION

(No. B/721) 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 Statistics Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the reasons for the –

- (a) publication of two different growth projections for GDP for year 2021 on 28 and 30 June 2021, respectively, and
- (b) resignation of the chairman thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avec votre permission, je répondrai aux questions parlementaires B/721 et B/727 conjointement.

En ce qui concerne les projections de croissance du PIB pour l'année 2021, j'ai été informé par *Statistics Mauritius* que les estimations des comptes nationaux datées du 28 juin 2021 était un projet de projection qui n'était pas encore finalisé.

Statistics Mauritius a mis à jour son hypothèse de croissance à la lumière des prévisions récemment faites par le Gouvernement concernant le nombre d'arrivées de touristes à hauteur de 650 000 arrivées au cours des douze prochains mois.

Sur cette base, la version du 28 juin 2021 a été amendée et remplacée par la version finale actualisée le 30 juin 2021.

Concernant la partie (b) de la question, s'agissant du président du Conseil d'administration du *Statistics Board*, j'ai été informé que M. G. G. a présenté sa lettre de démission au Président de la République le 1^{er} juillet 2021. Dans la lettre, le président démissionnaire a présenté sa démission en raison de l'augmentation significative de ses engagements professionnels au cours de ces derniers mois. Merci.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister of Finance just mentioned that Statistics Mauritius changed its *prévision* for two days: 28, it was 4.4% of growth and 30 June, it became 5.4%. So, may I know from the hon. Minister of Finance, whether in between those two date, 28

and 30, there were any communication from anyone, from the Ministry of Finance to the Statistics Mauritius to tell them that their projections were wrong?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, *Statistics Mauritius* est un organisme indépendant avec un *Statistics Board*. Le *Statistics Board*, avec son président, n'est pas au courant du mécanisme ou du travail de *Statistics Mauritius*. Ils sont pour la gestion de *Statistics Mauritius*, eux, leur travail, c'est concernant la publication des rapports, les dates, etc.

Au niveau de la projection de croissance, selon les renseignements que j'ai reçus, il y a eu une erreur. L'erreur est humaine, en général – donc, concernant la projection de croissance publiée par *Statistics Mauritius*...

Mais j'aimerais souligner quelque chose, M. le président, par rapport aux prévisions de croissance, c'est une prévision. Nous-mêmes, au ministère des Finances, nous travaillons sur les prévisions. Moi-même, en tant qu'économiste, je travaillais, je faisais des prévisions quand j'étais Chef économiste au niveau de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie. C'est quelque chose de très particulier et je peux dire que le jour où vous le faites, il tient pour le jour même. C'est pour cela qu'un économiste, quand il va faire des prévisions il va dire toute chose égale par ailleurs. Parce ce que c'est le jour où il publie ses résultats, c'est le jour où ces résultats sont valides. Parce ce que les éléments qui arrivent et qui s'enchaînent par la suite sur les prévisions changent la donne et qui après a été 5,4 %, je tiens à préciser que le *PwC* à un certain moment a publié 7 % de croissance pour 2021. *Moody's* est en train de publier 6,5 % pour 2021. *FMI* est en train de publier 5 % pour 2021. *MCB Focus* est en train de publier 4,8 % pour 2021. Nous, au niveau du ministère des Finances, nous sommes en train de chercher à avoir une croissance positive. Si on a plus de 4 % pour 2021, ce sera déjà un succès parce que nous sortons d'une période de grave crise, et nous sommes toujours dans cette crise. Et en sortant de cette crise, l'élément qui perturbe les prévisions de croissance concerne la réouverture des frontières, concerne des incertitudes au niveau de la propagation du virus de nouveau.

Donc, il y a tellement d'éléments qui peuvent perturber le taux de croissance que cela peut occasionner des erreurs qui sont publiés par la suite au niveau de *Statistics Mauritius*, d'où l'erreur que je pense a été fait, mais pour revenir, si vous me dites qu'on va faire que 4,4%, je serai heureux de faire 4,4 % pour 2021.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether this sudden resignation of the Chairman of Statistics Mauritius is because after the publication of the first version which the Minister said, projection of the National Account Estimates published on the website of the Statistics Mauritius on 20 June, an urgent meeting was convened at the seat of the Ministry of Finance with the Director of Statistics Mauritius, the Acting Deputy Director Mr R.M., Acting Senior Statistician and the Statistician which resulted in an unprecedented change from 4.4% to 5.4%, contrary to the section 24 of the Statistics Act which stipulates, promotes and safeguards the quality of official statistics and promotes and protects the integrity of official statistics? I want to know...

Dr. Padayachy : M. le président, voilà c'est ce que je ne voulais pas, c'est que tout de suite on va aller sur l'intégrité. *Statistics Mauritius*, ils ont publié quelque chose qu'ils ont enlevé par la suite, et la Directrice, le Président et tout le monde est au courant de ce qui s'est passé. Ils ont enlevé et ils ont remis un autre chiffre.

A la fin de l'année on va être au courant du résultat réel de ce qu'on a eu comme performance économique. Nous, au niveau du ministère des Finances, l'année dernière, on était le premier à signaler qu'on va avoir une grosse contraction de l'activité économique. Nous, au niveau du ministère des Finances, on avait déjà prévu qu'on ferait -7,5 % pour l'année fiscale 2019/2020, et on l'a fait. On aurait pu raconter une histoire si je suis le raisonnement de l'honorable membre en venant dire qu'on va faire un taux de croissance positive alors qu'on ne l'a pas fait, parce que quel est l'objectif d'avoir ces prévisions de croissance ? C'est d'établir les politiques économiques pour améliorer cette prévision de croissance.

Notre but n'est pas de donner un chiffre pour ne pas le réaliser. Notre but c'est de travailler pour améliorer les résultats par la suite. C'est pour cela qu'on travaille, les économistes travaillent pour faire des projections de croissance pour que les autorités, les décideurs puissent prendre des décisions, corriger leur politique économique ou politique public pour améliorer ces résultats. L'année dernière on avait prévu qu'on allait faire un taux, une contraction de -7 % pour l'année fiscale 2020/2021. Heureusement on a pris des mesures malgré le fait qu'on avait fermé les frontières, qu'on n'avait pas de touristes, on a réussi à avoir une légère diminution de cette contraction où on est passé à moins de 6 %.

Cette année, pour l'année fiscale on est en train de prévoir un taux de croissance de 9 %. Au niveau de l'année calendaire, tout dépend de l'ouverture, tout dépend du nombre de

touristes ; nous nous sommes en train de projeter un chiffre de 650,000 sur l'année fiscale. On a entendu les opérateurs du secteur hôtelier parler de ce chiffre de 600,000 à 650,000 touristes pour l'année fiscale. Il y a même un opérateur dans le secteur financier qui a parlé d'environ 620,000 touristes sur l'année fiscale. Donc, pour revenir sur cette décision, je le redis à l'honorable membre, il n'y a pas tout le temps des complots ou je ne sais quoi, l'erreur est humaine, comme l'erreur au niveau de *Statistics Mauritius* avec le nombre de chômeurs et le nombre d'inactifs. Est-ce que vous croyez qu'en l'espace de deux semaines, vous pourrez voir les chiffres du nombre de chômeurs baisser par 20,000/30,000 ou augmenter de 20,000/30,000 ? Non !

On est dans une période difficile, une période où pour mesurer des indicateurs, ça devient très difficile parce qu'il n'y a pas de contacts, on ne peut sortir, on a du mal à faire les sondages et faire les *surveys* et faire les enquêtes, d'où la difficulté pour faire les prévisions.

Merci.

Mr Uteem: Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue is not about whether Statistics Mauritius is right or wrong. The issue is that Statistics Mauritius published a figure and then the Ministry intervened and caused them to change it and now this is causing demotivation among officers of Statistics Mauritius and tainting the image of Statistics Mauritius as an independent and its integrity. So, does not the hon. Minister of Finance agree that the Ministry of Finance should not interfere with the working of the professionals of Statistics Mauritius?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je répète, dans tous les pays vous avez des institutions, des instituts des statistiques qui travaillent sur les statistiques. A Maurice, vous avez des nombreuses institutions publiques, des régulateurs qui travaillent sur les statistiques. Vous avez la Banque de Maurice, vous avez *Statistics Mauritius*, vous avez la *FSC*, vous avez *EDB* et bon nombre et aussi le ministère du Travail et le ministère des Finances.

Et je le redis, c'est en permanence un travail d'échange pour avoir les informations. Au niveau de *Statistics Mauritius*, je peux vous dire qu'il y a en permanence un échange entre le ministère des Finances et *Statistics Mauritius* pour comparer les chiffres et travailler sur les prévisions de croissance. Nous ne pouvons pas ne pas considérer le budget ou les dépenses publics et travailler en isolation. *Statistics Mauritius* doit travailler avec toutes les institutions et tous les ministères pour avoir le juste chiffre. Le but ce n'est pas de faire une prévision, c'est d'essayer d'avoir le meilleur chiffre possible.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, last supplementary!

Mr Juman: Merci. M. le ministre, vous ne répondez pas à ma question. Ma question était simple. Le matin du 29 juin 2021, est-ce qu'il y eu une réunion entre les directeurs et trois techniciens du *Statistics Mauritius* avec les officiers du ministère des Finances, et par la suite, le chiffre de 4,4 % a été remplacé par 5,4 % le 30 juin ? C'est ça ma question, oui ou non ? La réunion a eu lieu ou pas ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais répondre à cette question de la part de l'honorable membre. Je le répète, l'honorable membre veut voir 'des complots'. Et s'il y a eu réunion, moi je ne suis pas au courant, mais en général, tous les jours nous avons des réunions au ministère des Finances entre les autorités, *Statistics*...

(Interruptions)

Laissez-moi terminer, Monsieur. Tous les jours nous avons des réunions au ministère des Finances avec tous les régulateurs, en particulier en ce moment, en cette période de crise. Donc, oui, sûrement il y a eu des réunions si jamais ils ont enlevé les chiffres, les statistiques, le 28 juin. Moi je suis au courant qu'il y a eu un problème concernant la publication des chiffres et qu'ils ont mis les chiffres officiels à partir de 30 juin. C'est de cela dont je suis au courant, M. le président.

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

COVID-19 REGULATIONS 2021 - SPECIFIED INSTITUTIONS - VACCINATED & NON-VACCINATED PERSONNEL

(No. B/722) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the specified institutions targeted under the COVID-19 (Restriction of Access to Specified Institutions) Regulations 2021, he will state the number of personnel concerned therewith, indicating the number thereof –

- (a) having been COVID-19 vaccinated, and
- (b) cannot be COVID-19 vaccinated due to contraindications.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the specified institutions targeted under the COVID-19 (Restriction of Access to Specified Institutions) Regulations 2021, the personnel working in those institutions shall have access only if they produce their vaccination cards certifying that they have been vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine.

In case they have not been vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine, they have to produce an RT-PCR test result slip certifying a negative result dating back to not more than 7 days from the date the RT-PCR test was undertaken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that 10,112 personnel working in the public healthcare institutions have already been vaccinated against the COVID-19.

As at 05 July 2021, I am informed that 24,322 personnel of both the public and private educational sector, including the Early Childhood Development Sector, have already been vaccinated against the COVID-19.

With regard to part (b) of the question, in accordance with the provisions of the regulations, a personnel who cannot be vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine, needs to be assessed and certified, as such, by a panel of two Government Medical Officers. Consequently, regional panels have been set up at the level of each regional hospital to assess as to whether a person can be vaccinated or not.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 113 personnel of the public health institutions cannot be vaccinated. They have been provided with a documented medical certificate that specifies the medical conditions which prevent them from being vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine. As for the personnel working in the education sector, I am informed that 547 of them cannot be vaccinated and have been provided with a medical certificate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards personnel involved in the private healthcare and their subsequent vaccination status, I wish to inform the House that this information is being compiled.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister what is the percentage personnel today in the specified institutions that have been vaccinated?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think by giving the figures, we can calculate the percentage. If in the Public Sector, it is 10,112 and out of them, 113 cannot be vaccinated, so

the percentage is very low. As for the education sector as well, 24,322 have been vaccinated and 544 have not been vaccinated. I think it should be reasonably less than 1%.

Mr Uteem: I wanted to know whether everybody who could be vaccinated has been vaccinated. So, this is the case.

Dr. Jagutpal: This is the case. It is ongoing.

Mr Uteem: So, with respect to those personnel who cannot be vaccinated, they are required under the regulations to produce a PCR test every seven days. So, may I know from the hon. Minister who bears the cost of that PCR test?

Dr. Jagutpal: The cost of the PCR test is being borne by the Ministry because these people cannot be vaccinated, they have been provided with a proof, a Medical Certificate. Obviously, they cannot bear the cost of the PCR test.

Mr Uteem: With respect to the definition of specified institutions, for the time being, it covers the education sector and health care sector. Is the hon. Minister considering amending that definition to include any other sector?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the time being, no, but because our vaccination programme is ongoing and the percentage of all sectors where people have been vaccinated is very high, I do not think that for the time being it is important to amend the definition.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/738, B/739, B/740 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Bhagwan!

GRAM/MRA – BETS VIA REMOTE CONTROL

(No. B/723) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to bets placed via remote control, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority/Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if they are sequentially numbered and, if not, why not, indicating if it has been informed by the Mauritius Turf Club Sports and Leisure that one operator is operating contrary to approved procedures and regulations and, if so, indicate the actions initiated thereon.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé par la *Gambling Regulatory Authority* qu'il y a actuellement trois bookmakers autorisés à prendre des paris à distance. La section 105(2) de la *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act* (GRA) fait provision que -

“Every totalisator operator or bookmaker who accepts a bet otherwise than by remote communication shall issue to the person who places the bet a serially numbered receipt giving such particulars as may be specified in the rules of betting referred to in section 35 or 46, as the case may be, and shall keep a record of such particulars.”

La section 105 (2) est en vigueur depuis la promulgation de la *GRA Act* en 2007 et n'a jamais été modifiée. Conformément à la section 105 (2) de la *GRA Act*, les bookmakers effectuant des paris par voie de communication à distance sont dispensés de délivrer des reçus numérotés en série à une personne qui place un pari. Toutefois, ces bookmakers doivent télécharger sur le serveur géré par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* les informations relatives aux paris acceptés, y compris les transactions numérotées en série, chaque lundi suivant la tenue des courses.

J'ai également été informé que la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* effectue des vérifications a posteriori, y compris des tests de séquence sur toutes les transactions numérotées en série soumises par ces bookmakers afin de garantir l'intégrité, l'exhaustivité et l'exactitude des informations.

M. le président, la *GRA* a reçu une lettre de *MTC Sports and Leisure Ltd* en avril 2021, demandant que des modifications soient apportées à la *GRA Act* afin que les paris par voie de communication à distance soient correctement enregistrés de manière séquentielle. La correspondance ne fait aucune référence à un quelconque bookmaker/opérateur, opérant contrairement aux procédures et règlements approuvés.

J'ai été informé que la *GRA* a examiné la demande et a conclu qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de modifier l'Article 105 de la *GRA Act* étant donné que la *MRA* obtient déjà les informations requises sur les paris acceptés de manière séquentielle.

Merci.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire s'il y a eu ingérences de la part d'un membre du *Board* de la *GRA* pour qu'il y a eu cette dispensation dans ce cas précis qui a été rapporté?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je tiens à rassurer l'honorable membre, moi, je ne suis pas au courant d'une quelconque interférence d'un membre du conseil d'administration. Mais ce conseil d'administration, il a plusieurs membres et un président et je pense que de ce côté-là, la *GRA* est en train de faire un travail qui est reconnu de tous et nous pouvons leur faire confiance. S'il y eu des ingérences, ils vont prendre les actions nécessaires.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire s'il peut demander à la *MRA*, indistinctement ce que la *GRA* a fait et mener une enquête à sa façon pour voir s'il y a eu maldonne au niveau de la *MRA* ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais faire la requête au niveau de la *MRA* mais je ne promets rien parce que la *MRA*, encore une fois, c'est une institution indépendante, s'ils voient qu'il y a affaire à regarder, ils vont le faire.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre peut informer la Chambre et donner la garantie après l'enquête que *SMS Pariaz* n'a pas eu - je demande, c'est à vous de voir, de vérifier parce que moi je suis parlementaire. Est-ce que le ministre peut demander aux autorités concernées de voir, soit lui-même, il peut faire des enquêtes à son niveau, ou au responsable de voir si *SMS Pariaz*, qui est très proche...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: *Non, là vous allez trop loin.* Go to your question, the roots of the question!

Mr Bhagwan: ... n'a pas eu des faveurs directement de la *GRA*?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avec votre autorisation, je vais faire la demande à la *MRA* et à la *GRA* pour assurer l'honorable membre et je reviendrai au Parlement avec les réponses.

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

BETTING OPERATORS - MRA SERVER - CONNECTION

(No. B/724) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the betting operators, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if they are connected to the server of the Mauritius Revenue Authority in real time.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* que tous les opérateurs de paris sont connectés au serveur central de la *MRA*.

Au regard de la connectivité avec le serveur, j'ai été informé par la *MRA*, que tous les *bookmakers* qui prennent les paris sur les courses hippiques locales, sont actuellement connectés au *Gambling Regulatory Authority Betting Control System*. Les *bookmakers* offrant des paris à cote fixe sur les courses de chevaux locales et sur les matchs de football à l'étranger soumettent les données sur les paris en temps réel par le biais du serveur central de la *MRA*.

Toutefois, en ce qui concerne les opérateurs offrant des paris par communication à distance et les totalisateurs, ces opérateurs chargent les données sur les paris pour chaque journée de course hippique à Maurice sur le serveur de la *MRA* chaque lundi suivant la journée des courses. Merci.

Mr Bhagwan: May I know from the hon. Minister whether he has been informed by the *MRA*, whether there has been any departure from the established procedure with regard to *les données qui sont données par les opérateurs* - depart from the established protocol?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne suis pas au courant d'un quelconque incident à travers la *MRA*. Pourtant, j'ai des réunions hebdomadaires avec le directeur général de la *MRA*. Donc, je vais faire la requête à la *MRA* pour avoir plus de précisions.

Mr Bhagwan: Je veux être plus précis pour demander à l'honorable ministre lorsqu'il rencontre les responsables de la *MRA* de voir si *SMS Pariaz* n'a pas eu des faveurs spéciales au niveau de la *MRA*.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais faire une requête générale avec la *MRA* pour cette entreprise que l'honorable membre vient de citer. Merci.

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

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY - MR D. B. - BOARD MEMBER

(No. B/725) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Gambling Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to since when Mr D. B. is a member of the Board thereof, indicating the –

- (a) remuneration drawn therefor, and

(b) number of sub committees thereof of which he is a member.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé par la *Gambling Regulatory Authority* que le président et les membres du conseil d'administration de la *GRA* sont nommés conformément à l'article 5 de la *Gambling Regulatory Act*. Mons. D. B. a été nommé membre du *Gambling Regulatory Board* le 30 janvier 2015. En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé que Mons. D. B. reçoit des honoraires mensuels de R 25,000 en tant que membre du conseil d'administration de la *GRA*.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, Mons. D. B. est membre de trois sous-comités, à savoir –

- le *Human Resource Committee*, en tant que président;
- l'*Audit and Risk Committee*, en tant que président, et
- le *Corporate Governance Committee*, en tant que membre.

Je dépose la composition du conseil d'administration et les sous-comités et aussi des *fees annexed*. Merci.

Mr Speaker: You have a supplementary?

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the Minister whether Board members are entitled to run an organisation, taking decision on a day to day basis, apart from sitting from the Board, whether cases have been reported to him where Mr D. B. has been acting as if he was the super Director General of the *GRA*?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je tiens à rassurer l'honorable membre qu'à ma connaissance, il n'y a pas cette sorte d'ingérence de Mons. D. B. au niveau de l'institution. C'est un membre du conseil d'administration, il fait son travail, il est président de 2 sous-comités et, encore une fois, il y a plusieurs membres et un président sur ce conseil d'administration qui font leur travail et à ma connaissance, il n'y a rien comme ingérence.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. David!

Mr Bhagwan: I have got other questions to ask!

Mr Speaker: No, it is enough, sufficiently canvassed. Hon. David!

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

Mr Speaker: No, do not discuss with the Chair. Do not discuss with the Chair! The Chair is the victim! Do not discuss with it.

Mr Bhagwan: It is not good!

Mr Speaker: Hon. David, are you withdrawing your question?

Mr David: Not at all! PQ B/729!

Mr Speaker: Please.

Mr Bhagwan: Is it because of Mr Dev Beekharry?

STATISTICS MAURITIUS - CHAIRMAN - RESIGNATION

(No. B/727) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Statistics Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the date on which Mr G. G. resigned as chairman thereof, indicating the reasons therefor.

(Vide reply to PQ B/721)

SECRETARY TO CABINET & HEAD OF CIVIL SERVICE - PARASTATAL BODIES - CHAIRPERSON

(No. B/728) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, he will state the names of the parastatal bodies of which he is the Chairperson, indicating the allowances and other benefits drawn in each case?

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS, RODRIGUES & AGALEGA - FISHERIES POSTS

(No. B/729) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Fisheries Posts, he will state the number thereof throughout mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues Island, respectively, indicating in each case, the number of –

- (a) Fisheries Protection Officers attached thereto, indicating the corresponding working shifts thereof, and
- (b) patrol boats and vehicles, respectively, put at the disposal thereof.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are 15 Fisheries Posts around the island in Mauritius and 4 Fisheries Posts in Rodrigues and 1 in Agalega.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I am informed that presently there are 167 officers in the Fisheries Protection Service in Mauritius and 30 officers in Rodrigues, working on a shift system. In Mauritius, the Fisheries Protection Service has 2 shifts in 24 hours starting from 08h 00 to 16h 00, followed by the second shift from 16h 00 to 08h 00 on the following day.

In Rodrigues, the Fisheries Protection Officers work on a shift system which is 24 hours in and 48 hours off. With your permission, I am tabling the details of the numbers of Fisheries Posts and Fisheries Protection Officers attached thereto.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b), I am informed that presently the Fisheries Protection Service of my Ministry is equipped with 16 patrol boats. Moreover, there are 3 speed boats attached to Grand Gaube, Grand River South East and Mahebourg Fisheries Posts, which are in the final stage of repairs and soon be in operation.

With regard to patrol vehicles, my Ministry has 8 vehicles in the Fisheries Protection Service which are allocated as follows –

- East;
- South-East;
- Mahebourg;
- Blue Bay; and the
- Three flying squads, and
- The Port State Control Unit.

Each section has got 1 vehicle for operation. Ideally, each Fisheries Post should have one patrol boat and one patrol vehicle for efficient delivery of service and to attend to any complaints. The fact that we have only 8 vehicles, they are allocated with a view to cover the whole island. Unfortunately, with the 8 vehicles, it is practically impossible to equip all Fisheries Posts with 1 vehicle.

Additionally, I am informed that we have 5 more vehicles which are awaiting repairs at the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development. For efficiency again, this service needs to be revisited take into consideration the new challenges. My Ministry would ensure that all Fisheries Posts are provided with adequate man power, patrol boats and patrol vehicles, wherever needed to cover the whole island in this financial year, although funds are limited. I am tabling the details of the above information in Mauritius and Rodrigues respectively.

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. According to the Budget 2021-2022, there is no planned increase in the staffing of our Fisheries Protection Service in between the last financial year and the newly started one. While the number of registered fishermen is meant to increase from 1,800 to 2,300, considering the announced additional 500 fishermen cards, which is by the way, a positively welcomed measure. Knowing that our Fisheries Posts are already suffering from lack of staff as at now, may I know from the hon. Minister how he expects our Fisheries Officers to execute their actual and increasing duties?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand. With the announcement of 500 additional fishers, it is normal that the pressure on our Fisheries Protection Officers will increase. My Ministry will also start, as in Rodrigues, an awareness programme, where the fishers themselves also take responsibility with regard to surveillance and to denounce illegal fishing. It is working really successfully in Rodrigues where the fishers are called upon for surveillance themselves and to denounce to the Fisheries Protection Officers any illegal activity. So, this will be one of the measures.

Otherwise, we are working in hand with the National Coast Guard because I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to revisit, as I said, this service of this enforcement section to make it more vibrant and dynamic. So, right now whenever we need extra manpower in cases of emergencies, we collaborate with the National Coast Guard as well as the Flying Squad.

Mr David: The Fisheries Protection Service is the enforcement arm of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping for control of fishing activities in our coastal and economic waters. However, I am almost sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, that should a Fisheries Protection Officer walk in this Chamber right now, almost none of our Members would recognise his or her uniform. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he does not share my view that it is high time to empower these essential officers by not only equipping them more but by officially gazetting their working uniforms?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that during the last two years, there was a problem with *le syndicat, comme on dit, des officiers du ministère de la Pêche* but this has been resolved and last month all officers have been provided with their uniforms.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. David!

PERSONS SUFFERING FROM DISABILITIES – WHEELCHAIRS – EARMARKED BUDGET

(No. B/730) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the grant of wheelchairs to persons suffering from disabilities, she will state the –

- (a) budget earmarked therefor for financial 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, respectively;
- (b) number of beneficiaries thereof in financial year 2020-2021, and
- (c) eligibility criteria therefor.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to June 2021, the policy of my Ministry was to provide assistive devices in kind such as hearing aids, spectacles, wheelchairs and dentures on a means tested basis to applicants whose household income do not exceed Rs30,000 per month.

For a better and timely service delivery, since June 2021 my ministry has adopted a new policy which is to provide assistance in cash instead of assistive devices in kind to beneficiaries.

With regard to part (a) of the question, funds for the provision of wheelchairs were earmarked in my Ministry's budget as follows –

- (i) Rs9 m. in financial year 2020-2021, and
- (ii) Rs10 m. in financial year 2021-2022.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that for financial year 2020-2021, 595 beneficiaries have received wheelchairs from the Ministry and the new policy to date, 54 beneficiaries have benefited from assistance in cash instead of wheelchairs in kind.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the eligibility criteria to benefit from wheelchairs are as follows –

- (i) the household income threshold should not exceed Rs30,000 monthly, and
- (ii) the applicant should produce a medical certificate from a medical practitioner certifying the need for wheelchair.

Thank you.

Mr David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I took note of the Cabinet decision dated 26 March 2021, whereby the Ministry of Social Security is now providing as the Minister mentioned, cash

grant instead of assistance in kind to beneficiaries of wheelchairs. May I know from the hon. Minister how does this new procedure work exactly, and whether the hon. Minister does not think that this new protocol may be *un véritable parcours du combattant* for some of our vulnerable and disabled persons?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I am not of your opinion, hon. Member because after the change in policy, the Social Security Officers across the islands (we have 37 Social Security Offices) have called each and every applicant informing him of the change in policy, and also if he still needs the wheelchair to produce an invoice from a supplier to the nearest Social Security office so that the Ministry can effect payment. We have also issued a communiqué. As you have just mentioned, this is a new policy, we are still working on it and maybe in the weeks to come, we will have a sensitisation campaign on radios and TV, informing the public at large about the new policy and the mechanism put in place for the applicants to get the assistance in cash instead of assistance in kind.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

MSCL – MISSING CONTAINERS

(No. B/731) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of containers owned by the company, indicating the number thereof reported missing or lost as at to date.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, following information received of missing containers at the MSCL last year, in the month of October, I requested MSCL to carry out an inquiry into its number of containers.

In November 2020, MSCL set up a special unit to supervise the stuffing of containers at the depot of Associated Container Service Ltd. (ACSL) and to start auditing and monitoring of the containers of MSCL. In fact, this supervision has brought immediate result whereby the freight revenue of MSCL has increased.

All the containers of MSCL are stacked, managed and supervised by ACSL as well as undertake the stuffing and unstuffing of MSCL containers as per an Agreement since June 1990. As such, the management and tracking of the containers of MSCL fall under the purview of ACSL.

In parallel the entry and exit of all the containers were monitored by MSCL's Office to ensure the physical location of the containers till 2015. This physical control was supported by loading list and cargo manifest which were issued for each voyage by MSCL's agencies.

In 2015, the then MSCL Management took the decision to terminate the contract of a number of employees and since then no staff of MSCL was assigned the duties of monitoring of containers.

Following an inquiry initiated in November 2020, the newly set up Audit and Monitoring Team of MSCL, took about four months to verify, combine, tally all the container numbers and on 18 April 2021, the staff of MSCL carried out an in-depth survey of tracking the containers by its unique identification number, against the list of containers handled by the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd.

Moreover, the assignment also included counter checking with the Finance Department pertaining to the revenue received from previous sale of unserviceable containers. MSCL sold 120 containers in Auction on 04 and 11 December 2018 for a total amount of Rs5,420,000, with an average price of Rs46,166 per container.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the report of the findings of the Audit and Monitoring Report revealed that ACSL has no records for 29 containers, but provided location for 27 containers. Out of the 27 containers, MSCL had not found the containers at the stated locations and some of them could not be checked, such as those supposedly located at Reunion Island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the matter was reported to the Police on 09 July 2021. MSCL gave a declaration to the Line Barracks Police Station to the effect that 56 containers were untraceable, out of 942 containers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police's inquiry is ongoing, but this morning, I got some information that the Police traced out some of the containers. We are still awaiting the inquiry.

Mr Lobine: As a date, hon. Minister, has there been any arrest with regard to those containers that have been reported missing or that theft has occurred at the Central CID?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given it is only on the 09 July that the declaration was made, I think the Police's inquiry is ongoing. So, it is awaited.

Mr Lobine: With regard to the Mauritius Shipping Corporation acquiring a cargo vessel, where is the progress with regard to the vessel that you were to acquire from China to the tune of Rs700 m.?

Mr Maudhoo: I have got a substantive question on it, so let's wait for that answer.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

COVID-19 - STUDENTS UNDER THE AGE OF 18 - VACCINATION

(No. B/732) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the students under the age of 18, he will state if they will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to be allowed entry on the premises of educational institutions and, if so, indicate the types of vaccines that will be administered thereto under the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House may be aware, students under 18 years old can only be administered the Pfizer Vaccines. We are waiting for the African Union to supply a consignment of these vaccines in August 2021.

Presently, as the law stands, it is not required for students under 18 years to be vaccinated against COVID-19, to be allowed entry on the premises of educational institutions.

Mr Lobine: Whether there will be any change in the law that the Minister will be bringing with regards to implementing vaccination for students under 18?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, once we receive the vaccines that can be administered for those under 18, there would be an amendment.

Mr Lobine: Is there any study that has been conducted to that effect for you to go ahead with bringing legislation to that effect? Is there a comprehensive study that has been done with regards to vaccination of people under 18 on the basis of which that you will be bringing those legislations?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not have a study but the consent form will be signed by the parents, by the guardian and that is the consent will be needed for those under 18 to get vaccinated and we will go by international recommendations.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

VACOAS & PHOENIX - METRO EXPRESS PROJECT – INFORMATION & SENSITIZATION CAMPAIGNS

(No. B/733) 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 Vacoas and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to the number of information and sensitisation campaigns held regarding the carrying out of works associated with the Metro Express Project, indicating the roads and reticulation networks falling under the aegis of the Council having reportedly been damaged in the course thereof, indicating when same will be repaired and who will bear the cost thereof.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by Metro Express Ltd that public relations exercise with strong emphasis on communication and stakeholder engagement is carried out regularly along the Metro alignments with the various stakeholders, including representatives of Metro Express Ltd, L&T, Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, municipalities and the Police, amongst others. A project of this complexity has involved a lot of information and sensitisation campaigns. Both Metro Express Ltd and the contractor Larsen & Toubro are communicating the progress of the works or diversions, or any information related to Metro Express through different channels namely on TV, radio, Facebook and their respective websites. Intensive public relations are equally being carried out on a regular basis by going from door-to-door in the area under reference.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a multi-stakeholder team comprising of the different authorities has been regularly conducting stakeholder management and door-to-door communication exercises with the residents of Sivananda Avenue in relations to various land issues and forthcoming works. This has been an ongoing process, and these exercises are being conducted since several months with the above named stakeholders. In total the team has met more than 50 families residing along Vacoas to Curepipe metro corridor and sensitise them on the works, its associated diversions and responded to each of their queries and worries, among others. Necessary information has been imparted and engagements with inhabitants of Sivananda Avenue are ongoing and being undertaken collaboratively by the above named stakeholders.

In addition, public relations exercises have also been carried out by the contractor L&T Flyers have been prepared and distributed to the inhabitants so far by Larsen and

Toubro. Extensive communication has also been done through different channels, namely on the MBC, on the Facebook page of Metro Express and social media.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in that connection, a public relations exercise started in June 2020 from Sadally junction to Jumbo roundabout in view of disseminating information on the Metro Express Project to the inhabitants. Some inhabitants were present during the public relations exercise which was held also in the presence of his Worship, the Mayor, Mr Ramburn, elected members of Constituency Nos. 15, 16, 17, as well as all stakeholders of the project.

Moreover, L&T has also set up a hotline for the region of Vacoas and Curepipe to receive complaints from the public. A dedicated Site Manager is also in constant contact with the residents and businesses to update them on ongoing works and any cropping issue.

Furthermore, weekly monitoring meetings are held under my chairmanship at the level of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix to collaboratively resolve all issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express alignment passes on Sivananda Avenue from Curepipe to Vacoas which is a classified road and does not fall under the aegis of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix. In that regard, major constructions are ongoing and at certain locations the roads are closed to undertake works such as diversions of utilities. These works are undertaken only after proper traffic diversion plan has been set up and approved by the authorities, namely my Ministry, the TMRSU, the NLTA and police.

I am informed that there are other associated works to the Metro Express Project such as the diversion of traffic and the laying of undergrounding high tension cables which are being carried out on non-classified roads which fall under the aegis of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix. The contractors who have been entrusted with the works are reinstating the said roads as and when required. As a consequence, the final reinstatement will be implemented by the L&T. Works associated with the Metro Express Project will be born as part of the other projects.

Mr Lobine: May we know from the hon. Minister, why at the level of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix we do not have a dedicated desk with regard to the specific project as it has been the case with the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill to that effect?

Mr Ganoo: I understand that in the weekly meetings that are being conducted at the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, the Mayor is present, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, several

inhabitants come to make the complaints that they have to make to this committee and to the Mayor.

Mr Lobine: And may we know why hon. Members from this side of the House are never invited in those sensitisation campaigns or meetings with inhabitants, why is it so?

Mr Ganoo: Because I understand the Members of Opposition are very active on the *terrain*, with regard to them Metro Express Project I mean.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

CAP MALHEUREUX RELAY CENTRE – CCTV SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

(No. B/734) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether in regard to the cameras of the Closed-Circuit Television Surveillance System installed at the Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, she will state how the monitoring thereof is carried out.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, following the installation of the CCTV camera at Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, appropriate training was provided to administrative officers of the Relay Centre on how to interact with the system, including viewing, playback and saving images of the incidents.

The recordings and footages are viewed through the monitor, through a VGA HDMI Port 19 found in the Administration Office of the Relay Centre. The system has also been configured on the mobile phones of the Acting Officer in Charge of the Relay Centre and on that of a Coordinator of the National Children's Council who monitors the Relay Centre on a daily basis.

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. According to my information, several times the Officer in Charge has deleted certain sections of the CCTV camera footage. Would the Minister tell us if her Ministry intends to initiate an enquiry in regard to such manipulation and/or any other manipulation thereof? Thank you.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that manipulation of CCTV images are not possible, but, once again, should there be a matter of concern raised by the hon. Member, I shall look into it and get back to the House on the matter.

Ms Anquetil: Mr Speaker, Sir, last one. Thank you. If the Ministry has nothing to hide and nothing to worry about, would the Minister state whether she would have no

objection for a small group of Parliamentarians of both sides of the House to visit the shelter in the immediate future? Thank you.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, a very straightforward answer would be a big no! You cannot come and visit the Relay Centre whether it is a big group or small group! I already have about 53 residents in my Relay Centre of Cap Malheureux, so, adding to that would actually go beyond the number of 50 and crowd the place up. And besides, if you presented a motive or reason for the visit, I could study the proposal and get back to you.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CAP MALHEUREUX RELAY CENTRE – NEW RECRUITS

(No. B/735) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, she will give the list of the posts thereat which have recently been filled, indicating –

- (a) the qualifications required for each post, and
- (b) if induction courses have been provided to the new recruits.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with effect from 15 June this year, the following posts have been filled at Cap Malheureux Relay Centre which is also known as *l'Oiseau du Paradis* –

- 1 Shelter Manager, and
- 12 Child Caregivers.

As regards part (b) of the question, in order to ensure the smooth entry of the new recruits to work in the Relay Centre of the National Children's Council, induction courses were provided to the Shelter Manager and all Child Caregivers at the National Children's Council. The new recruits are currently benefiting from hands-on, on-the-job training at the Centre.

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister state whether she is ready and willing to table the list of the new recruits for the benefit of the House in all transparency?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very happy to table the list of the new recruits to the House.

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Would the Minister confirm as to whether the 12 new caregivers are from her Constituency and the new Manager is related to her?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would affirm that the caregivers are not just from my constituency and that the Shelter Manager is not related to my person. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): 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.

(4.32 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MISS MARIE KRISTI QUEENZY A. – CARER'S ALLOWANCE

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I propose to make a Statement on the matter raised by hon. Quirin on Tuesday 13 July 2021 regarding the case of Miss Marie Kristi Queenzy A. whose Carer's Allowance has been discontinued as from 01 March 2021.

I am informed of the following –

- (i) Miss A, aged 27, was awarded a Basic Invalidity Pension in December 2008 and is, as at date, still drawing the said pension.
- (ii) On 07 April 2011, she was found to be in need of constant care and attention for a period of 5 years by a Medical Board. The Medical Certificate dated 10 March 2011 presented to the Medical Board mentioned that the patient

suffered from “severe pulmonary hypertension and mental retardation/Down’s Syndrome” and also “patient has difficulty to move currently”.

- (iii) On 19 January 2016, Miss A appeared before the Medical Board and she was again found to be still in need of constant care and attention for another 5 years.
- (iv) On 13 October 2020, she again appeared before the Medical Board and she was then found to be no longer in need of a Carer’s Allowance.
- (v) In a letter dated 03 February 2021, Miss A was informed of the said decision and of her right to appeal to the Medical Tribunal under section 36(1) (b) of the National Pensions Act.
- (vi) On 16 February 2021, Miss A made an appeal to the Medical Tribunal.
- (vii) On 26 June 2021, the Medical Tribunal comprising 2 specialist doctors and a lawyer from the State Law Office determined that Miss A no longer qualified for the Carer’s Allowance awarded to persons in need of constant care and attention as she was found to be mobile, that is, she was able to move around. The determination was made on the basis of the Medical Certificates presented by Miss A, the explanations furnished by her mother, the clinical examination made by the 2 specialist doctors and the legal assessment made by the lawyer on the said Medical Tribunal.

As Minister, I stand guided by the clinical assessment made by the Medical Board and/or the Medical Tribunal.

It is to be noted that Miss A may make a fresh application for a Carer’s Allowance 6 months after the date of discontinuation of the said allowance or earlier if there is any deterioration of her health, provided the application is supported by relevant medical evidence.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

(4.35 p.m)

MAURITIUS TELECOM – TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORK - TECHNICAL ISSUES

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With your permission, I wish to make the following Statement.

I have been informed by Mauritius Telecom that on 19 July 2021 at around 11.30 hours, its telecommunications network faced various technical issues, as a result of which the internet services were disrupted.

In fact, on that date at around 11.30 hours, an alarm was generated at Mauritius Telecom as an abnormal number of requests for internet services was observed on its network. Investigations carried out showed that there was a series of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks originating from abroad. Two Domain Name System servers which normally translate website addresses into IP addresses used to access sites were impacted.

Mauritius Telecom immediately reviewed its defence policies on its platforms and internet services were restored at around 16.30 hours on the same day.

A technical team continued to monitor the different platforms. However, at around 08.00 hours this morning, similar attacks were observed. Immediately actions were taken and there was minimal impact on customers. The situation is being very closely monitored by Mauritius Telecom.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has also been reported that, today 20 July 2021, there have been fibre breakdowns in several regions in the South and East of the island. Technical teams of Mauritius Telecom have been attending to those issues since this morning and the situation is expected to be back to normal by this evening.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. XIII of 2021) was read a first time.

Mr Speaker: I will suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 4.39 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.23 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please remain seated!

Second Reading

**THE INSTITUTE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY
BILL**

(No. I of 2021)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I move that the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill (No. I of 2021) be read a second time.

The Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, provides for –

- (i) the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to operate and manage technical education centres, and
- (ii) opportunities and pathways to students pursuing studies in technical and technology education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to pave the way to Vision 2030 and strengthen a whole-of-education national reform, Government took a bold step towards the reform of the technical education in the Government Programme 2020/2024. This calls for the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to create more opportunities and pathways for students to pursue studies in technical education. Indeed, we need a diversity in the provision of educational pathways that recognise multiple entry and multiple exit points and address the existing sectoral occupational gaps to cater for an increasingly complex workforce.

We cannot, Mr Speaker, Sir, miss the boat. As we build skills for the present, we need to also build the skills for the future. We need to create the conditions facilitating the emergence of technicians and technologists who can join the university graduates to bring solutions to ever-more complex emerging areas of our economy.

This Bill is an important piece of legislation which will supplement efforts towards transforming our economy into a vibrant, innovative, knowledge-based and high skills one and for the country to be propelled to its next level of development.

Consensus today exists but we have to respond to the changing and unpredictable labour market needs, particularly now in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all too well that exogenous shocks to our economy and our very fabric of life can come in any form and at any time. Building the skills to be resilient in the face of uninvited changes cannot be relegated to future generations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Globally, it is widely recognised that the development of technical skills plays an important role in the social and economic development of nations. Long-established nations realised the veracity of this since quite some time while emerging economies and developing countries, aiming to transition into high-income economies, are also working towards the transformation of their educational ecosystems so as to facilitate this shift towards an advanced technological and skill-based economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this respect, countries like Singapore and South Korea have actively channelled secondary school students towards high-quality technical education to meet the higher order manpower needs of their economies. That is more than 50% of the secondary school students in Singapore are directed to technical institutes and Polytechnics. South Korea, for its part, is introducing incentives to enroll 29% of its secondary level students into technical education by 2022.

And what about Finland, renowned internationally for its excellent education system? It enrolls 42% of its upper secondary students in technical education, while the European Union average hovers around 47.8%. As for Germany's, the dual training system that is internationally acclaimed, it has 45.6% of students currently enrolled in upper-secondary technical education there.

Lately, different organisations like UNESCO, in its Strategy for TVET 2016-2021, the African Union Strategy for TVET 2016, and the SADC Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan for Development of TVET, 2018, all stressed the need for the development of higher technical education.

I believe, Mr Andreas Schleicher, the globally renowned OECD Director for Education and Skills, got it right when, in September 2020 interaction, he spoke of countries needing to operate a shift from qualifications focussed education upfront to skills-oriented learning throughout life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact of the case is that recourse to a high-quality technical education is not an option anymore, but a necessity for an economy and an education system like ours. We need to equip the future generations to become the 21st century drivers of our economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, every stage of development brings to the fore the necessity for specific types of skills that respond to the needs of the day. This has been true for Mauritius. Thus, we have moved from an agricultural economy to a service-based one after going through the industrial phase. At each of those levels, specific skills were a prerequisite. Thus, initially, the use of repetitive, manipulative skills was the order of the day.

In its quest to move to a high-income economy, the country now has to revamp its technical education ecosystem to usher in more technological education. By this, I mean, the occupations relating to Industry 4.0 and progressively Industry 5.0 will require higher order technological skill sets. Students will need to develop higher cognitive competencies for the understanding of scientific concepts and their applications in the processes.

Whatever model of economic transformation we consider to be appropriate, productivity gains and innovation can only be achieved through higher calibre technicians and technologists.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our education system is being revisited to meet the human capital requirements for our economy to transit back to the high-income status. The reform of the technical education structure, hon. Members of the House will concede, is long overdue. The creation of ITET will provide a modern and hitech pathway, in line with the new emerging sectors of the economy, for students who complete Grade 11, ITET will provide a diverse range of learning areas and programmes across its centres around the island and in Rodrigues. These will be vectors to change people's mindset on technical education, and in so doing, rebrand it as an attractive modern option for students.

While students may choose to join the labour market following completion of their programmes at the ITET, they will have the option to articulate into the polytechnics for further higher level technical education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what this Government seeks to create with the ITET is to provide a comprehensive pathway for students who may wish to embrace a practice-based, career-focused approach to education and at the same time, providing the flexibility for students to exit and re-enter the system at ease. Until now, this was the missing link, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What we need in this country is not an endless debate that pits technical against academic education. What we do need is a re-affirmation that both are complementary; both are equally necessary for a country at the cusp of a transition into high-income status to thrive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier, forward looking countries have a much high proportion of their students continuing in Technical and Technology Education. There, the institutions responded to provide the human capital which was needed. Today, industries which are future focused will be looking for more technicians and technologists qualified in a number of new areas. We are talking here, Mr Speaker, Sir, of Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Automation, Fintech, Green technology, Engineering Technology, etc. The ITET will provide an early grounding in such fields and prepare them for the higher studies at the Polytechnics and other institutions.

In our technical education ecosystem in Mauritius, we currently have the MITD, and the Polytechnics and now the ITET. While the MITD is responsible for vocational training for students after Grade 9 and re-skilling of workers under the Ministry of Labour, the Polytechnics Mauritius, under the aegis of my Ministry, provides the niche and specialised high end technical education. It also offers innovative programmes in healthcare and nursing, hospitality and tourism and emerging technologies directly in partnership with industry.

Let me now take a moment and situate the relevance and positioning of the ITET within the larger education ecosystem and in enriching the diversity of the offer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, not all of our secondary school students opt to move on to upper secondary education after Grade 11, after School Certificate. Many would rather choose to go for technical education and thereafter enter the world of work.

The gap that the ITET will primarily address is to broaden the array of opportunities available to our grade 11 students to move higher up in their educational and career paths in

a number of technical and technological fields. These cover fields like, I have said earlier, the green technologies, robotics, food processing technologies, among others. These fields are both different and distinct in terms of level and scope from what the MITD or the Polytechnics offer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once students will have completed the program of studies at the ITET, they could then move on to the Polytechnics and from there, should they so wish, to Universities to complete their degree cycle.

What makes this restructuring of the technical education landscape forward looking is that the roles and responsibilities of the different institutions will be more distinct thereby reducing duplication in terms of programmes on offer. Moreover, with Industry 5.0 upon us, it is foreseen that the ITET will build capacity and further expand and diversify its array of programmes. In the process, Polytechnics will move higher up the technical education echelon but with a heightened practical and applied focus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ITET is intended to start with five centres in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues which will be equipped and staffed to deliver the higher level technical and technology education. The five centres in Mauritius will be located at Piton, Port Louis, Ebene, Beau-Vallon and Flacq and the one in Rodrigues will be at Le Chou. The locations have been identified so as to be accessible to the students from all over the Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the first time, students in Grade 11 will have the opportunity to choose a pathway of their choice to move to an occupation-based stream which will also qualify them to move on ultimately to higher education. There will no longer be dead ends in the system. The ITET, Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd. and other technical education institutions will target at least 35% of the post School Certificate learners by 2030.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to introduce to the House the main provisions of the Institute of the Technical Education and Technology Bill.

Clause 2 spells out the definition for Technical Education and Technological Education –

- "technical education" means a combination of academic knowledge and practical skills acquired in classrooms and applied settings", and
- "technology education" means the study of the application of scientific knowledge and processes.

What we mean here, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the difference between practical skills required to execute a specific task and the understanding of knowledge of the scientific concepts behind this operation.

Clause 3 provides for the Establishment of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology which shall be a body corporate and an approved service operating under a Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now focus on Clauses 4 of the Bill. Clause 4 refers to the "Objects" of the ITET which relates to its responsibility for –

- (i) the provision and effective as well as efficient management of high quality technical and technology education in line with the Government Vision 2030, and
- (ii) the establishment of a number of partnerships.

These partnerships, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be evident in different areas, namely –

- (i) the award of technical and technology education qualifications either by ITET on its own or in partnerships with other recognised institutions and even the MES to enhance its certification with standards benchmarked on international levels;
- (ii) the design and development of appropriate curriculum for the provision of technical and technology education ensuring compliance with norms and standards, and
- (iii) as rightly spelt out, Clause 4 (g) of the bill reads as follows -

“Collaborate with industry and business sectors to deliver a skilled and work ready pool of technicians and technologists.”

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, says it all where partnership with industry and business is concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for Clause 5 we are basically concerned with ensuring the development of appropriate pathways for students to move seamlessly from the education sector to the world of work. In this context, the Institute will strengthen links with the secondary schools and tertiary education institutions such that the secondary school students

will be given better opportunities to eventually enrol in higher technical education institutions according to their individual choices and in line with their career aspirations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 5 (f) of the Bill relates to capacity building. There can be no transformation in the provision of Technical and Technological Education without proper investment in high quality Continuous Professional Development to ensure better student learning outcomes and educational quality. Hence, one major function of the Institute shall be to ensure the continuous professional development of its technical and technology education staff in pedagogy, instructional skills, classroom practices as well as in adolescent development. Some of this capacity building can also be undertaken in industry based settings. Capacity building will also be responsible for elaborating teacher professional standards in line with international good practices to guide and harness the development of teachers throughout their careers.

It will also promote the training of trainers for adoption of relevant and updated competency-based teaching models. The Institute will equally foster international collaboration to keep abreast of developments in the different sectors of technical education and technology development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, learners have to be aware of the pathways and avenues in technical and technology education. Students, across the entire spectrum of competency, must realise how attractive and worthy such an education can be for their future. Hence, one major function highlighted is the strong branding of technical and technology stream for the facilitation in the choice of a suitable career path or further studies. This is explicitly underlined in Clause 5, sections (l) and (m) of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 6 of the Bill deals with the conferment of powers of the Institute while Clause 7 refers to the admission of students. Clause 8 provides for the establishment of a Council for the administration of the Institute. The Council shall consist of a Chairperson and seven members and due attention has been given for a fair and adequate representation both from the public and private sectors. The term of office will be for a period of three years with the possibility of renewal, except for ex-officio members. Specific provisions have been made at Clauses 9, 10 and 11 for meetings of Council, disclosure of interest of members and setting up of Committees for specific purposes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clauses 12 and 13 make provision for the establishment of an Academic Committee, which will act as an academic body of the Institute in preparing academic professional, technical and technology programmes and courses. It will also advise

and make recommendations to the Council on all academic matters, including the control, general direction and management of examinations and research facility.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as provided for at Clause 14, the Institute will be placed under the administrative responsibility of a Director to be appointed by the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Council for the execution of the decisions of the Council and for the control and management of the institution. Clauses 15 to 18 are standard clauses and provide for –

- (i) the delegation of power to the Director with regard to activities of the Council, and
- (ii) the appointment and conditions of service of employees.

The Institute may, on such terms and conditions as it may determine, appoint such employees as it considers necessary for the proper discharge of its functions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, provision is made at Clause 19 for the Powers of the Minister who may give written directions of a general character to the Council in respect of its activities. I would like here to stress that we are talking of written directions and not verbal ones. This should allay whatever concerns or apprehensions that may exist with regard to extraneous pressure. In fact, this Clause shows the commitment of this Government to ensure transparency and accountability in the management process of the Institute.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Institute will need resources to finance its activities. In this context, Clauses 20 to 26 are standard ones which make provision for management of finance and accounts of the Institute.

Clauses 27, 28 and 29 relate to the miscellaneous provisions of the Bill which include Offences, Legal Proceedings and Promulgation of Regulations. Clause 30 pertains to amendments to be brought to the First Schedule of the Public Procurement Act and Statutory Bodies Act. The Institute will need to comply to the provisions of the Public Procurement Act and will be an approved service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the setting up of this ITET needs to be made without delay. This will be done as indicated at Clause 31, through the vesting of six centres of the MITD to my Ministry as specified in the Schedule of the Bill, namely -

- (a) the Professor B. S. Upadhyaya Training Centre in Piton;
- (b) the Knowledge Based Training Centre in Port Louis;
- (c) Sir Rampersad Neerunjun Training Complex-East Wing/School of Information Technology, Electronics and Communication (SITEC) at Ébène;
- (d) Lycée Polytechnique Sir Guy Forget in Flacq;

- (e) Le Chou Multipurpose Training Centre in Rodrigues, and
- (f) Technical Education Centre in construction at Beau-Vallon.

These centres would be re-engineered into high-level technical education centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another transitional provision has been made for the assets of these training centres to be vested in the ITET. It is to be pointed out that the staff who are currently working in these centres, will remain on the establishment of the MITD retaining all their rights and privileges according to their conditions of service. However, they can apply to fill posts advertised by the ITET, in line with its staffing requirements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now conclude my intervention. We believe that re-designing and providing a new orientation for the Technical Education sector is a matter of pressing urgency if we wish to develop an agile workforce to match the requirements of the economy. I wish also to emphasise that this Bill is future-focused and the ITET will serve as a means to promote a unified, sustainable and technologically advanced public network of technical education centres. These will provide work-based, on-campus and even online technical education across the country and beyond.

This Bill, Mr Speaker Sir, will be a landmark in our education ecosystem. It proposes to enhance the attractiveness of technical and technology education as an item uppermost on our agenda.

It comes at an opportune time in that it gives to the technical education its rightful place and serves to embed it in our entire education reform agenda.

The wheel, Mr Speaker, Sir, will now come full circle.

With these words, Mr Speaker Sir, I commend the Bill to the House and I thank you for your attention.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Mr Speaker: Debate would ensue; I remind hon. Members not to be out of subject, to stick to the Bill.

Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(5.48 p.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to share my views on the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill.

Let me start with the following quote from Ronald Reagan who said –

“Education is like a diamond with many facets: it includes the basic mastery of numbers and letters that give us access to the treasury of human knowledge, accumulated and refined through the ages; it includes technical and vocational training as well as instruction in science, higher mathematics, and humane letters.”

This quote helps to go to the core of the Bill which is being debated today. Indeed, education is a multifaceted diamond and this diamond includes the TVET Sector. The object of the Bill is to provide for, I quote –

“The setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to operate and manage education centres.”

As mentioned in the Schedule, Section 31, we have a list of six training centres; five in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues and out of the five in Mauritius, the Beau Vallon Training Centre has not been built yet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the mover of the Bill very attentively and I can say that the enthusiasm, the narrative, the approach which has been adopted by the hon. Minister of Education, seems to be, I will not say *du déjà-vu* but *du déjà-entendu*. Yes, I agree, as she has said, that we have to provide multiple entries and exits to students. I agree we need to provide more opportunities to students. I agree that there should be emergence of technicians and technologists. I agree that we have to equip future generation to be the drivers of development. We need to revamp the technical development; reform of the technical education has to take place. We need rebranding. We agree, but while presenting the Skills Development Authority Bill, she said, let me quote –

“Our public institutions operating in the TVET sector have well defined statutory objects and functions, each fulfilling the roles ascribed to them. Whilst the HRDC is mainly responsible for the planning of the human capital development, the MQA, for its part, is tasked with the registration of training providers, accreditation of programmes and maintaining a national qualification framework, the main public training service providers being the MITD and Polytechnics Mauritius.”

The HRDC is mainly responsible for the planning of the human capital development, the MQA for its part, is tasked with the registration of training providers, accreditation of programmes and maintaining a national qualification framework, the main public training service providers being the MITD and Polytechnics Mauritius. In 2019, we were told that the MITD and Polytechnics Mauritius were the main public training service providers. Two years later, in 2021, a new institute, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill (ITET) is going to be set up. What will the ITET do? The aim of the ITET is, I quote–

“...to operate and manage technical education centres.”

Why? In the Explanatory Memorandum, we read that the ITET will provide, I quote –

“opportunities and pathways to students pursuing studies in technical and technology education,”

My overarching question is: isn't the TVET sector already taking care of technical and technology education?

I said it, education is a multi-faceted diamond and this diamond includes the TVET sector. Why do we need a new player in a field where we already have established institutions fulfilling almost all the objectives mentioned by the mover of the Bill in her speech some time ago? Not only today but in the past also, the hon. Minister had a similar narrative and she had reassured us that the TVET sector is already taking care of the training of our students. Now that she is trying to neologise, laud, acclaim the ITET, I ask myself which is which? Don't we already have existing opportunities and pathways to students pursuing studies in technical and technology education in the TVET sector?

Mr Speaker, Sir, in an answer to a PQ No. B/387 by my colleague, hon. Osman Mahomed, on 21 May 2019 regarding the educational reform, she said that, I quote –

“All this is being done along or simultaneously to ensure that by the time we reach the policy for five credits that we have sufficient space in all our TVET institutions for our students.”

I continue with the quote –

“I must add that we have courses for students leaving the secondary schooling, that is, after Grade 10, as well as from the age of 16. They can join the TVET training sector, that is, students leaving after Grade 9 also would be given the possibility of joining and are presently following courses at the level of MITD.”

She has almost the same arguments for the ITET. At the outset, let me ask the following questions –

- What about the policy driving this Bill? Please, enlighten us about the policy to be implemented in order to create the link between secondary schools and ITET.
- Who among the secondary schools students will ultimately be selected for this project?
- In what ways secondary schools students will benefit from the ITET?
- What about the other institutions which have been providing training to secondary school leavers so far? Will the training delivered by ITET be full time, part time, blended, dual or any other mode of training?
- How will the ITET boost up the goodwill of the technical and vocational sector? She has talked about rebranding and revamping of the sector, how will it happen?
- How will the ITET address the shortage of skilled labour in the market?
- How will the ITET address the skills mismatch in the labour market?
- How will the ITET address the issue of rebranding the TVET sector?
- How will the ITET empower the staff of the TVET sector?
- How will the ITET add value to the TVET sector?
- How will ITET address the issue of developing coherent policies in that domain?

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that the TVET sector comprises of the Mauritius Polytechnics Ltd and the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) as public providers of technical and vocational education pathways for both secondary students as from the age of 16 onwards.

The ITET Bill now proposes nothing less than splitting up the MITD in two halves. Now, six centres will be under the purview of the Ministry of Education and the rest of the centres will be under the control of the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC). Should I assume that the Skills Development Authority, which was introduced with so much of pomp, is now a lame duck as its functions will be taken over by the ITET? Aren't we

creating yet another player in that somewhat congested field of post-secondary education and training? Is the creation of the ITET going to help greater coordination, planning and resource optimisation in these days when greater fiscal responsibility rather than the mushrooming of agencies and institutions would be expected?

I hope the Minister will clarify these queries in her summing up. I would like to make it clear that I commend each action, each measure, each incentive which goes in the interests of Mauritian children and the personnel of the TVET sector. We are for the rebranding of the TVET sector, we fully recognise that the TVET is one of the key players in the educational sector and we have to increase our intake at the level of the MITD and Polytechnics Mauritius.

We should also ensure capacity building, work with foreign institutions like the IT Education Services of Singapore, Australia and Switzerland and we need to ensure that the links between TVET sector and the industry is further strengthened. I insist that technical, vocational and technological education should not be viewed with disdain or stigma. Every effort should be made to revamp this sector. On this, I agree with the mover of the Bill.

We should do everything to popularise this sector. According to former US Senator of Montana, Conrad Burns, vocational education programmes have made a real difference in the lives of countless young people nationwide. They build self-confidence and leadership skills by allowing students to utilise their unique gifts and talents. The Bill comes at a very critical time.

As a concerned patriot, like all of you here and outside the House, I have to make sure that we use our financial resources smartly. I am not against the development of my country but we are going through an economic storm and we are currently drowning in debt. Investing in our human resources is crucial. A conservative look is that the Government's agenda for managing the sustainability of public finance do not bode well for the country's economic recovery in the near future. The economic model in which this Government has dragged us is not an apology not to embrace development and not to invest in education sector, far from it. I propose a judicious use of our financial resources.

Mr Speaker, Sir, part 4 of the Bill refers to the financial provisions and accounts. I am given to understand from Section 20 that the general fund shall be tapped from the same pool of grants. It is all taxpayers' money to be collected and distributed to two different institutions leading to a duplication of work and cut throat competition between two different

institutions doing almost the same work. I hope that we are not going to be what I call, penny wise and pound foolish in doing so. Today, we have great economic challenges facing our country. Let me quote from the PwC, which says that, I quote –

“Successfully resetting the course of the economy, more than just the deployment of financial resources, will require thoughtful decision making underpinned by a real desire for long-term sustainability.”

For example, the debt to GDP ratio for 2021-2022 is projected at 91.4%. Public debt increased by 22% from fiscal year 2019-2020 and is projected to rise by further 8% subsequently. GDP dropped by 14.9% in 2020, making Mauritius the country with the largest COVID-related GDP loss in Africa, according to the IMF.

We need to provide training, training which will open up opportunities, provide skills which are required by the labour market, training which supports the ambition of Mauritius to embrace emerging technologies. We need to harness the potentialities of our youth so that we can set the sail in the direction of progress and drive the economy forward. As the hon. Minister said, we cannot miss the boat. If the ITET goes in this direction, as mentioned in section 5(j) whereby it aims to –

“ensure judicious and optimum utilisation of its resources”.

Yes, we are for it and we are here to support it. However, when we have a few legitimate questions and queries, we are not being demagogues or anti-progress or anti-development. We would like the Government to take on board views, opinions and concerns of the stakeholders.

My next concern is the following –

In section 5(a), we read that the ITET will be –

“responsible for the provision and delivery of technical and technology education in line with the current and future needs of the economy”.

What research has been carried out in order to gauge the need of the ITET? What research has been carried out in the industrial and business sectors in order to find out the issues of skills mismatch? Is the ITET going to provide proactive measures to enhance employability of our youth? How is the ITET going to bring quality change in training and skills development in meeting the needs of the market, in developing the competencies for our labour force?

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Explanatory Memorandum, in part (b) of the object of the Bill, reference is made to the –

“... students pursuing studies in technical and technology education”.

Now we heard that the ITET will be for post Grade 11 students. This is what the mover of the Bill said, and before hearing this, I tried to look for the answer and came across the Budget Speech 2021-2022 and on page 48 under the heading under ‘The TVET Sector’, I read on the paragraph 282, section (a) –

“An Institute of Technical Education and Technology will be set-up to provide technical education at Grades 10 and 11”.

Should we understand that the ITET is being created exclusively for students post Grade 11 only? Does it mean that, henceforth, the students will be catered by the ITET and not the MITD? Will students of extended stream also be enlisted for the courses? What will be the academic pre-requirement of these students to join the ITET? What courses which will fall under the ambit of technology education consist of? We know that the number of students taking science in our secondary schools has dropped drastically. So, will science be a pre-requirement in order to join the ITET?

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are other issues requiring consideration. Would both MITD and ITET be running same courses like electrical, plumbing, welding, hairdressing, etc.? Would these courses be soon advertised to be run in both MITD and ITET training centres? Would both MITD and ITET be targeting the same student population to join their courses? It seems there would be no difference between the MITD and ITET. They would in fact be operating like competitors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the establishment and objects of the ITET respectively, section 3 and 4 of the Bill are going to have both a direct and indirect impact and bearing on those who are related to this sector. The creation of this institute will require human and financial resources, appropriate infrastructure and equipment, innovative curriculum, effective quality assurance of the courses, recognise awards and proper policy implementation framework.

When I speak in this august Assembly, I speak as the spokesperson of those people who have dedicated their experience, career and even life to this dynamic but crucial sector of education. I salute all of them for being the unsung heroes of the TVET sector. They have trained thousands of Mauritians who are now doing very well in different spheres of life.

Now, I refer to section 6(g), which reads as follows, that the institute may –

“enter into agreements, in such manner as it may determine, with any other institution or body, whether academic, technical, technology or otherwise, including the incorporation within the Institute of any other institution or body”.

According to me, section 6(g) is too vague and has to be clarified to avoid misinterpretation among the public in general and the staff of the existing institutions. Does this section 6(g) implicitly or explicitly mean that it will incorporate the MITD and the Lycée Polytechnique under its aegis? Will the ITET be completely an independent body? Will the ITET be another training institute?

Section 7 of the Bill under the heading ‘Admission of students’ reads as follows –

“The Institute may admit a student to any of its programmes or courses on such criteria and on such terms and conditions as it may determine”.

And, I would like in the days to come or in your summing up to have clearer guidelines regarding same.

Section 14 of the Bill refers to the Director. Nothing has been mentioned regarding the qualifications, duration and terms of contract of the incumbent who will be appointed or selected as Director. Let me remind the House that in the past we have had directors who have done an excellent job by providing their leadership, professional expertise and have spearheaded the TVET sector to new heights. I propose that the Director should be an engineer, and not an economist, like it was the case in the past. We need to have the right person at the right place and I propose that the qualifications and experience of the Director to be made clear, explicitly clear so that the incumbent is someone who comes from the TVET background. This provision should not be flouted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are many employees and trade unionists who are worried regarding their future with the advent and implementation of the ITET.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me refer to another diamond of the TVET sector, which is the *Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq and it is one of the centres which the ITET is proposing to operate and manage, henceforth. Let me remind everyone here that the *Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq was set up by the French Government. Technical courses are conducted in French mainly. The students of the *Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq already have pathways leading to further higher studies in Mauritius, France and elsewhere. We would like to know whether

the French curriculum and system will still be the same under the ITET. Will French language, technology and know-how still prevail under the ITET? If ever there will be changes then, will the staff of the *Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq be trained for the new curriculum and system? Like the other MITD employees, those of the *Lycée Polytechnique*, Flacq are worried about their future. It is up to the mover of the Bill to reassure them.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude.

Dr. Gungapersad: Let me try to.

Mr Speaker: I know it is difficult.

Dr. Gungapersad: According to the author, historian, philosopher, Professor Yuval Noah Harari, from time immemorial, life was divided into two complementary parts, a period of learning followed by a period of working. In the first part of life, you accumulated information, developed skills, constructed a worldview and built a stable identity. In the second part of life, you relied on the accumulated skills to navigate in the world, earn a living and contribute to society. Training is shifting from an activity undertaken before employment to a lifelong process.

Now, that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will request the mover of the Bill to show the type of grit and leadership which is essential and primordial in driving whatever policy measure which is essential in making it work. The mover of the Bill must realise that we have great expectations from the TVET sector and we hope that at least this time she will drive the ITET successfully. The future of our youth depends not only on policies but also in its implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the beginning of my speech, I quoted Ronald Reagan who said that education is like a diamond with many facets and to end let me ask the mover of the Bill to reflect on the following sentence - I hope in her quest for gold she does not lose the diamonds that she has.

À bon entendeur, salut! God bless the TVET sector! God bless Mauritius!

Thank you everyone.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Callichurn!

(6.11 p.m.)

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, rising unemployment, predominantly among the youth, is one of the most significant problems facing economies and societies in the world. The latest figure of Statistics Mauritius shows that unemployment amongst the youth, here, is on the rise and this phenomenon has been observed for quite some time now.

One of the reasons which explain the situation in which we are today is the inequity in the education system. The system has always prioritised the academic pathway. We have currently a high number of qualified youngsters but less jobs for them on the labour market. The imbalance in the labour market, we are observing presently, is unfortunately the result of a series of poor policy-making of Governments, and I say, of Governments prior to the one of 2014.

It is with this concern in mind that the previous Government under the leadership of the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth and current one, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has, since taking Office in 2014, been doing its utmost best to address the issue of youth unemployment by taking a different approach to the whole education system in Mauritius.

The introduction of the Nine-Year Schooling was the first step towards addressing the one-sidedness of our education system. It has always been assumed by some that technical pathways were for the less-able academically. They are being proven wrong when we see what is happening in the world, today. We are observing a paradigm shift in the education system across the world and this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is keeping up to pace with this evolution.

Countries like Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the US are giving more credence to vocational and technical education. And according to a report named 'Perspective and debates on vocational education and training, skills and the prospects for innovation', it is observed that the percentage of youth in the abovementioned countries who possess a vocational qualification is more than those possessing a tertiary qualification. And those having a vocational and technical education are more likely to find a well remunerated job faster than their fellow countrymen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has always placed the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) high on its agenda as a tool to staving off the unemployment crisis. We gave due consideration to vocational and technical training from 2014 to 2019, and

MITD, alone, trained some 57,000 youths in different fields and most of them were absorbed by the labour market. It was for that reason that unemployment rate fell from 8.2% in 2012 to 6.9% in 2019, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Unfortunately, due to COVID pandemic, we are forced to start all over again. Mr Speaker, Sir, the merits of TVET in promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment can also be instrumental in empowering our people for a better future.

With the ITET Bill, which is being presented today by my colleague hon. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, we are continuing to take a leap forward in the right direction by arming our youth with the technical competences to address the issue of skills mismatch and also to face the technological challenges in the world of work in the future.

For our economy to be able to sustain and rebuilt itself post-COVID-19, we are banking on the strength of our human resource, which has always been our main asset. Our people need, therefore, to be adequately equipped with the right knowledge, skills and aptitudes; these are not only essential for the support to the economic growth, but also are preconditions for growth to be inclusive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a worldwide trend that the better skilled the workforce is, the more prosperous communities will become. Hence, there is an urgent need to engage in the development of a skilled workforce that meets employers' job requirements and engages in sustainable enterprise development.

In line with the Government Programme 2020–2024, the Human Resource Development Council in collaboration with relevant stakeholders has developed a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) 2021-2025. Consultations are presently ongoing to fine-tune the proposals made therein and the document will soon be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, its main objective is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and quality of the skills development system in Mauritius. It is hinged around three salient strategic clusters –

- Improving skills system effectiveness;
- Tackling skills imbalances, and
- Strengthening the education and training system to prepare and empower young people for the future.

The NSDS also tries to address the underlying culture of learning and attitudes towards training, from the perspective of the training supply and training demand, as expressed by employers, employees and the unemployed.

However, our country needs sufficient technical hands with skill sets to accelerate the pace of development. The new generation of workers is expected to work in a fast-evolving future economy. One of the most promising ways to face faster economic growth is through investment in the skills of the people.

Moreover, technology has become a necessity especially in the current worldwide COVID pandemic situation. With travel restrictions in most part of the world and people being in lockdown or quarantined, technology is playing a vital role in allowing them to connect with the outside world.

In order to keep pace with the fast growing innovation in technology, Mauritius needs to elevate the technical, cognitive, digital and socio-emotional skills level of its population by more rigorous skills training, up-skilling and retraining. Skills would allow existing employees to improve productivity in their workplace and also allow the unemployed to compete for better paying jobs.

The setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology, therefore, comes at an opportune time to complement the existing Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Students completing their School Certificate will get access to high quality technical education that would open their way to direct employment or higher studies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology, a clear distinction is being made between vocational training and technical education. Technical education has as objectives the preparation of trainees for occupations that are classed above the skilled manpower but below the scientific or engineering professions. The establishment of the ITET will go a long way to correcting perceptions of the vocational track being a second-best option as compared to general secondary or tertiary education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 aims at ensuring an inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In order to achieve this goal, training centres that will form part of the Institute of the Technical Education and Technology will be setup in the strategic locations across the island in order to allow students, both girls and boys, to have access to high quality education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me take some time to share with the House some of the observations made in the Industrial Policy and Strategic Plan for Mauritius 2020-2025, issued by the Ministry of Industrial Development, SME's and Cooperatives lead by my colleague, the hon. Minister Sunil Bholah.

It is a nicely structured report and I would invite many to read it, especially hon. Dr. Mahend Gungapersad. In one section pertaining to workforce, it is mentioned –

“It was noted that Mauritian labour skills have failed to improve relatively compared to global competitors, forcing an unsustainable dependence on expatriate labour for low, medium, and high skilled positions, with this particularly acute in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related occupations”.

Further, talking about skills development, the report stipulates the following –

“Mauritius’ existing skills development system appears unable to meet the range and depth of industry requirements. There is a clear need to focus on basic and intermediate technical education and to raise high-level STEM capabilities. (...) Most notably, there are no post-graduate technical institutions in Mauritius providing the industry with a pipeline of advanced skills. This is stunting the availability of advanced technical skills, which is central to the development of high-value activities within most the manufacturing value chains based in upper middle income and high-income economies.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, our strategy is to build a robust industry foundation to enable existing skills development system to meet the industry's requirement. The area of intervention here is the STEM and the academic triangle supporting the manufacturing and other sectors.

Such initiatives have had astounding results in other countries, like for example in South Korea, which is considered to be amongst the very few countries having high-tech industries in the world with the right skills. Actually the South Korean Government since 2010, Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of its policies to develop vocational education gave much

importance to the incorporation of vocational education into the high school curriculums and consequently the employment rate of vocational high school graduates has increased.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology as per its objectives will undoubtedly play a prominent role in the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy and assist in achieving its strategic objectives by zooming in on the formation and acquisition of higher order technical skills.

Given that the Institute of Technical Education and Technology shall collaborate with industry and business sectors to deliver a skilled and work ready pool of technicians and technologists, we are confident that this initiative will overcome skills mismatch and ensure that trainees receive the right skills and competencies needed to secure productive employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, questions are being asked as to the future of MITD with the introduction of ITET. Let me be clear and reassuring, the MITD which has been the leader in providing training in this country for decades is here to stay. Actually MITD is in the process of being revamped in order to provide quality vocational courses. A new strategic plan is being prepared to meet the demand of skilled manpower from various industries. The new strategic actions would be centred on –

- (i) enhancing the relevance and quality of training;
- (ii) increasing its efficiency and effectiveness;
- (iii) increase access and promote equity in Technical Vocational Education and Training;
- (iv) rebranding of MITD, and
- (v) promote continuous professional development of staff.

In addition to pursuing the transformation of TVET, the new strategy of the MITD will place greater focus on the following –

- (i) Expansion of training under the National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP);
- (ii) Scaling up of training for unemployed youth;
- (iii) Greater opportunities for training of women;
- (iv) Continuing upskilling of in-service workers;
- (v) Retraining of workers whose jobs are potentially vulnerable, as a result of fast changing technology through targeted training such as NTRS (National

Training & Reskilling Scheme) and NSDP (National Skills Development Programme);

- (vi) Multi-skilling of workers to enable them to maintain their employability;
- (vii) Training of Mauritians to enable them to seize employment opportunities resulting from international migration

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education & Technology (ITET) and the phasing out of the Pre-Vocational Education (PVE) this year, the MITD will streamline and consolidate its training resources by building comprehensive and vibrant regional training centres. Moreover, MITD training centres are being upgraded to deliver quality training. These training centres shall provide learners with a more conducive and enriching learning environment. New equipment is being purchased in line with latest technological development. The curricula programmes are being reviewed systematically in collaboration with industry partners.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that MITD has, since its creation, played an important role in the development of a competent workforce by producing skilled labour for socio-economic development of the country. The high employability rate as I stated earlier of MITD trainees is testimony of that. With the ITET Bill, it will further pursue its role as an enhanced provider of training, as well as its certification role.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently MITD employs some 750 staffs. Let me reassure those who are currently posted at the centres which will be transferred to the new institute after the promulgation of the Bill. I wish to tell them that they will keep their respective positions at the MITD and that they will be transferred to other centres falling under the purview of MITD. The ITET will have its own recruitment policy, those who are currently under the establishment of MITD will get the opportunity to join the new institution but they will obviously have to apply for any position that the new institute will eventually advertise. As regard to those who will be selected by the new institute, their length of service will be transferred to the new institution. So, I say it loud and clear, no staff will be made redundant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we can only hope that the introduction of the ITET here bares the same fruits. Training to acquire new skills is an ongoing process in an ever-changing Industrial Era 4.0, and this Government, under the able leadership of the Prime Minister, has walked the talk by deploying lots of resources in order to have a trained workforce to respond to the emerging needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall conclude my intervention by again commending my colleague for the introduction of this legislation, which is attuned to the country's vision for a smarter economy. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(6:31 p.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Allow me, at the very outset, to state that on this side of the House, we have no quarrel over this Bill.

Notre pays a certainement besoin de beaucoup plus de gens dans le domaine de l'éducation technique et technologique. M. le président, le monde est de plus en plus dominé par la science et la technologie. Il est incontestable que le *Blockchain*, la robotique, l'intelligence artificielle, la *Fintech*, l'Internet et les innovations numériques entre autres vont envahir de plus en plus nos vies et le monde du travail. Nous sommes dans l'ère du *STEM* (*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*). Il nous faut, donc, reconstruire ou même transformer notre économie et créer des opportunités pour nos jeunes dans le monde post-pandémique.

Or, notre seul capital humain reste insuffisamment préparé et continu d'être à la traîne dans les domaines de l'éducation technique et technologique. Et la planification et l'élaboration de stratégies dans le domaine de l'enseignement technique et technologique ne peuvent se faire de manière isolée. Il est nécessaire que le plan éducatif soit un continuum et holistique. D'autant plus que dans un pays comme le nôtre, notre seule ressource est notre capital humain.

Toutefois, des questions restent pertinentes. La création d'un tel institut tel que proposé par le projet de loi, va-t-elle nous aider à obtenir les ressources humaines dont nous avons besoin pour stimuler notre économie et notre société ? Pourquoi n'avons-nous pas eu une révision du programme d'études dès l'école primaire, axée sur l'éducation technique et technologique pour s'assurer que chaque enfant ait la chance d'opter pour de tels domaines, plutôt que d'envoyer le message que l'enseignement technique est destiné à ceux qui ne sont pas « académiquement bon ». La technique est considérée comme une dernière chance, malheureusement, pour les jeunes qui ont échoué académiquement. Et d'ailleurs, comment pouvons-nous décider qui n'est pas bon sur le plan académique ? Une bonne planification est essentielle à la construction de notre avenir. Mais commencer par un tel institut sans même

s'assurer que tout notre système éducatif créé l'espace pour que les talents s'épanouissent, grandissent et se développent dans de tels domaines, est à mon sens dénué de sens, et représenterait encore une fois un énorme gaspillage de ressources.

M. le président, après 53 ans d'indépendance et malgré toutes les tentatives de réformes du système éducatif, ce dernier devient de plus en plus élitiste laissant un certain nombre de nos jeunes en marge de la société avec un avenir incertain et le prétexte qu'ils peuvent être orientés vers certains domaines techniques. Il se peut que certains s'en sortent. Mais qu'en est-il de la grande masse, ceux qui n'arrivent pas à obtenir cinq *credits* ? Pourquoi cette politique d'exclusion au nom de l'excellence et de la qualité ?

M. le président, au paragraphe 33 du programme gouvernemental, il est énoncé ceci –

“In line with the education reform policy, a Technical Education Institute will be set up to create opportunities and pathways for students to pursue studies in technical education.”

Cela est l'un des objets du projet de loi, dans la note explicative.

Le programme gouvernemental ne parle que de l'enseignement technique mais le projet de loi mentionne la technologie également. Et le projet de loi ne nous donne aucune indication de la façon dont l'éducation technique et technologique est différente, et les implications sur la formation et les centres d'apprentissage.

Étant donné que l'enseignement technique n'est pas nouveau à Maurice, le gouvernement a-t-il entrepris une étude approfondie du secteur ? Par exemple –

- Quelles sont les réalisations du *MITD* ?
- Quel est son bilan ?
- Est-ce que le *MITD* arrive à réaliser ses objectifs ?
- Est-ce que ces objectifs sont en ligne avec nos besoins socio-économiques ?
- Dans quel domaine les étudiants du *MITD* ont-ils été recrutés ?
- Quelles sont les opportunités et les contraintes auxquelles le *MITD* est confronté ?
- Et tout aussi importante, quelles sont les disparités entre les sexes qui sont à l'origine d'une sous-utilisation de notre capital humain ?

Nous avons aussi des institutions techniques qui ont apparemment établi un partenariat avec une université étrangère pour l'obtention d'un diplôme. De tels partenariats

peuvent être utiles mais doivent être évalués avant de se lancer aveuglement dans d'autres collaborations externes.

M. le président, le collège technique St Gabriel, à Port-Louis, je dois dire est un modèle. Mais, malheureusement, ce collège peine à trouver les moyens financiers afin d'atteindre ses objectifs. Le gouvernement se doit de trouver des moyens pour que les étudiants qui fréquentent de telles institutions puissent aller jusqu'au bout. L'objectif de ce collège est d'ouvrir l'accès à l'enseignement technique à tous et notamment dans la zone de Port Louis en offrant une option préférentielle aux enfants les plus vulnérables de notre société. Ce collège offre une formation pratique à l'atelier, des cours techniques, théoriques en classe, dessin industriel, technologie, mathématiques appliquées et un complément d'enseignement général tel que la prévention des accidents et l'hygiène du travail, la législation, la formation sociale et la formation humaine. Le diplôme préparé est un Brevet d'Études Professionnelles (BEP) et un Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP). L'octroi de ces diplômes de type français est sous la responsabilité d'un jury d'examen composé d'industriels mauriciens, de l'administration du collège et est présidé par un représentant du secteur privé mauricien.

M. le président, à la clause 5 du projet de loi, mention est faite de la fourniture et la prestation de l'enseignement technique et technologique en conformité avec les besoins actuels et futurs de l'économie. Mais d'autres questions restent encore pertinentes –

- Avons-nous une étude sur les besoins actuels et futurs de notre économie ?
- Et dans l'état actuel des choses, pouvons-nous savoir dans quel secteur spécifique avons-nous besoin des compétences techniques et technologiques, et en quelle quantité ?
- L'exercice de planification de la main-d'œuvre, bien que difficile, demeure cruciale en ces temps difficiles également. Combien un tel institut va-t-il nous coûter?
- Quel sera le budget annuel en termes de salaire pour le personnel ?

Nous devons être très prudents dans la mise en œuvre de tout nouveau type d'institutions. Le gouvernement vient de voter *The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill* le 30 juin. N'est-ce pas là une duplication ? Est-ce que le pays peut se permettre une floraison de *Councils* alors que l'Audit vient de dénoncer les gaspillages ? Quel est le *cost analysis* de ces investissements ? Il serait bon ici, M. le président, de savoir ce qui est

advenu de la technopole à Rose Belle mise en chantier en 2016 et estimée à R 300 millions. Quels sont les besoins en matière d'éducation auquel le projet en tant répondre ?

Mr Speaker: No conversation there!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le discours du budget mentionne les grades 10 et 11. Pourquoi cette catégorie seulement ? N'est-ce pas là perpétuer la stigmatisation de ceux qui ont échoué le *NCE (National Certificate of Education)* et qui seraient bons pour la technique seulement ? Cette année, M. le président, il y a eu la première Edition du *NCE, National Certificate of Education*. Des 14,044 candidats, 2,168 places sont allouées dans le 12 académies. 11,876 de grade 9 ne sont pas éligibles pour une admission en académie. Je présume que ce sont ces élèves qui seront admis dans la filière technique. De plus, si on se base sur les chiffres de 2019, le taux de réussite au *SC* a baissé de 71,5 % ...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ministers, no conversations!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: ... à 70,9 %. Quid des étudiants détenteurs d'un *SC* ou d'un *HSC* qui voudraient continuer leur formation dans la filière technique ? Est-ce qu'on a fait une étude sur le nombre d'étudiants potentiels, sur le nombre d'institutions techniques pouvant accueillir ces étudiants et les secteurs nécessaires à notre développement socio-économique ?

M. le président, selon *Statistics Mauritius*, du début de 2020, le taux de chômage pour 2019 était estimé à 6,7 %, soit 39,300 personnes. De ce nombre de 7,700, soit 20 % du nombre total de chômeurs sont de 16 à 24 ans et 51 % ne détiennent pas le *SC*. Alors que le nombre de travailleurs étrangers a dépassé la barre de 45,000, répartis dans différents secteurs tels que le manufacturier, la construction, la distribution, la restauration et l'hôtellerie. Nos institutions se doivent de fournir un enseignement technique de qualité avec des composantes à valeur ajoutée en terme de développement intégral de la personne tout en garantissant une main-d'œuvre qualifiée avec des compétences solides, des aptitudes et une attitude positive au travail.

M. le président, en 2019, 8,024 étudiants dont 76,5 % d'hommes et 23,5 % de femmes étaient inscrits à des cours techniques et professionnels à temps plein, à temps partiel et aussi à des cours d'apprentissage. Ces chiffres démontrent l'écart entre le sexe dans les domaines technologique. Il est donc important de féminiser les professions et les filières techniques. Il faut prendre les mesures nécessaires pour éliminer les inégalités entre les genres et encourager un plus grand nombre de filles à entrer dans les domaines techniques.

C'est une question légitime lorsque les ressources seront investies dans un institut qui aura également la responsabilité de développer des programmes et de la recherche dans le domaine de l'enseignement technique et technologique.

La recherche dans le monde entier montre que si la STEM n'est pas sensible aux genres, combler les écarts entre les sexes dans le monde technique et technologique restera un exercice très difficile. Cela signifierait également une utilisation inefficace de notre capital humain.

Pour conclure, M. le président, je dirai ceci, notre pays a besoin des personnes formées à la technique et à la technologie et notre système éducatif se doit de permettre à tous de pouvoir exploiter son potentiel pour le développement socio-économique du pays. Pour cela les cours doivent être adaptés à nos besoins et l'argent des contribuables utilisé judicieusement.

J'en ai terminé, merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(6.48 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. I think this is one of the most interesting debates that have taken place in the House. One must acknowledge that it is a daunting challenge to hold the education for portfolio especially in times of COVID-19. But allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir to salute the tremendous and commendable role of hon. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, not only as Vice-Prime Minister but also as Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very passionate about this subject because as a mother of two, I have been constantly questioning myself about the future of my boys. What if they do not want to be doctors, lawyers, accountants or even engineers or any of the conventional professions? What if they choose to opt for a non-conventional job, jobs that are generally and wrongly looked down upon? Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, from my address today, I would like to reach out to the numerous youngsters, who for too long, have been uncanny victims of an education system that has not only instilled the stigma of failure unto them, but worse still, has not allowed them a second chance in life. Every single young person has a unique potential inherently embedded within himself or herself; a potential that should lead him or her to do well as an individual to succeed in life.

But, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, the obtrusive education system that we have so obstinately been practising since the colonial days, the remnants of which still pervade the present system, had brought in its wake a yardstick for success that defies the very meaning of the term.

A system that over decades that followed our accession to sovereignty generated more the so-called ‘failures’ than success. A system that has forced numerous unwilling youngsters into the dropout bin and who found no other alternative than to take up jobs that instead of enhancing their self-esteem in society as honest wage earners further relegated them to the lowest rung of the social ladder. This is precisely why I believe that this Bill comes as a beacon of light that may go a long way towards rehabilitating those who do not have the ability for purely academic streams but do possess other greater abilities to succeed in life.

This Bill, in a way, comes to place education in a better perspective. It comes to correct a long overdue injustice towards those victims of the society. And as I lend my voice to such an important Bill, I think it is my duty to highlight and make the youngsters outside understand the purpose of this Bill; a Bill which is about to modernise and strengthen our education system, supporting the progress of every single Mauritian student out there, by placing him or her at the centre and not on the periphery.

The Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill touches on some important aspects of our education system which go beyond politics.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, education is a basic human right and this Bill comes to reinforce many of other fundamental rights, that is, our right to democracy, our right to information but above all, our right to be part of an inclusive society.

And, once again, this Government, under the able leadership of Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is moving towards the building of an inclusive society that will ensure that no one is left behind. This is what we call an inclusive society. To be able to do so, the Government is making place for students with skills, beyond bookish knowledge, that is, supporting learning through multiple pathways and throughout life by helping the students to use their ability and potential to their fullest. Regardless of the starting point, the end result matters most.

I will here refer to an article published in 2011 where the then Minister of Education, Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, who, during his speech in Saint Esprit College mentioned, *et je cite* –

« que son ministère contemple sérieusement l'introduction d'un HSC professionnel qui prendra en compte des stages en entreprises et du service social formatif. »

Et, dans l'éditorial paru le lendemain de cette déclaration, l'auteur écrit, et je cite -

« La question qui devrait interpeller tout citoyen raisonnable qui a à cœur l'intérêt de ses enfants et du pays est ceci : le système des examens actuels offre-t-il la garantie d'une éducation de qualité qui permet à tous les étudiants mauriciens, indépendamment de leurs classes socio-économiques, de se mettre au diapason avec la compétition sur le plan planétaire, si indispensable pour la survie même de notre société à long terme? »

This is such an important question which this Bill comes to answer because this Bill will actually correct all the inequalities that students have been facing so far.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is therefore clear that this Bill aims to bring forward an educational system which is *juste et équitable*.

The pandemic has been an eye opener for many, and the construction sector has been crying out loud for new workers. We need skilled workers. We need more workers and this Bill is about creating a new system that is in responsive to the needs of learners and employers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the aim of this Government is regardless of where you come from, you have equal access to education and training and skill development opportunities that you need to thrive in a workplace or simply in life. This Bill takes into consideration the significantly changing nature of work, both here and around the world and it responds to the fact that many current employees, increasing number of employees are going to need access to upskilling workers.

Well, I have been listening to Members on the other side of the House who have been referring to statistics but I have been doing same to find out some statistics and according to Statistics Mauritius, for the year 2019, we have around 158,200 skilled workers in agriculture, forestry, fishery workers, craft and related trade workers plant and machine operators which means there is scope.

Mr Speaker Sir, to conclude, I would like to use a sentence and a word which has been very often used by the hon. Member of the other side, the hon. Bodha who unfortunately is not here, 'the paradigm shift'. Well, let me tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Bill is

actually the paradigm shift and the paradigm shift is happening with this Bill on this side of the House and I would like to say that this Government has levelled up several inequalities where time back, one was limited to, I could hear the hon. Member who just spoke before me, mentioning about the figures, you know, percentage of pass, etc.

We, as students, were limited to the 'ranking number', like you were *classé* as we say, but we are also reduced to figures like 89% of success rate and so on. So, I think it is high time that we stop this, but what matters is that you should produce successful and accomplished individuals. What matters at the end of the day is the students should win for the future; it is not about us, but it is about them.

Therefore, our prime concern, as politicians, as lawmakers is to see that the future wins. And, this Bill precisely goes in this direction and as a young Member, I fully support this Bill.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhaliah!

(6.58p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving the floor to me to bring my humble contribution to the debate on the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill in this August Assembly.

This Government has a clear vision for developing the potential and talents of our youth and direct them towards a brighter path with better prospects. Our inclusive education system aims at providing a career path to each and every young learner while concurrently ensuring that no one is left behind. This Government has been consistently reviewing our education system to ascertain that it remains innovative, robust and responsive to industry needs and ever-emerging gaps.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we are discussing a Bill relating to the education sector, I have a special thought for our students. Allow me to avail of this opportunity to pay a special tribute to all the teaching staff, non-teaching staff, officers from the other public and private bodies and parents for their commendable efforts, hard work and precious time to put in place various facilities to allow students to continue their studies in the midst of the second wave of the COVID-19 situation. We are fully cognisant of the stress that the prevailing situation brings to our young, innocent students.

In this regard, Government will leave no stone unturned to ensure that students continue their studies in the best possible manner and in a safe, secure and conducive environment. We would here like to wish all the very best to these students.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming back to this Bill, it is a very important piece of legislation which will no doubt shape the destiny of this country by providing an all-inclusive and holistic system of education for the benefit of the youth of this country.

The very object of this Bill is, first and foremost, to provide for the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to operate and manage Technical Education Centres. It will assist Technical Education Centres in providing opportunities and pathways to students pursuing studies in technical and technology education. It will subsequently enable the country to make a judicious and effective use of its human resource capital. Here, I would like to congratulate the hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookhun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology for having introduced this vital piece of legislation which will pave the way for a better, holistic and all-inclusive education system that will cater for the well-being of the young generation of this country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is in line with the vision of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister, to enhance the education system in order to meet the aspirations and needs of the country and its population. He has pledged to the nation that his Government will bring the necessary reforms to modernise and transform the education sector. Here, I would like to refer to paragraph 33 of the Government Programme 2020-2024 which reads as follows, this has been quoted before, but I have another conclusion to this and I am going to share that with Members in this House, so I quote –

“In line with the education reform policy, an Institute of Technical Education will be set up to create opportunities and path ways for students to pursue studies in technical education.”

For me, this is a concrete example of another achievement of this Government under the stewardship of the Prime Minister. Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth has stood by the pledge he made to the nation in November 2019. I am convinced that the population will judge this Government along the line of its programme implementation and draw their own judgement and conclusion against those who are indulged in demagogies and hollow promises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we would all recall that Mauritius has emerged from a monocrop economy based on agriculture to a diversified economy underpinned by the development of textile, manufacturing, service and other emerging sectors. The tremendous progress achieved over the years was largely attributable to reforms introduced in our education system. A vivid example is the creation of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB) back in 1989, under the vision of an MSM Government led by late Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, the then Prime Minister.

At that time, the country was in dire need of skilled labour to respond to the needs of our booming textile sector and other manufacturing industries. Further reforms were subsequently brought to the education sector to adapt to an ever-changing world and this led to the creation of several institutions at different stages, notably –

- *Lycée Polytechnique* Sir Guy Forget ;
- *Ecole Hôtelière* Sir Gaëtan Duval ;
- the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development;
- Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd, and now
- the Institute of Technical Education and Technology.

M. le président, je partage la même ambition avec notre gouvernement, qui est de conduire les améliorations nécessaires depuis longtemps à la qualité de l'enseignement technique dans ce pays, reflétant l'impact des réformes de ce gouvernement sur la qualité de l'enseignement. Les réformes de ce projet de loi sont fondamentales pour la vision du gouvernement de veiller à ce que tous les peuples, indépendamment de leurs antécédents, aient des règles du jeu équitables pour réaliser leur potentiel et aient des voies de haute qualité pour assurer non seulement leur propre avenir, mais aussi les compétences dont les entreprises mauriciennes ont besoin.

M. le président, au-delà des mesures du projet de loi, le gouvernement a pour mission fondamentale de réformer la société afin de réaliser notre vision d'un système d'éducation qui fonctionne pour tous. L'éducation est au cœur de notre ambition de faire notre pays une véritable méritocratie. C'est pourquoi nous avons placé la responsabilité des premières années, des écoles, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la poursuite des compétences des adultes et de l'apprentissage dans un seul département. Je suis confiant que ce projet de loi nous permettra de poursuivre la transformation de l'enseignement technique dans ce pays

pendant que nous continuons d'élaborer des propositions pour un système scolaire qui fonctionne pour tout le monde.

M. le président, ce projet de loi sur l'éducation technique et technologique fait avancer l'ambition du gouvernement de rationaliser l'enseignement technique afin d'assurer des voies claires vers l'emploi qualifié. Ces réformes placeront les employeurs au cœur du système de compétences, ce qui leur permettra d'utiliser les compétences dont ils ont le plus besoin. Soutenir les individus à une vie d'emploi qualifié durable contribuera non seulement à stimuler la productivité et la croissance de notre économie conformément à notre stratégie industrielle, mais il permettra également de réaliser la vision du gouvernement pour une économie qui fonctionne pour tous, et pas seulement pour les quelques privilégiés. Les mesures du projet de loi s'appuient sur les progrès que le gouvernement a déjà réalisés en investissant dans des apprentissages de haute qualité.

M. le président, l'avancement d'un pays se mesure surtout au bien-être de sa population, le vivre ensemble et aussi le progrès pour chacun de nos citoyens. Ce progrès, M. le président, passe par notre système d'éducation et de formation. Un système qui doit évoluer selon la demande dans le monde de l'emploi.

Nous avons fait un grand pas en avant comparé à plusieurs autres pays, dans le développement de notre secteur d'éducation tertiaire. Il y a les universités publiques; l'université de Maurice, l'*Open University* et l'université de Technologie de Maurice et aussi les branches d'universités internationales. Nous avons aussi fait d'énormes progrès dans la formation technique avec la création de l'IVTB en 1989. Depuis, des dizaines de milliers de nos compatriotes ont pu suivre des cours et ont pu s'intégrer dans le milieu professionnel.

Nombreuses des entreprises du privé ont pu se développer grâce à la connaissance de ces jeunes. Toutefois, l'évolution de la technologie et conséquemment dans le système de production requiert des qualités plus avancées en terme de connaissance de la technologie. Et nous n'avons pas d'autre choix que la formation de nos jeunes dans cette filière. Nous devons aussi regarder les choses en face. Un manque de connaissance précise de notre main-d'œuvre n'est pas encourageant pour les entreprises d'investir à Maurice. Nous devons nous adapter à la demande du marché.

La formation dans le domaine de la technologie permettra aussi une meilleure efficience pour les PME. Le mécanicien, par exemple, doit pouvoir diagnostiquer les failles

d'un véhicule à travers son *laptop*. C'est pour ces raisons que nous débattons aujourd'hui de ce projet de loi.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, higher level skills will be capital to be able to rise again to a status of a high-income economy. Various business and industry sectors have been actively lobbying to eliminate the gap in competencies and skills as compared to that required in the job market. The mismatch between the job seekers and what the industry requires is another major reason for some of our youngsters not securing employment. This led to the introduction of Youth Employment Programme (YEP), the Graduate Training for Employment Scheme (GTES) and the Service to Mauritius Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no country in the world has been able to maintain itself as a high-income economy without the development of its technical education stream. The problem earmarked for vocational training is that it has traditionally prepared individuals for jobs in the lower and middle level of the skill spectrum. Consequently, the decline of medium-skilled jobs is a particular challenge. The skills gap arises not because vocational education is not producing graduates with the right attitudes and skills. It is in fact because jobs at this level are declining.

We are struggling in the 21st century to face the challenges of emerging technologies. Now, the economy wants something else, something unique and creative, something our education did not cover - higher level technical education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, technical education is part and parcel of a holistic education system that responds to the various learning needs and interests of our young learners. It helps in the orientation of individuals towards the acquisition of practical skills and constructive attitudes required in a work place, thus enabling them to pursue specific occupations in a variety of fields. There is also an urging need to keep pace with emerging technologies by providing relevant up to date training to our students on these new technologies. It is important to highlight that we are venturing into new and high-growth potential sectors such as the digital economy, renewable energy, and life sciences, amongst others. Concurrently, the Government has to design an overall system that provides young people with clear educational routes and options that ultimately lead to employment as professionals in specific fields.

Mr Speaker, sir, several hon. Members have already debated on various clauses of the Bill and hence I do not intend to delve into them again.

Mr Speaker Sir, I will conclude by stating that this is a time for bold decisions as our country is still fighting the waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our population is our greatest asset and upskilling each of them in the desired way is going to have a compounded effect in terms of productivity and resilience. This Bill is all about inclusiveness while creating new opportunities to our youth and enabling them to contribute in a greater manner in the building of a better society for one and all.

For the first time in decades we are beginning to see a realisation that if we do not prepare all school students for the world of work, and if we are to provide the skills that our country needs, then the dial has to be reset. This Bill will, in fact, reset the dial of technical education and technology in Mauritius.

Education is a lifelong process of empowerment. It helps us to grow and develop as individuals. It empowers us to become emphatic individuals, build our self-confidence and exploit our skills and strengths. Education is the passport for the future and tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. Education is all about investing for the future. This Bill will pave the way for students to have a technical education of excellence, unlocking their full potential and preparing them for the world of work.

Finally, this Bill will provide the necessary legal and institutional framework for boosting technical education and technology in the Republic of Mauritius to newer heights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with these words, I fully support the provisions in this Bill. Long live the Republic of Mauritius! Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: At this stage, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

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

(7:14 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill transcends beyond party politics. Because it concerns the future of our youth, it concerns the future of our school population this is why we have to tell the facts as they are. Now, many of my fellow colleagues from this side of the House and on the other side of the House have made reference to statistics. I shall also refer to them in a minute, but let us situate the context first in which this Bill is being passed.

Now, in 2015, Mauritius, together with other member States, adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which included among its 17 Goals, as Goal No. 4 the following and I quote –

“To ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”.

And, in order to achieve that particular, goal, Goal No. 4, targets were set out and they included amongst others, I will refer to the relevant ones for the purposes of this debate, target 4.3 -

“By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.”

And target 4.4 -

“By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.”

Now, let us see the present situation with regard to Mauritius. Where are we with regard to achieving Goal No. 4? I will refer, first of all, to the situation in the academic sector and then I will come to the TVET sector.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will agree with me that the best yardstick to measure how far we have reached in achieving these goals, is the statistics published by none other than the Mauritius Examination Syndicate. The statistics show the performance of our students in the various national examinations, and I will refer to them –

- (i) If you take, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, PSAC Assessment Grade 6 for 2020-2021, out of approximately 14,000 students who were examined, only some 10,500 students got through, leaving some 4,000 out of the mainstream. Therefore, about 27% of PSAC students did not go through the PSAC exams at Grade 6;
- (ii) If you take the National Certification of Education Assessment 2020-2021, out of some 14,000 cohorts who were examined, only 10,000 went through, leaving again some 4,000 out of the mainstream. About 30% approximately who did not go through;

- (iii) If you take the Cambridge School Certificate 2019, out of 14,605 examined, 10,500 approximately went through, leaving again some 4,000 who did not pass their exams, and
- (iv) Finally, for the Cambridge Higher School Certificate 2019, out of 8,975 examined, 6,727 students passed, leaving some 2,000 students who did not succeed, approximately some 26%.

Therefore, when we look at the statistics as far as the academic sector is concerned, on average, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, every year we have some 25% to 30% of our school population taking part in national exams, be it PSAC, NCE, SC, or HSC, who unfortunately for various reasons, do not pass their exams every year. *30% pour chaque examen!* So, this is alarming, but I am not blaming the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, because this state of affairs, in all fairness to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, has been there for some years now. It has been the trend for many years but, unfortunately, I have to say this and this is where I disagree with the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. It would seem that even the Nine-year Continuous Basic Education Reform brought in 2017 is not providing the result and why I say so? I said that the reform started in 2017, if you take 2017, 16,000 students took part in the newly introduced PSAC exams out of which 13,000 had passed leaving some 3,000 who did not go through. *3,000 parmi les 16,000* did not go through the PSAC exams.

Now, these 13,000 who went through, they continued in the mainstream and they took part in the NCE exams last year, 2020, and out of these 13,000 who were on the mainstream – those mainstream students, those 13,000, those who are considered to have the required level to continue academically – 4,000 out of the mainstream failed to achieve the NCE exams. Therefore, out of 16,000 students who joined PSAC in 2017, only 10,000 went through after three years at the NCE exams leaving about 6,000 out of the mainstream. This is why I say that the reform is not providing the result and these statistics were before the hon. Minister had to review the criteria for promotion to Grade 10, to allow students to move to Grade 10.

So, these first available statistics, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the reform, show clearly that there has been no improvement in the passing rate of students and in fact, I deduce from these statistics that the situation has worsened.

Now, let me look at the statistics with regards to the TVET sector, those students who are enrolled in training centres falling under the responsibility of MITD. I am glad, I heard it

I think from the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, he stated very clearly that MITD is going to stay but there is a great need to revamp the MITD. Why I say so? Because the last available statistics which is for year 2016-2017, I have been looking for the annual report, the MITD has filed its last annual report in 2017 and since then no annual reports have been filed.

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, when he intervened, he was praising the high rate of employability by students leaving MITD but according to the statistics of 2016-2017, out of some 5,800 trainees who were enrolled for different courses, after having gone through their respective exams, only 2,087 were awarded certificates and diplomas at the end of year. Out of 5,800 only 2,087 were awarded certificates and diplomas. *C'est bon!* I can only deduce that from those statistics, only half, that is 50% of those enrolled for vocational and technical training, come out every year with a certificate. What about the rest? Where do they go? How are they employed on the labour market without a certificate?

I am also told, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that every year there are about 30% dropouts at MITD because given their social status, those students, unfortunately, cannot even afford to pay their exam fees. We are already subsidising SC and HSC exams fees and I cannot see why Government cannot subsidise fees for TVET exams, when here we are dealing with students coming from families who are socially in distress.

I have also been informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that MITD has at present no Director, no Deputy Director and the institution is being run by a Divisional Manager who is acting as Director with no pedagogical qualifications. Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I want to point out is that both in terms of academic exams and vocational exams, the number of students who come out of the educational system with no academic or vocational certificate is quite alarming and I repeat, the trend has been there for years! I am not placing the blame on the hon. Minister. This is a serious issue and it has to be addressed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I understand that this Bill is intended to provide for the solution, especially for those leaving Grade 11, but we have to ensure that for the institution that this Bill proposes to set up, is effective enough to provide them with a requisite education, training and skills development so that those students, they integrate the job market after going through the technical schools. Because when you look at the current situation on skills development, here again, I beg to disagree with the hon. Minister of

Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. When it comes to skills development, the situation is even more alarming. The most relevant source, with regard to skills development would be the World Bank report published this year; ‘Mauritius through the eye of a perfect storm’ and what I read from the report, in relation to skill gap. I am going to quote from the World Bank report, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir –

“Closing the skills gap”

Paragraph 33; this is what the World Bank says about skills development –

“Skills are in short supply. Employers point out that education and training (E&T) institutions do not produce workers with the required job skills, that training programs are not aligned with industry needs and havenot been updated to reflect the latest changes in industry, and that the quality of training is insufficient.”

Paragraph 35 –

“The absence of effective leadership and coordination ...”

I will come to coordination in a minute.

“... among all relevant stakeholders weakens the linkages needed to balance the labour market.”

This will also require strengthened collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, E&T institutions, independent regulators like MQA, the Higher Education Commission, the Quality Assurance Authority, etc.

In addition, the support from education and training institutions to transition to the world of work is limited. At paragraph 39, this is what they said about the TVET reform –

“A TVET reform is also expected as part of the nine years of continuous basic education reform with some activities underway to upgrade TVET but without (...).”

This is what they say -

“(...) but without a cohesive plan developed. The strategic direction has catered to lower TVET or traditional vocational professions and trade which is not aligned with private sector demands and fast-paced industry changes.”

Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, although, as I have said, I agree that this Bill is a positive step towards us achieving the sustainable development goal, there are other serious challenges that we are yet to address. And what are those challenges? Training programs

have to be aligned with industry needs; there must be effective leadership and coordination among relevant stakeholders in skills development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at present, in this small country, we have the HRDC Planning and Development in Human Resource; we have the MITD which deals with training and skilling; we have *l'École Hôtelière Sir Gaëtan Duval*; we have Polytechnics; we have some 550 private training institutions; we have the MQA which gives certification for training courses. We have the newly introduced Skills Development Authority regulating training institutions and now the Institute of Technical Education and Technology.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in Singapore, you have only one institution, the Singapore Institute of Technical Education that heads skills development in the country. I am making some recommendations, I hope that the Minister will take these into account: courses dispensed by training institutions have to be regulated to ensure that they provide courses suitable for the industry. I am given to understand that the Skills Development Authority which was mandated to regulate those training institutions has not yet been set up although the law was passed back in 2019.

There must also be more involvement of the private sector because they are the ones who employ most of those students. They know what courses best suit their needs and their involvement, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir; the private sector must start at the initial stage. In the Bill, I see that on the Council, it is being proposed that there will be two representatives from the private sector but they shall be chosen by the Minister. I fail to see why representatives of the private sector should be chosen by the Minister and not by Business Mauritius or representatives of the SMEs, for example. We do not want to see political agents sitting on the Council of the Institute, otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we choose political agents, it is going to be a lost battle right from the start.

Therefore, to conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill, I agree, is another step towards the reform in the Education Sector, but, as I have said, the results of the reform are still being awaited and I do sincerely hope that this institution will bring the changes that are needed insofar as skills development is concerned.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Prakash Ramchurrun!

(7.36 p.m.)

Mr P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor to address this august Assembly on the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill. It is indeed with immense honour and gratitude that I am sharing my views on this proposed legislation aimed at delivering a more cohesive, integrated and harmonised technical and technological education system, and I congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Education, hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, more importantly, the ultimate benefits of this reform will be borne by the students themselves. The need for skills manpower, across existing and emerging economic sectors, makes it a must for technical education to be up to the level. The hon. Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has thus diligently operated the policy and its implementation of technical and vocational institutions under its aegis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our technical and vocational training institutes have been widely recognised as high-performing institutions, both locally and regionally. They have thus experienced sustained growth in student admission rates over the last years which demonstrates the growing interest in the sector. We welcome the Minister's wisdom and foresight in bringing the necessary reforms to ensure that the technical and technological education systems are in line and benefit our country's and economy's requirements.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the proposed Bill gives due credit to the paramount role of technology in our modern day business world. Indeed, technology has revolutionised our modern day businesses. Technological tools such as computers, mobile phones, multimedia software and applications have brought various benefits to businesses through increased efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, the correlation between technology and business profit maximisation is direct and evident. For instance, the adoption of internet based technological tools by businesses has streamlined various processes. Thus, it is primordial that there is an adequate skilled manpower which understands and masters the technological tools.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our country has faced the long-term challenge of skills shortages leading to a mismatch between the training offered and the skills needed by the employers. Through this Bill, we are aiming to deliver a new technical and technological education system which will act simultaneously; namely by increasing the number of students

undertaking technical training but also by using balanced and innovative foresight to identify, understand and plug the skills gaps.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are thus laying the solid foundations to tackle the unsustainable levels of skills shortages for our local industries across the country. Indeed, technical education has rapidly evolved and we need to show our willingness to adapt and be ahead of the curve by ensuring that our qualifications being delivered are consistent as well as portable, both locally and internationally.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through the improved functions of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology, we are on track in making sure our technical and technological education system is ready for the future; where it can be envisaged that employees will need to change their jobs more frequently over their careers. The system being built through this proposed legislation will create more and better opportunities for Mauritians to reskill, upskill and to 'new-skill' which is an emerging but untapped concept. We are thus keeping the communication line constantly on with the employers by better aligning the educational system and the skills requirements. Hence, we will ensure that businesses are supported with the appropriate skilled employees to ultimately support our economy.

Therefore, the Bill establishes a single, modern and harmonised regulatory framework for technical and technological training. It enables the industry to have much more leadership across the education system by consolidating the existing courses and expanding the study options for the students. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am confident that through this proposed Bill, a tighter connection between students and businesses will be created, thus facilitating the opening of apprenticeships and employment opportunities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this piece of legislation also presents a golden opportunity for our country to develop a robust research based training and technological educational system. Hence, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology, through the industry based collaboration, can position itself to be a golden source of research, consultation papers and data analysis. The Institute of Technical Education and Technology will be able to work with the local industries and students to collect information which can be invaluable in understanding the emerging trends in technical and technological teaching. Such insights will be essential in providing information to the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology to adapt the teaching methodology, curriculum and industry skills

demands as well as appropriate marketing campaigns to attract more students towards the courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the proposed legislation also confirms its commitment to support our ambition to transform our country in an educational hub. In fact, the newly set up institute should be able to fully leverage the international organisations such as the Inter-Agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training which has been set up by the UNESCO. The Inter-Agency Group aims at enhancing knowledge-sharing and understanding of the keys issues in the domain to assist countries in designing and implementing effective policies to boost productivity, economic progress and sustainable employment avenues. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we cannot deny the potential of Mauritius in aspiring to become a regional powerhouse in technical education and aim to export our graduates and their high quality skills and experiences regionally.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me quote the following pearl of wisdom from late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, back on 14 June 1985, that is, 36 years ago. I quote –

“We are conscious of the fact that our main resource is our people. The development of our country is based on our people's abilities, attitudes and skills. Education is therefore a springboard for development.

Development means the development of the country as a whole and of the individual in particular, for it is the individual who is the final purpose of the development.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again we find that the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth's philosophy still prevails and runs in the vein of the actions of this Government. Hence, the proposed Bill is fully aligned with the philosophy of developing the skills of our population to empower them for better employment opportunities. Our Government is, through this very important Bill, catering for the needs of the next 20 years of technical and technological training needs of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on an end note, I would like to reiterate that our Government acknowledges the challenges being faced by the technical and the technological training sector. Through our balanced and innovative approach, a lot of progress has already been made and through the proposed Bill we fully envisage addressing the needs of the sector. And it is with immense pleasure that I commend this Bill to the House.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We will break for one hour; dinner time. Thank you.

At 7.47 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.58 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: All educated Members, sit down!

Hon. Ms Teenah Jutton!

(8:58 p.m.)

Ms T. Jutton (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, for once, listening to a Member on the other side of the House, who spoke just before me, I thought that indeed we may be putting behind petty quibblings for a better good. But, unfortunately, *les procès d'intention n'ont pas tardé à surgir*.

Hon. Ramful said that this Bill concerns our youth and our education system. And I shall go further to add and say, it concerns our children and those of future generations; and education is verily the pillar from which the whole life of a child is crafted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what we are debating on today, in this House, is what future generations will thank us for or curse us for. And in these especially trying times, whilst waging a war against an invisible enemy, a calamity of apocalyptic dimension and having severe global economic repercussions, here, I have to salute the hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, as well as the hon. Prime Minister, for taking up the cudgels and fighting.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a sense of privilege that I speak to bring my humble contribution to the debates in this House, on the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill (No. I of 2021), the ITET. This Bill should not be treated in isolation. It comes as an important component in a series of extremely, if I may say, ground breaking decisions that these two successive Governments led by the hon. Prime Minister have been taking in the field of education. One of these decisions regards the sweeping and bold reforms that were brought in the system of primary and secondary education, as well as providing free tertiary education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is public knowledge that this Government strongly believes in the importance of education. For us, on this side of the House, education is considered to be the very bedrock of civilisation, and in line with the UNESCO principles and the Sustainable Development Goals, we consider education to be the basic tenet of human development. It therefore requires to be reviewed, improved and upgraded, so as to be at par with the ever changing needs of society, which over the past few decades has been evolving at an exponential rate.

The mainstream education focuses on building competencies whereas technical and technology education place emphasis on the acquisition of skills. The proposed ITET will provide education, training and experience through the concrete application of knowledge in practice, together with workplace learning. Technical and technological education is becoming one of the most economic resources. The power to innovate and the ability to compete are inextricably bounded with learning and knowledge. These will empower our socio-economic progress and success. The increasing sophistication of modern careers is demanding higher levels of education, training and skills from the workforce. Moreover, the information age and the age of global networks, Blockchain Technology, Fintech, Artificial Intelligence, all these emerging technologies offer facilities and employment opportunities that can be secured in the long-term if all the employees have access to the possible training. Technical education as a raw material will provide a pivotal competitive edge in the global market. Mauritius is already offering free education up to the undergraduate level and through the ITET, the Government wishes to enhance the employability of thousands of students in the labour market.

M. le président, les experts en la matière sont unanimes à affirmer qu'un des plus grands défis, sinon même le plus grand défi dont fera face la race humaine, c'est son avenir. Jamais auparavant le futur de l'humanité n'a été perçu avec autant d'incertitude. Et cela, M. le président, uniquement en raison de la dimension et l'étendue que prendra le développement de la nouvelle technologie dont les experts estiment sera la révolution la plus marquante de la civilisation humaine. Il s'agit ici de l'intelligence artificielle, *AI* qui sans doute, relèguera toutes nos merveilles technologiques d'aujourd'hui au rang de pièces de musée dans un avenir très proche. C'est justement dans ce sens que ce projet de loi, dont présente l'honorable ministre de l'Éducation, constitue un pas, certes modeste, mais avant d'élaborer sur ce projet de loi, il est nécessaire que nous aussi prenons conscience de l'envergure de cette incertitude que nous guette l'avenir.

D'abord, la raison principale de cette incertitude demeure le fait que contrairement aux autres principales révolutions, telles que la révolution agricole, industrielle, même informatique, il y avait des points de repères dans l'histoire antique où l'homme pouvait puiser des références car ces activités ont toujours existé sous une forme ou une autre et on pouvait exercer un contrôle quasi-total. Mais l'intelligence artificielle quant à elle, n'offre aucune référence avec l'histoire. C'est une grande inconnue. Ainsi, les experts les plus érudits dans la matière affirment incapables de juger son étendue. Il suffit de dire qu'il s'agit pour la première fois d'une technologie qui sera à la portée de l'homme mais où ce dernier ne sera peut-être plus au contrôle. Bien au contraire, c'est cette technologie qui aura probablement un contrôle absolu sur nos comportements et même nos émotions. C'est parfois même effrayant, M. le président, mais c'est de cela qu'il s'agira. C'est pourquoi il est impérativement important d'encourager nos enfants et la nouvelle génération à s'intéresser à la technologie dès maintenant. Et c'est justement ce que vise à faire ce projet de loi.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the issue of mismatch and hon. Dr. Gungapersad, earlier today, questioned on how the ITET can address the issue of mismatch and add value. Well, hon. Callicurn also spoke on it and gave *une grande étendue de la situation*. And actually there are different types of mismatch on which I will not delve into, but just to tell you that skill mismatch refers not only to skill shortages or gaps but also to qualifications, knowledge and skills exceeding job requirements. While there may be shortages in some sectors, there can also be over-education in others and, indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, when skill mismatch takes time to resolve, it imposes real cost on individuals, enterprises and societies and allow me here to quote one of the findings of one of the young leaders of the World Economic Forum who is also the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of LearnUp who states that, I quote –

“The information gap persists because existing education providers do not give workers the skills employers actually need. Until we fix this, we will continue to have a workforce that is ill-prepared for the jobs of the 21st century.”

The duration of skill shortages will indeed be a function of a level and complexity while the duration of the skill gaps is linked to retraining and with respect to re-skilling, there have been so many initiatives of this Government to combat unemployment such as the setting up of a National Skills Development Programme and the setting up of a National Employment Agency. All these are vital to address the skill mismatch but, at the same time, I agree that there are reactive measures.

In line with the above, a proposition for a new educational model has been put forward which needs to be employer-driven and responsive. It, therefore, implies that educational programmes should be devised in close collaboration with employers, and once developed, the employers need to provide real-time and continuous feedback to our educational institutions such that changes can be made to the courses in response to requirements for any new skills or knowledge.

On the global level where some innovative employers like Staples, Office Depot, Gap Incorporation, AT&T are already doing this, here, education providers, relevant Ministries and sectors currently generating employment, all those likely to generate employment in the near future such as Ocean Marine industries and emerging technologies such as AI, Blockchain, etc., they have to collaborate and courses developed accordingly. And this is the starting point and it has already started. I just wish to come back to hon. Ramful's point who, indeed mentioned about the World Bank's report which mentioned on skills and about training needs not being adequate. This is the exact starting point and let me also inform him that it has already been done. There are consultative meetings being held. A *titre d'information*, at the Open University of Mauritius itself, several consultative meetings were held, for instance, with the Ministry of Education, the industry and prospective employers to tailor-make some courses and programmes. For instance, some which are already running are those which have been designed, tailor-made for institutions such as the FSC, the MRA and the Meteorological Services, amongst others. And also, I have to say that I am proud to be among the pioneers of open and distance education in Mauritius. I have myself been actively engaged in the Commonwealth of learning for curricular design, development of instructional materials, videos and advocated for the embedment of multimedia into learning. I agree, however, that we need to have constant research because these are dynamic and we need to constantly upgrade and actually this is exactly what this Government, through this Bill, wishes to bring forward. It prones, *inter alia*, the collaboration with industry and business sectors to deliver a skilled and work ready pool of technicians and technologies.

Earlier in the House, the hon. Minister of Education mentioned how countries like Singapore, Finland, South Africa and Germany have successfully embedded technical education in their educational system. Along the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Institute of Technology tries to decipher the skills expected by employers and aligns the contents of its programmes offering with the needs of businesses at local level. This is again because with

that firm belief that future competitiveness will revolve around the adoption of advanced technologies.

As a fervent gender advocate, I am fully confident that there will be no gender barriers with the advent of the ITET and any young girl with a dream can follow her passion and that the gender gap as per the statistics currently reflected on unemployment will also reduce.

Diversifying academic offerings for new programmes, short courses, professional training is key. Existing programmes must be reengineered in order to ensure that the system is providing sufficient number of people with the right skills.

Distance learning can actually help to integrate workplace skills and the panacea to combat the unemployment level lies verily in adopting an education model which is truly responsive to the needs of employers, job seekers and the international labour market. So, undoubtedly, the ITET will have this enviable and commendable task of supporting individual companies in their efforts to participate in economic development through technical training. Small, medium and large companies are highly likely to benefit from such an institution that can ensure a constant supply of skilled labour. By involving the employers throughout the process of curriculum design and delivery, the ITET will help to solve the problem of mismatch in the demand and supply of labour.

I would also like to propose humbly that the blended learning mode be included in the Bill so as to cater for smooth running of programmes if ever there are confinements. The field of technology is dynamic and as such, it remains a *sine qua non* to keep pace and it is extremely important that we secure international collaboration. Capacity building is also required on a regular basis for the staff.

Mr Speaker, Sir, very often students who freshly leave the world of academia find themselves a bit lost when taking up employment and this Bill also seeks to address this and assist our youths in the transition from education to employment. As a previous lecturer myself, I am not oblivious to the fact that many students feel forced to study a particular subject, seemingly pushed in a particular field due to parental or peer pressure, and finally, they have absolutely no interest and no motivation in their studies and although coming from the world of academia, I however do not agree that a child's competencies and intelligence be judged according only to the marks he begets in a memory-based exams. I have seen students falling into depression because they tend to gauge their self-worth based on this. They are

also afraid of the perception that their friends will have on them if they fail in a particular subject and some even do not go home after failing in a particular subject. There are also some, Mr Speaker, Sir, who, despite succeeding brightly in a chosen field of study, choose not to pursue a career in the same field just because they do not find themselves in these spheres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, several students even share that they enjoy connecting electrical circuits in the house, getting their hands into car engines or even hairdressing. This Bill, by introducing skill-training at a young age, will, by all means allow our children to explore the different options and accordingly narrow down to a vocation of their liking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what is sad is that these students who feel that they will not be able to pursue any one of these occupations because parents or teachers or society may condemn them. I wish here to say that each child is born with natural talents and skills and each one of us has a personal calling which is as unique as a finger print and preventing someone from following his calling can be destructive. While they may take up over white-collar jobs, they may not feel that sense of fulfilment from their jobs. They may find it meaningless and experience what we call job-alienation.

The Institute of Technical Education is also not only for those who tend to be less academically inclined and the ITET should not be shunned by society as a sector of education for low-achievers and academic failures. No, it is, however, very important that students, parents, educators and all of us do communicate this. I also decry any kind of societal prejudice against the ITET. Mr Speaker, Sir, enthusiasm and motivation is vital for our children to persist in the education and training system and to achieve long-term success.

Rather than learning abstract concepts, there are many students who prefer to gain practical, relevant and marketable skills that will make them more employable. This is exactly what this Bill aims to achieve.

Mr Speaker, Sir, last decade's auto mechanics are today's automotive technicians because they must know how to use advanced computerised diagnostic equipment in addition to more traditional mechanical repairs. Indeed, I strongly commend this Bill as it goes one step further in strengthening Mauritius as an inclusive society. It is indeed opening avenues for a bright future for students who wish to further develop their skills. To them, I say: find what makes you follow your soul purpose.

The ITET is not only about providing good technical and technology education but to also establish a career-pathway for these children. The objectives and functions of the proposed institution indicate that it is going to be the much desired bridge between secondary education, the world of work as well as tertiary education. It will definitely help many children of our Republic of Mauritius to achieve social mobility, realise their potential and aspirations. Regardless of whether the students are headed for tertiary institutions or the labour market, this type of education will mould them into accomplished individuals. Clearly, this is in line with SDG 4 which aims to, I quote –

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, by Rafferty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to UNESCO, today we have more than 262 million children and youths who are out of school in the world and you have 6 out of 10 who are not even acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills after years in school. Fortunately, here in Mauritius, each child has a guaranteed place in our pre-primary, primary and secondary schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is also why I do not understand why some Members on the other side are confusing vocational, technical and technology education. Earlier, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, clearly explained the difference between each, for instance, the Polytechnics, the MITD and the multiple points of entry and exit. The ITET is actually to give students more choice. This Government is ensuring that no one is pushed out of the education system. The ITET is coming to increase the options available to our students. Moreover, this is where Mauritius can actually become a key game-changer by developing its areas of competitive advantage through deepening of its core competencies and its key resources. It is very important that we empower our youths and help them to become independent job creators instead of job seekers. This is why the spirit of entrepreneurship needs to be fostered. We need technical expertise and entrepreneurship.

In order to deliver on Industrialisation 4.0, we need to think beyond academics and ensuring that our nation is one which implements and delivers.

To conclude Mr Speaker, Sir, as Nelson Mandela stated –

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Positioning Mauritius as an education hub for the African region and transforming Mauritius into a start-up island for young African entrepreneurs will be instrumental in supporting the development of a new economic model for Mauritius, which shall reap benefits both in the short term and in the long term. With the bold reforms, strategies and policies, the seeds for the next 50 years of transformational landscape have been planted by this Government.

With this, I hereby commend the Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(09:21 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill has been sufficiently canvassed by hon. Members from both side of the House. I do not wish to revisit all the valuable and interesting points they have all raised.

However, I do share the views and concerns of the hon. Minister of Labour, who is not here, as to the rise in youth unemployment, as also rightly pointed out by hon. Ramful. And, bearing that in mind, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do agree with this Bill so that at the end of the day, it caters for the creation of jobs and enhance employability of our youth.

But instead, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall provide my views as to the need to consider a digital touch to this technical sector and at the same time a greening process of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Speaker, Sir, has brought for the challenge of delivering practical lessons remotely. This is mainly due to technological and resource limitations in addition to inadequate educator and trainer capacity to deliver such online lessons. The need is to approach this Bill as a stepping-stone to introduce a digital, technical and vocational education and training in our education landscape.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the time is thus right to critically look at the role of digitalisation of technical and vocational education and training. If we are to better prepare and equip our youth for the future of work, digital skills have become vital in a world of increasing

adaptability skills. It is now up to Government to embrace this new normal and reform education policy, accordingly.

And this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, in my humble opinion, ought to have been introduced in its Explanatory Memorandum very clearly this very concept and name the Institute as follows: 'the Institute of Digital, Technical Education and Technology.'

Mr Speaker, Sir, technical and vocational education and training has been instrumental for the economic development and industrialisation of societies all over the world. Numerous examples from European countries throughout the 18th century Industrial Revolution, Japan for instance, at the end of the 19th century, or the Asian countries during the 20th century globalisation, would stand for proof of social progress with the rise of the labour market and the TVET demand driven in each society.

How could we, Mr Speaker, Sir, as a nation capitalise of this trend to continue our social progress? What makes TVET successful though, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the focus on skills development, that is, using hands-on training. This helps students and future job seekers to acquire, not only the essential knowledge on the subject matter, but also the required competences that one would need to fulfil employers and economic stakeholders' expectations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, skills change lives by offering everyone a future for professional occupations and entrepreneurship. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, it should be pointed out also that access to TVET remains one of the most honourous sectors of education systems worldwide. Many countries struggle to finance the establishment of TVET Centres as social benefactors to support the sustainable development of their labour markets and economies. Access to laboratories for examples and workshops require important and upfront investments, very often not available in the national education annual budget allocation.

The question would be: if education technologies, that they call EdTech, would be a driver for developing alternative methods for the hands-on training in TVET? And, Mr Speaker, Sir, would digital learning and training help us to reduce investment unit to enrol a maximum number of students in our education system? Whether digitisation would offer facilities to provide more meaningful TVET activities, transforming the mode of delivery from onsite attendance, thus indispensable for hands-on training, to online interaction, Mr Speaker, Sir, without losing sight at the virtue of learning by doing? And, I do hope that a

substantial budget will be allocated to this sector to that effect and make it happen, Mr Speaker, Sir.

It also becomes equally important, Mr Speaker, Sir, to increasingly consider the new modes of digital delivery in TVET systems, to be coined as digital, technical and vocational education and training. The recent progress of a EdTech, Mr Speaker, Sir, beginning with the use of digital education tools like computers or web-based trainings online or offline, learning management systems from the early 90's up to individual adaptive learning, use of artificial intelligence that was mentioned by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, virtual reality and augmented reality in simulated and remote laboratories nowadays should be in, my humble opinion, Mr Speaker, Sir, the key focus of this Institute, to provide meaningful D-TVET solutions to overcome challenges. This will help in addressing more online students with quality education, with less onsite students in classrooms, whether due to lack of budget or needed social distancing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, such changeover of TVET models would have an impact on students, teachers and schools alike. On students: on how they would learn with more off-the-school and near-the-school, learning scenarios. On teachers: on how they would teach the subject matter, changing and alternatively adapting the new pedagogy as well as training and vocational establishments that should accommodate students and teachers in a new way of interacting with each other for learning and teaching, probably with no less important impact that this will have on the efficiently education budgeting in this new era.

Mr Speaker, Sir, here I pose to lay emphasise as to the important role being vested to the institution at Clause 6(g) of the Bill, where the Institute shall have powers to –

“enter into agreements, in such manner as it may determine, with any other institution or body, whether academic, technical, technology or otherwise, including the incorporation within the Institute of any other institution or body.”

We spoke about all those institutions doing the same role; MITD or Polytechnic Mauritius but I do hope that those powers will be used judiciously and decisions shall be taken in all transparency.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same spirit for more transparency, I shall humbly invite the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to bring an amendment to Clause 14(1) of the Bill, with regard to the post of Director and I propose the following, instead of –

“The Council shall, subject to the approval of the Minister, appoint a Director on such terms and conditions as it may determine,”

I move that it be redrafted, Mr Speaker, Sir, and same to be read as follows: ‘There shall be a Chief Executive Officer of the Institute, who shall be –

- (a) known as the Director, and
- (b) appointed by the Council with the approval of the Minister on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.’

This is important, Mr Speaker, Sir, so that you can tap on the right talent and it is not somebody who will be at the whims and caprices of the Council or the establishment. He should be a competent people, such that when you are putting the clause ‘subject to the approval of the Minister’ instead of ‘with the approval of the Minister,’ it goes without saying that this gives the Minister too much power in the appointment of the Director.

I also urge the Vice-Prime Minister to bring another amendment to Clause 8(3)(h) so that the private sector, be allowed to choose their representatives, as rightly pointed out by hon. Ramful, so that the members of the private sector, they are chosen by their own bodies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another issue that I want to canvass is the need for the greening of the TVET, that I humbly submit, ought to have been explicitly inserted in the Bill at Clause 4 as one of the objects of the Institution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as hon. Ramful has rightly pointed out, our country adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. A global momentum has been created following the demonstration of political commitment to the sustainable development goals and climate change agreements. The political, as well as environmental imperatives for the transition to a green economy are evident. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the economic and social imperatives of these transitions need further exploration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, greening TVET helps production to advance to more environmentally conscious practices, so that a green worker, Mr Speaker, Sir, is more employable, so that a green workforce will enhance the profitability of the enterprise. The Government needs to seize this potential for job creation by providing skills needed in the new green sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall also urge the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that the establishment of this institute should also give due consideration to disadvantaged groups in the society, in the labour market, the young people, women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable

groups, and they require targeted support to develop their potential, knowledge and skills for green jobs.

Thus, at clause 7, Mr Speaker, Sir, of this Bill, it should be more explicit with regard to admission to the above mentioned categories. It should be clearly and very explicit in this clause that due consideration would also be given to those of the vulnerable groups to be included in technical education. This, in my humble opinion, is lacking in this Bill.

The potential return on investments in TVET, Mr Speaker, Sir, is also an important step in guiding the process. Several points can be made in explaining why investing in greening TVET is essential. From social and economic perspectives, greening TVET enhances the employability of workers and productivity of enterprises. A worker who possesses knowledge, skills and competencies, oriented to green occupations is a more employable worker than someone who does not possess these attributes. In case there is a shift in job processes, which would eventually take place in this new normal, upskill, displacement of those workers, retraining of those workers are of paramount importance and this should also be one of the main objectives of this institute, to cater for those categories as well.

Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, new opportunities are being offered to re-imagine the 21st century school as a social venue for education to be more accessible, more relevant, more resilient, by also leaving no one behind.

The TVET with necessary access to ICT infrastructure and internet should provide new prospects to boost education for all as a lifelong learning for initial and continuing education, skilling and re-skilling. And, I do hope in all those centres that would be under the supervision of this institute, all those technologies would be made available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be valid for our country, and I urge the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to consider the above-mentioned suggestions being put forward, so that at the end of the day our youth shall regain confidence that there shall be meaningful job opportunities, green jobs opportunities for them and they can forge ahead in the best interest of the country.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry!

(9.35 p.m.)

Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, since education is an ever-evolving process, all the successive Ministers of Education have brought to this House their contribution, starting from the first education plan in the 1970s to the Nine-Year Continuous Education by the present Minister of Education, the hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun.

To start, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, the hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun for bringing to the House the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill.

Au passage, je salue aussi la contribution de mon époux, en tant qu'ex-Chairperson du Technical School Management Trust Fund dans les années 2003-2004.

To reply to hon. Dr. Gungapersad, who said that after listening to the mover of the Bill, it seems to be *du déjà entendu*. I will say that the hon. Member should know that we have to build on our past, on our strength. There is nothing like a clean slate in education and we cannot start anew. In education, change should be brought incrementally. Today, we are correcting the mismatch between education and the world of work.

M. le président, il est grand temps qu'on arrête de penser que l'éducation technique c'est pour les recalés. En passant, je salue mon frère, qui, dans les années 80, après avoir passé son SC, a préféré opter pour des cours de tourneur et d'ajusteur au *Training Centre Sir Kher Jagatsingh* à Beau Bassin au lieu de compléter son *HSC*. Et, je peux vous dire qu'aujourd'hui c'est un professionnel accompli.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at a critical juncture where the bleak reality of a second wave of the COVID-19 looms above all of us, there is a dire and urgent need for Mauritius to explore all the possible avenues to further fortify its economic powerhouse, and one of that is to fully exploit the possibilities which technology and technical education have in strengthening our very own human capital. We need to come to terms with the fact that many economic sectors around the globe have taken a dangerous nosedive, some to the extent of no return.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is in this particular light that the Government under the leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth has found it imperative to therefore roll out an operational framework to emphasise the importance of integrating technology and technical education in our human development approach that will level up the potency of Mauritius as a confirmed service provider within the whole breadth of this sector.

The impetus behind the enactment of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill is to create the requisite legal infrastructure for the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to service technical education centres in Mauritius while paving the way for pedagogical enquiry in technical and technology education, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset, allow me to convey my word of appreciation to our Government for envisioning such an institute. Technology and technical education may have had a timid start some decades ago, but Mauritius soon caught up with international trends, given that accessibility to technology and the provision of technical education to multifarious academic levels have become more than a satisfying necessity. In fact, the majority of developed and developing countries have been benchmarking their levels of developmental progress and human capacity indices against the degree to which technology has seeped into the socio-economic order of the day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the advent of leverage of technology on native operations is boundless and offers limitless and immense opportunities for Mauritius to be at par with technologically advanced countries. The sense of innovation and flexibility of our fellow countrymen are almost legendary. And as a visionary Government, we cannot, technically, morally or socio-economically allow these talents to go unharnessed.

Indeed, our educational curricular has been systematically beefed up and reengineered to incite students at an early age to opt for technical education. We have to be patient and we shall reap the fruits of this policy in imaginable ways. But with the implementation of technology and technical education comes great responsibilities. There is a need for strict surveillance, moderation, and consistent support if this particular sector is called upon to flourish and perhaps become *un fleuron de notre économie*.

Hence, the creation of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology could not have come at a better time. It is critical that the teaching and learning process under the technological and technical schemes be undertaken such that all relevant partners are roped in; that resources are adequately and optimally used; that the pedagogical delivery chain is subject to informal and formal continuous auditing; that the people are kept abreast of what is being done in terms of technological and technical assimilation; that the delivery pathways are completely undertaken and monitored; that perennial linkages are established between various stakeholders including academics and business entities, and extending beyond our

frontier, especially international partnerships with harbingers of progress. And, to summarise it all, that the Republic of Mauritius benefits fully and tangibly pursuant to the setting up of the Institute.

On a concluding note, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have an untapped potential in our hands and it is high time that we all pull in our efforts in a constructive manner, beyond personal sentiments, beyond party politics and move in unison towards a common and brighter future. On this, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(9.44 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are here today to debate on the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill. This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, has two main objectives -

- “(a) the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology to operate and manage technical education centres, and
- (b) opportunities and pathways to students pursuing studies in technical and technology education,”

And to achieve that, this Bill preconises the establishment of an Institute of Technical Education and Technology and the objects of that Institute shall -

- “(a) be responsible for the provision of high quality technical and technology education;
- (b) effectively and efficiently manage the subject of technical and technology education, and
- (c) award technical and technology education qualifications either by itself or in partnership with other recognised institutions;”

The point that I want to raise here, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Institute will have a key role in the whole process of quality of the technical education and technology that this Government wants our young generations to have. This will also be the stepping stone of Mauritius as an education hub. If we go through the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, one can see that there is a

concerted and planned effort to assemble a critical mass of local and international actors to support its effort to build a higher education sector as is provided at Section 5(i) -

“foster international collaboration in technical and technology education development;”

All this, Mr Speaker, Sir, will help to get rid of the *universités ‘marrons’* forever and ever.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 5(g) of the Bill states that the function of the Institute to be set in pursuance of this Bill will be to –

“award technical and technology qualifications, either on its own or in collaboration with the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate or jointly with recognised awarding bodies, and to ensure their national, regional and international recognition;”

Whilst being a hurdle to those *universités ‘marrons’*, this Bill is a springboard of two things basically; first technical education and then education itself. Education, we know, has been at the heart of our achievement and growth, and we also know that technology will keep influencing the industries and jobs, and that does not apply only to one industry, but to all the industries worldwide.

And when the section 4(d) of the Bill mentions that the objective of the Council to be set will ensure the standard, norms and relevance of courses, it shows that the plan is not to front load learning just into the first 17 to 21 years of life, it tends to make learning a lifelong process so as to produce a high quality workforce. And this is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir. In a day like today, if we want to be a winner, we must enable lifelong learning as the Bill says at section 4(f), that the Council is going to -

“promote a modern, collaborative, agile and innovative approach to technical and technology education, adapted to the contemporary workplace;”

That is what is going to make our island both an innovative and an inclusive society. Gone are the days where there was a linear process of ‘learn and work’. We are in a world today where everything operates in a cycle and never stops. I heard the hon. Minister of Education mentioning the ‘dead end’ as these are cycles, here it will be learn, work, and learn again. No one can any longer stop at what they learn in their teens or early 20s in education. That is pre-employment.

What is now becoming very important is how we keep learning throughout our careers. So, this Bill is putting much greater emphasis now on linking up and integrating pre-employment education with post-employment, not only training, but also learning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the illiterates of this century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot unlearn what they have learnt and learn what they have not learnt so far. The function of the Institute as stipulated under Section 5(f) elaborates on promote capacity-building, continuous learning, and professional development of the technical and technology education staff.

Much emphasis is laid on collaboration with industry and business sectors to deliver skilled and work-ready pool of technicians and technologists and this very important. The new paradigm of education commands that we integrate meaningful and authentic work experience with learning and enabling our workforce to keep learning through life. And it means a new fluidity in our system, in our culture and in our genes.

Unless we have laws like this one, we will continue to face the problem of young people leaving schools and universities, ready to work, and yet remain unemployed. At the same time, employers cannot find youth with the skill that the need to move their business.

I listened to the hon. Minister of Labour and I am glad that he is aware of this problem, of what we call the mismatch. This Bill will prevent students with qualifications coming in the labour market which does not suit the requirement of the industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to be educated and this has also been a requirement. There is nothing new in that basic requirement.

However, what is new is the width of the education. The institute that is proposed by this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is going to valorise technical education and technology and not tag these students as low performers. To understand that, let us take the example of Singapore; like here even there at a time those students joining a technical school were considered as low academic performers as technical schools were considered as a place of last resort for those students. The turnaround came the Singapore Institute of Technical Education was instituted. These students changed from low academic failures to experiential learners who blossom in those technical environments. It is the Singapore Institute of Technology that helped to supply the industry with the skills that they needed and thus make Singapore the country with the least unemployed youth. Even most important, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that 90% of those young people find jobs in their chosen field.

A similar example here will be the *Lycée Polytechnique* of Flacq where in the early days the then students were getting admission after completing the Form 3, what we call the Grade 9 today and you may be surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, some of the same students who left secondary schools after their Form 3 in the 80s and adopted an alternative route are today holders of PhD degrees. All this has been made possible because at that time a technical school was set up with a roadmap. It is the power of education that has taken not only human beings but humanity in many different directions over the last two decades.

From the turn of the century, a technology revolution has set the globe holding art, the promise of greater freedom and a more inclusive and equal society but as technology has advanced, so too has unequal progress and concerns over the nature of these changes. In this new technological world how do we prepare for the future of work and what road is there for education in preparing for the jobs of 2030? It is the challenge that we face today; it is not the time to let important aspects of technical education and technology to remain informal.

Technology, Mr Speaker, Sir, has submerged us in itself and so much that we do not even realise the magnitude and power of technology. Let me give you one example. Some time back I saw a clip, a video on TikTok by hon. Shakeel Mohamed. Through technology, I got the opportunity to discover the talents that he had got because he was doing mimicry of Dr. the hon. Jagutpal and he did it so well, Mr Speaker, Sir, that with some training I am sure he can beat a lot of the Bollywood Stars like Johnny Lever or Chunky Pandey.

In 1969, humans set foot on the moon for the very first time, it is severely difficult to imagine the technical challenges of landing of the moon more than five decades ago at a time when I was not even born but what is certain is that technology played a fundamental role even back then. It is only technology that can guide humans across 356,000 kilometres of space from the earth to the moon and back safely.

Today, the need for technical education and technology has grown and changed. Just for the House to understand, let me compare the Apollo and today's technology requirements. Put it simply, an iPhone 6 clock which I got in my hand is 32,600 times faster than the 1969's computers and could perform instructions 120,000,000 times faster. Let alone iPhones and computers, even today's pocket calculators have much more processing power than the state of the art in computing during the Apollo era. The requirements of technical and technology is a key issue for competitiveness of companies and economies all over the world. The skills

and knowledge of the workforce are a result of learning processes taking place in formal settings.

Today, we need institutes which can create opportunities for students and adult learners to acquire skills, knowledge and values for employability and lifelong learning. The Bill on which we are debating here at this moment is a very good one and an important one.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one suggestion that I hope the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, will give due consideration to and that is concerning the constitution of the Council because, as I said earlier, this Council will help to prepare our young generation for an employability for tomorrow. Therefore, it is important that we have people from the industry who can provide the needs and, as the Section 8 Subsection 2 Paragraph (b) which state that the Council shall approve the work plan of the institute and ensure its timely implementation, I therefore suggest that the four members that are to be appointed by the hon. Minister under the Section 8 3(h), if possible, that these members are representatives of professional councils.

The Singapore Institute of Technology is something which today envies the whole world. The reason of their success is the partnering between the academia and the industry. Technical education helps to develop a technical competency and a nation which has a competent generation will have a flourishing economy. The Council, the Institute canalise the demand of the industry with a supply of competencies when such a partnering exist and this partnering will help to serve the needs of the industry and the nation's economy.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the former Minister of Education of Singapore, who eventually became the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, has admitted that the link, the partnering between the institute and the industry has been fundamental to its success. By having the representatives of the professional councils and representatives of the private sector, the link will be thus reinforced as the employers will themselves be a stakeholder where they will be involved in the design of curriculum, specifying the use of equipment, providing visiting lecturers and welcoming trainees in their companies.

To conclude, I would like to thank the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, for such a Bill. It is the duty of the Government to support its young population and build a strong nation. It is the duty of the Government to raise the young population so that they can stand on mountains. It is the duty of the Government to raise them so that they can walk on stormy seas. It is the duty of the

Government to provide a shoulder where they can feel strong. It is the duty of the Government to raise his nation up to more than it can be.

Mr Speaker, Sir, whichever the potential talent, we have to help every Mauritian discover that strength in themselves, develop it and take it as far as they can and this is why we have to open up many and different opportunities in our education system. We want to develop many different pathways to excellence in different niches, in different areas of potential talents. This Bill will enhance the different pathways in education system through the specialised school and through a diverse and vibrant post-secondary system comprising of the MITD, the FDI, polytechnics and universities. Each niche of excellence or each course has its own goals but the basic aim is the same, to develop every student in a way that involves a solid core of basic skills and basic values and also enable him or her to develop their own special strength to the fullest.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Shanmugaratnam, I referred to earlier, once said –

“Very often we measure success by numbers, by statistics but when you meet an individual who succeeded because he took an alternative path, did well and proved to everyone that it is not one talent that counts, it is then that you realise that it is different talents that make up a society and ultimately make up a country.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, education is our children’s right that is going to make the future bright. I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(10.01 p.m.)

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor to share my views in support the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill.

This Bill is a fitting answer to one of the biggest challenges of education, that of remaining relevant in ways that continually and constantly promote excellence and developmental opportunities. And through its equalising virtues, contribute to equity, inclusiveness, social justice and social promotion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, learning is a dynamic and continuous process. Progressive countries and forward-looking Governments mould and adapt their skills and competency development

policies according to the exigencies and requirements of the economic and social environment.

The Bill, as put forward by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, paves the way for the development of a skilled workforce. It provides for setting up of a dedicated institute with a clear mandate to provide high quality technical and technology education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, technical and technology education has been an integral part of our industrialisation process. Today, more than ever, our economy needs to build on a pool of skilled labour to cater for the rising needs of the industry. Production processes have evolved. The labour market has evolved. We are witnessing a change in employment patterns as well, with rising demand for specific skills which are more technology-driven.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us recall the 1960s and 70s that is the infancy years of our economy. Mauritius had just stepped into independence. It was time to define our own destiny. To lead the country towards development and success, economic sectors could not do without a skilled labour force. Technical education has been fundamental in charting pathways for economic prosperity.

Back in 1967, the very first technical school, which was later named Sir Kher Jagatsingh Technical Training Centre, was set up. It catered for industry requirements and produced skilled technicians in welding, light mechanic, electrical courses, amongst others. Many of those who were initially trained set up their own businesses, and today count among the most successful entrepreneurs.

Moving forward, in the 80s, technical training was further adapted and enhanced through the setting up of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB), now the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD).

Training programmes such as shoe making, plumbing, air conditioning, building maintenance, masonry, scaffolding and wood trades, to name a few have been developed. No one today doubts the immense contribution of these technical institutes in helping the country to achieve the economic miracle.

Today, the same concept of adaptation and relevance of technical and vocational training can be witnessed with the Fashion and Design Institute and Polytechnics Mauritius.

In spite of the pool of technically competent labour provided by these technical institutions, industry requirements are calling for a new set of skills; skills which are more responsive to nature of work in the present era. The industry is facing numerous challenges. The major one being the rapid evolution of technology-driven processes. This definitely requires our training sector to follow the rhythm and readapt courses for the world of work.

Technical and technology education as proposed under Clause 4(f) in this Bill will not just be about preparing some learners for successful lives and careers. Rather it will prepare learners to respond to the wider needs of business and of life. It is about the future that we cannot just prepare with textbook knowledge.

Due to complexities of today's environment, jobs of the future will require adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, as well as applied education or training. Sustainable jobs will be about how to operationalise learning, and build on the knowledge and competency blocks that applied learning should provide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the future success of every nation, individual, enterprise and community is highly dependent on the existence and possession of transferable skills and ideas. Through skills development, people can increase their chances of securing productive and profitable employment; thereby sustainably increase their income levels and access a better quality of life.

In the context of this Bill, high quality technical and technology education would lead to enhanced entrepreneurship, creation of businesses, from an idea to a prototype and beyond. It will be about creativity, the conceptualisation of new tools to solve everyday problems. It will be about applying practical skills to create solutions and business opportunities to tackle major challenges, like global warming, climate change or public health for example.

The management of these challenges will surely shape our future but as importantly create new opportunities for ethical business, provided we are ready with technical training and technology.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a major marker at a time of great stakes. Through the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill, as further detailed in Clause 5, we are being given a chance to close persistent achievement gaps in the bridge that connects education and industry. And it comes at the most appropriate time, when we are seriously gearing for the relaunch of our economy in the difficult post COVID-19 period, full of uncertainties and where unemployment is an issue here and elsewhere. Technical and

technology education as provided under this Bill will provide an impetus geared towards the development of young people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a result of COVID-19, global unemployment increased by 33 million in 2020, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The pandemic also created the largest disruption of education systems in history. UNESCO reports that two thirds of an academic year has been lost worldwide due to school closures.

In the face of these challenges, technical and technology education can mitigate the impact –

- (i) they can provide short-term training to meet the urgent demand for skilled workers in certain trades and sectors;
- (ii) technical and technology education can build the capacities of staff to meet the increased demand for digital delivery of programmes and services, and
- (iii) they can apply best practices honed during the pandemic to improve their own readiness and preparedness for such future crises and disruptions.

In fact, UNESCO-UNEVOC has implemented a special project: Strengthening the Responsiveness, Agility and Resilience of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institutions for the post-COVID-19 era, to help alleviate the short, medium and long-term effects of the global crisis.

The project will support TVET institutions around the world, especially those in developing countries, in addressing these challenges and preparing for the post-COVID-19 era. We can hope for international collaboration in this field, which is one the functions of the Institute as listed in Clause 5 of the Bill.

Rising youth unemployment is one of the most significant problems facing economies and societies in today's world. Over the next decade at least 475 million new jobs need to be created to absorb the 73 million youth currently unemployed, and the 40 million new annual entrants to the labour market.

At the same time, many surveys reveal that many graduates are ill-prepared for the world of work. Attaining decent work is a significant challenge. I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, technical and technology education can equip youth with the skills required to access the world of work, including skills for self-employment. It is gratifying to note that one of the

objects of the Bill as listed in clause 4(i) - the new Institute will also assist youth in acceding to the job market after their education.

On this chapter, allow me to talk about the SME Employment Scheme which has similar objectives of providing youth with employment opportunities, all the while helping SMEs with talent. Launched in August 2018, the SME Employment Scheme provides SMEs with the possibility of recruiting a graduate and/or a diploma holder. The salaries are paid by Government while the entrepreneur caters for the travelling. Till date, SME Mauritius has placed 1,277 graduates and 319 diploma holders in SMEs in various sectors of the economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the nature of the business of many SMEs, there is a rising demand for skilled labour. Therefore, it is crucial that this gap be bridged by young people who have followed relevant extensive technical and vocational training to benefit from job experience.

To this end, SME Employment Scheme has been extended to include TVET graduates. This extension will provide employment to vocational graduates having an MQA approved certificates of level 3 (same level as GCE 'O' Level/SC) and above. Job opportunities will consequently be opened in sectors such as plumbing, electrical installation works, culinary skills, landscaping, jewellery, bakery, pastry, maintenance works, welding and automotive mechanics and electronics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this will, to a large extent, reduce the disparity between academic and vocational qualifications and improve perception of technically qualified personnel. Mr Speaker, Sir, the 10-year SME Master Plan had highlighted the need for bold policies in devising the right entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Master Plan also suggested a revamp of apprenticeship, the rebranding of TVET and aligning its programmes based on SMEs Skills Needs Assessment and national economic priorities.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that today, with the setting up of the Institute of Technical Education and Technology, we are addressing these issues. By focusing on equity and inclusion, we are more apt to build institutional capacity such as infrastructure, policies, frameworks and guidelines, and strengthen partnerships and cooperation.

As we have always stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, our strength is our people. If a country owns sufficient technical hands with full of skills, it undoubtedly accelerates the pace of development. Technical hands do not remain unemployed for long; they can either be onboarded or they will proceed to open their own enterprises and create jobs. I am confident

that the Institute of Technical Education and Technology will ensure that learners are fully equipped to transition smoothly to the world of work, whether as a skilled employee or as entrepreneurs.

A further note of satisfaction is that the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives, that is, my Ministry, will be part of the composition of the Council, as specified in clause 8(3). This will definitely bring about a fundamental contribution on industrialisation and entrepreneurship requirements.

M. le président, permettez-moi à présent de parler de l'importance de la main-d'œuvre qualifiée pour notre industrie locale. Clause 5 (d) de ce projet de loi fait état d'une éventuelle collaboration étroite entre l'institut et l'industrie pour la promotion de nouvelles technologies. Il s'agit là d'une démarche tout à fait louable qui s'aligne avec les recommandations de la politique industrielle et du Plan stratégique 2020-2025 lancé par mon ministère en décembre de l'année dernière.

Le but ultime de la mise en œuvre de ce Plan stratégique demeure la consolidation et la compétitivité globale de notre industrie. Cela afin qu'elle puisse contribuer à une croissance économique plus élevée à travers l'innovation, les nouvelles technologies, la productivité et l'emploi hautement qualifié. Une des faiblesses notée dans ce rapport est le manque de main-d'œuvre locale qualifiée face à nos concurrents. Ce qui mène à une dépendance sur les expatriés. Ce déficit est observé pour des postes à divers niveaux.

Le Plan stratégique préconise de repenser et rehausser le niveau des formations techniques, avec une attention particulière aux filières liées aux sciences, les nouvelles technologies et l'ingénierie, entre autres.

M. le président, la mise sur pied de l'institut responsable pour la formation technique et technologique vient donc combler ce déficit. L'un des plus grands défis de l'industrie 4.0 est de convertir tous les employés du secteur industriel à ses pratiques et à ses codes. Les métiers de l'industrie changent et de nouveaux métiers apparaissent.

M. le président, les actions de formation réalisées auprès des salariés en poste ne sont pas les seules nécessaires. Les changements induits par l'industrie 4.0, tels que la robotique, l'intelligence artificielle, l'impression 3D, etc., nécessitent également que la formation des jeunes soit adaptée avant même leur arrivée en entreprise.

Les pays développés jouissent d'un avantage compétitif certain, surtout avec des produits de moyenne à forte intensité technologique et de compétences. Il est clair que la

production de masse restera dans des pays à faibles coûts. Pourtant, le secteur manufacturier local demeure résilient grâce à des opérateurs du textile, de la transformation des aliments, de la joaillerie et de la pharmaceutique, entre autres, qui s'appuient sur des productions à plus forte valeur ajoutée. Nous sommes appelés à continuer à fabriquer des produits à forte valeur ajoutée, novateurs et concurrentiels si nous souhaitons rester compétitifs. L'intégration de hautes technologies reste un élément incontournable pour soutenir cette démarche. Tout comme la formation appropriée et adoptée.

M. le président, de telles mutations requièrent une main-d'œuvre ayant des compétences différentes de celles traditionnellement attribuées à l'industrie manufacturière. Aujourd'hui, l'économie mondiale offre à Maurice des opportunités nouvelles ainsi que des défis qu'elle ne saurait ignorer. Il convient donc pour notre pays de se positionner de par le rehaussement des compétences afin qu'il puisse occuper la place qui lui revient au regard de ses potentialités énormes.

L'avènement de cet institut de la formation technique et technologique permettra donc de recentrer nos priorités. L'institut permettra aussi de dégager une réflexion sur les politiques appropriées pouvant déboucher sur une nouvelle dynamique de la formation technique et technologique dans le pays. Le secteur de la formation et du développement des compétences professionnelles, charnière indispensable de tout développement économique, est donc appelé à se réinventer et à s'adapter. La mise sur pied de l'institution de la formation technique et technologique représente donc l'espoir pour la jeunesse mauricienne.

L'espoir pour les industriels ! L'espoir pour notre économie !

Car au final, nous arriverons à produire une main-d'œuvre qualifiée pour une industrie forte et compétitive à une île Maurice encore plus résiliente! Quoi de mieux !

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, wind-up!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all hon. Members from both sides of the House who have intervened and contributed to the debates on the ITET Bill. This shows the keen interest generated on the issue of technical education and technology and its importance in an ever changing international education landscape. I have listened carefully to the constructive contribution of my colleagues on the Bill. Nonetheless, some hon. Members have raised some queries concerning this piece of

legislation. However, I note with satisfaction that there is consensus on the need for high quality, higher technical education in the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has been assigned the portfolio for education, science and technology and it incorporates technical and technology education. We have engaged in a reform process in the whole of the education sector, a process which requires an adjustment of our legal and institutional framework governing technical and technology education.

We are in dire need of a new institution with well-defined and clear responsibilities to spearhead programmes of actions for this component of education. Our students have to be provided with opportunities and numerous structured pathways towards skills development to operate in an increasingly technical and technological environment.

Our policies and the education landscape have shifted according to the demands of the time and in a promising way towards one with multiple pathways to success. The concept of school/work/retire model is increasingly defunct and the future will see work and learning blend into one.

The ITET fully addresses this need to provide high quality technical education with a focus on industry-focused skills development. At the outset of our national reform agenda, the World Bank had peer reviewed and validated numerous planks of the reform as positive changes for the future. Furthermore, the 2021 World Bank Country Economic Memorandum has indicated the need for champion agencies to spearhead higher technical education in Mauritius to address the middle to high skills needs, especially in line with the emerging sectors of the economy and as part of a more demand-driven approach. This point has been stressed by both hon. Callichurn and hon. Bholah. Furthermore, our policy for technical education dates as far back as in 2014 when we came forward with Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd and planned for an overall of the technical education system.

In fact, we had a number of studies carried out that have guided and better shaped our strategies for technical education. A research team from Harvard came up with an in-depth diagnostic of the sector and reinforced our conviction that we are on the right track.

The ITET will be geared towards delivering technical and technology education with a culture of innovation and a passion of learning.

It is the role of Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, to act as a catalyst and facilitate the implementation of the restructuration process, and I must stress, Mr Speaker, Sir, that

education is very high on our agenda and Government has supported and invested massively on human capital. That is what we are doing as a responsible Government.

I will now come to some of the issues that have been raised by hon. Members. After having gone through the various interventions, I noted with satisfaction that in fact, there is agreement from both sides of the House about the importance and the usefulness of the ITET. It indeed responds to a felt need for right kind of human resources that constitute our human capital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now address one of the qualms of the hon. Member of the Opposition, hon. Dr. Gungapersad. I think he is misguided on the roles of a regulator as against that of a service provider. I appreciate his reference to the Skills Development Authority but he should know that when we presented the Bill, we made it crystal clear that the SDA is meant to be a regulatory body that has oversight over the broad ambit of the skills ecosystem. Conversely, this Bill refers to objects and functions that clearly define the six technical education centres as providers of technical education. Let me reassure the House that there is no mission drift here. The roles are clearly allocated for each institution and that applies as well to the MITD. My colleague, hon. Callichurn, clearly stated that the MITD will continue to operate with well-defined mandate.

There is also agreement that we need a well-articulated policy which is the case and which addresses pertinently issues raised by hon. Members in regard to skills mismatch, rebranding of technical education and youth empowerment as well as inclusiveness.

I must stress, Mr Speaker, Sir, that education has always been very high on Government agenda. The Prime Minister has always believed in the youth and invested massively to ensure that they get what they deserve. This Government came up with sponsorship for the SC and HSC examinations. The Prime Minister came up with the free Tertiary Education Scheme and a revamped and reinforced national apprenticeship programme.

As highlighted by some hon. Members, it is a paradigm shift not '*du déjà vu*' or '*du déjà entendu*' as we are now dealing with a new strategic thrust focusing on technical and technology education. We are not reinventing the wheel, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many countries like Korea, Singapore, Germany have successfully gone through this technical education development trajectory. I must stress that unlike what hon. Ramful stated, in Singapore they

have vocational education centres, the ITE and the Polytechnics, very much the setup that we have here now.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, TVET is being applied in a generic manner that often results in a loss of focus. What this Bill is meant to achieve, is a clear differentiation between vocational, technical and technology education. This means that different forms of technical education are best achieved through different curricula, different pedagogies and different models of competency-based learning. This disaggregation serves two purposes –

1. a more streamlined and harmonised approach to both policy orientation and the allocation of funds for greater efficiency, and
2. ensuring better alignment between the needs on the labour market and the skills secured by learners through the exposure to the disaggregated segments of technical education.

Some Members referred to the splitting of institutions and duplication of responsibilities and a congested framework. Let me reassure the House that there is no such duplication of functions and wastage of resources. If one refers to the provision in the budget for the Financial Year 2020-2021, due appropriation has been made such that the centres have the necessary carry forward provision. The issue of sustainability of Government finance is already taken on board and I wish here to thank my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for ensuring that in the last budget we had managed to come up with this carry forward element. I would refer here to Vote pertaining to Technical Education both recurrent and capital (Sub Head: 4-105).

Mr Speaker, Sir, reference has been made about research and studies prior to embarking on the ITET. As stated earlier, relevant and extensive researches have been undertaken prior to embarking on our technical education reform.

Again, I wish to enlighten the House that the project for charting out the National Skills Development Strategy was initiated when HRDC was under the aegis of my Ministry. Sector skills surveys were initiated in a number of fields. Studies on green technology were also carried out while curriculum development was also undertaken by our partners, the Singapore Corporation Enterprise.

The outcomes of many studies undertaken have served as useful inputs in the articulation of the ITET framework. Some hon. Members cannot claim that this initiative was devoid of any research in driving it forward. It is also sad that one Member of the House, who

has intervened, has not been able to distinguish between technical education, vocational education and technology education.

I wish to reiterate again, in no uncertain terms, that MITD will offer vocational courses, provide training to unemployed and also address reskilling of workers specially through the National Apprenticeship Scheme and also would admit students after Grade 9 who would wish to join vocational training. My colleague, the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, clarified this in his speech. True it is, the world will be dominated by technology and innovation and we are providing funding precisely where required, that is, to drive the knowledge agenda by furthering technology education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure Members of the House that the existing collaboration with international organisation in the technical and vocational education will be sustained. In fact, they will be strengthened with the setting up of the ITET.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for the query raised regarding the orientation of Lycee Polytechnics, Sir Guy Forget, the specificity of its setup, curriculum and the French oriented system in place will be maintained. However, while maintaining the specificity, the curriculum and equipment will be readapted with the needs of the ITET and considering the evolution in the economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ITET is intended to address the issue of low perception, often attached to technical education, but its objective is to increase the attractiveness of and the enlistment in the technical stream. It is meant to eliminate dead ends in the technical education systems and provide students with career progression and access to high levels of certification throughout, thus providing them with enhanced economic mobility.

The ITET will accordingly rebrand the sector and carry out sensitisation program and training for educators and for career counsellors and this with a view to promoting technical and technological education and bringing along the necessary change in the mind-set of people. The infrastructure of technical education centres will be upgraded to provide conducive environment to students including equipment and other facilities. Hon. Ramchurrun rightly stated that ITET will contribute in our process of making Mauritius an Education Hub. Opportunities will exist for cooperation between ITET and other technical and technological institutions, both at the regional and international level.

Moreover, we expect students from countries of the region to come over to Mauritius and they would be welcomed to join the ITET. We already have collaborations with a number of surrounding countries, countries in the region, Reunion Island, so forth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also refer to one point raised regarding the post of Director. It will be up to the Board to determine the profile of the Director, the qualifications and experience. We do not want to be prescriptive in our approach, Mr Speaker, Sir, and direct the Board that it would be an Engineer or someone else who should drive the Institute. The terms and conditions of service will be determined by the Board.

As for the fields of study, likewise, we cannot specify in the object of the Bill, the fields of study be it green technology or digital technology. We should not limit the coverage of the technology education. Priority fields of study will evolve with time and we shall adjust. We want the system to be dynamic, we want it to be flexible, we want it to be able to adjust to the demands of the economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a point was also raised with regard to the Council. The Council will be represented by both public and private sector representatives and consideration may be given to the representation on the Council of registered professionals. I believe it will ensure greater professionalism and will allow enhanced cooperation with a wider prospection of the private operators and professional bodies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the importance of training and capacity building for our SME sector should not be understated. Hon. Bholah rightly stated that SMEs, micro, small and medium enterprises face particular challenges due to scarce human resources. They often struggle to keep on top of new developments and technologies and encounter difficulties in finding and retraining qualified staff and providing them with adequate training. So, SMEs argue that current TVET programmes are too generic and not sector-specific as some sectors might need vocational training for manual and semi-skilled workers while other sectors might need technological education for specialised technical occupations. Mr Speaker, Sir, ITET will address all these.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the concerns of some hon. Members about what will become of the teaching and non-teaching staff of the MITD, I wish to reiterate that there will be no loss of jobs. Hon. Callichurn had clearly stated MITD will be reorganising its activities with the additional staff of the training centres vested in my Ministry. Moreover, any staff of the MITD willing to join ITET may apply for the post advertised by the ITET.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in such circumstances, the rights and privileges of an officer will be, as per established procedures, laid down by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to state that there are many teachers, instructors who were engaged in technical education and who obviously have done a wonderful job. These unsung heroes, as stated by Dr. the hon. Gungapersad, I would like to remind him that the person who had set up the IVTB was in fact the Director, Mr Suresh Munbodh. When he did all that, he ensured that at that time, he could provide skilled labour force for the economy. I would like to remind Dr. the hon. Gungapersad that when the Labour Party came into power in 1995, the first thing that they did was to ask Mr Munbodh to take leave, to go away. He did the work, but he was no longer required. So, there are a number of unsung heroes definitely and we need obviously to stress that they did a wonderful work.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard funds for the institution, provision has been made in Budget 2021-2022 from meeting the recurrent and capital expenditure of the technical education centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unlike what the hon. Member of the Opposition, hon. Ramful stated, I wish to remind the House that the full measure of the reform cannot be reduced to a myopic view of isolated snapshots of students' performance but rather requires a holistic view of all the facets, be it quantitative or qualitative dimensions seen as an amalgam after a full nine-year cycle of the change process. We cannot do so and we cannot gage its success by taking these snapshots.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ITET will undoubtedly create a nexus between education and employment, that is, the industrial and business domains. The ITET will work closely with businesses, industry related stakeholders, the HRDC, Business Mauritius, amongst others, for the promotion of technical education.

As a caring and responsible Government, we have always delivered and will continue to deliver on our promises. This is the pact we made with the nation, a pact we will honour, Mr Speaker, Sir.

One hon. Member has been focussing on digital technologies, which is but one component of the ITET programme delivery whilst it is admitted that it is an area that cuts across a number of fields. Yet, ITET mandate goes beyond digitalisation but also a wide array of fields of study, as already highlighted in my intervention. ITET will offer the right

mix of industry-oriented programmes which will bring a direct value added to the technical and technology education. It will also deliver on provision of skills for promotion of green technologies and this will support our sustainable development initiatives and the UN SDG goals, more specifically Goals 4.3 and 4.4.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also reassure the House that ITET will have an all-inclusive and gender-neutral approach in the programme delivery where ITET will be innovative is that student centricity will not come at the expense of employer centricity. It will create a win-win situation for not only the learner but also for industry and for the country as a whole.

I hope that I have cleared the points raised by my colleagues. I would like once again to thank all those who have intervened from both sides of the House in the debate on this Bill.

I can, Mr Speaker, Sir, in all modesty, state that the reform and transformation that we have embarked upon in the whole of the education sector have earned the plaudits and general consensus of all stakeholders. *Et, je suis convaincue, M. le président, que cette législation ne sera pas en reste.*

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

Mr Speaker: Do you commend the Bill to the House?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I certainly commend the Bill to the House, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill (No 1 of 2021) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill (No 1 of 2021) was read a third time and passed.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 23 July 2021 at 03.00 p.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Specific Matter!

MATTER RAISED

SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - PASSENGERS & TOURISTS –

TAXI OPERATORS

(10.47 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given notice to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister who is the Minister responsible for Tourism as well as the hon. Minister who is responsible for Land Transport, of the following matter and it reads as follows -

‘The contracting out of the transportation of passengers and tourists on arrival at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport with effect from 15 July 2021 which results in the taxi operators, based at the Airport, not able to resume normal operation.’

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 19 March 2020, our border was closed to tourists as a measure to reduce the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus in the country. For months now, Government, together with some stakeholders, especially *l’AHRIM* have been planning for the reopening of our border so as to welcome the first batch of tourists, taking into consideration, of course, all the health and safety measures in the best interests of the country. The border has thus been reopened since 15 July 2021 to the great relief of some stakeholders in the Tourism Industry.

However, I wish to remind the hon. Minister that the tourism sector does not only comprise of the hotel industry but also concerns the taxi drivers, taxi owners, their children and families. There are about 1,153 taxi operators in the tourism industry. They include those operating at hotels and also those operating at the airport.

Like many of our fellow citizens, the taxi operators at the airport, as well as those based at the hotels, are also bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic; the more so, as their activities are directly related to transfer of tourists to and from the airport. I have had the opportunity of meeting a few of them and they have reported to me the stress and trauma they have been enduring during the past 18 months since the border was closed. It has also been reported to me that some of them have outstanding loans, some are in arrears on their loans, others are being threatened by seizure orders from leasing companies and some have unfortunately been placed on the MCIB Report of the Bank of Mauritius for failing on their loan repayments.

Neither the Taxi Facility Scheme at the DBM, nor the Rs5,100 of Self-Employed Assistance Scheme is sufficient in these circumstances, given especially that they have been out of work for nearly 18 months now.

Now that the border has reopened, they thought that they would be able, at last, to alleviate their financial burden. Unfortunately, to their great deception, they have been left out of the reopening process.

Government has decided to contract out the transportation service for tourists to 2 private contractors - I will not cite their names - and the 72 individual taxi operators have been left behind. They have no idea how much these private contractors are claiming for the transfer service nor are they aware of the duration of the contracts, nor are they aware when they will be allowed to resume their operation at the airport.

I am also given to understand that these 2 private contractors are themselves hiring the services of other private cars and vans to perform the transfer operations and questions are being raised whether such a state of affair is in compliance with the Road Traffic Act. Maybe the hon. Ministers can provide some clarification to these questions.

I am also told that the individual taxi operators were never consulted on the reopening process nor were they informed or trained on the protocol that has been put in place for transporting tourists to and from the airport.

Since October 2020, they have written to the hon. Prime Minister, copied to the Deputy Prime Minister asking that they be included in the training sessions given to frontliners so that they can get accustomed with the established protocols. But their request was never even acknowledged. It was not until 14 July this year, on the eve of the reopening of the border, when they publicly manifested their intention to go for a peaceful protest, that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister called them in for a meeting. Now that they are claiming their rights and they are denouncing the unfair treatment against them, they are told that they cannot be involved in the transportation service as they have not been trained. How can Government use such an excuse when the taxi operators were not given the opportunity in the first place to be trained?

They are also told that to take opportunity of the taxi facility scheme of Rs100,000 loan at the DBM - some have applied but they were told that the scheme did not apply to taxis at the airport. In any event, how can they take further loans when they are already heavily indebted? These taxi operators are desperate; their requests have been turned down and for the time being they have resorted to peaceful protest.

Since the opening of the border, they have been protesting at the entrance of the airport exhibiting cardboards and put up signs against the unresponsive approach of the Government and this state of affairs is giving a very bad publicity to our tourist industry, especially in those difficult times when we are doing everything to revive the industry. The Government has said that the population, including the economic operators, should now learn to live with the COVID situation. How then do you expect them to survive when Government is coming up with such unfair policies that are discriminatory against those who are economically vulnerable?

I will, therefore, make an appeal to Government and especially to the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as the Minister of Transport, to review their stand and to include those taxi operators into the transfer process of tourists from and to the airport as early as possible.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the hon. Member and I would like to thank him for providing me the opportunity to briefly enlighten the House as to measures adopted for the transfer of incoming passengers to quarantine facilities. I note that the hon. gentleman has said each time transfer from the airport, but he forgets to say to quarantine facilities.

So, let me remind the House that we are still in a global pandemic situation whereby despite the gradual reopening of various sectors of our economy, adherence to strict sanitary measures, where wearing the mask and protocols pursuant to the Public Health Act and to the Quarantine Act remain the order of the day so as to mitigate any possible risk of contamination and contain the propagation of the virus.

Let me remind the House, firstly, that there has been no reopening of borders contrary to what the hon. gentleman just said. There is no freedom for anybody to come in and out of the country. What has happened on 15 July is that some selected airlines have been allowed to resume commercial flights under special derogation. Secondly, let me remind the House that all incoming passengers whether before or after 15 July, all incoming passengers, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, are required to undergo 14-days quarantine. So, all passengers when they arrive are transferred from the airport to a quarantine facility, whether it is an in-room quarantine or as from 15 July a resort hotel quarantine.

Now, the general practice since March 2020 has been for riding passengers to be conveyed from the airport to quarantine facility by the Ministry of Health and Wellness under Police escort. Due to the heavy consequential strain on public resources, vehicles, manpower, it has, for some time now, been envisaged to entrust the task to selected operators under strict conditions. In January of this year an expression of interest exercise was launched by my Ministry with a set of defined criteria to select the most well-established and experienced operators. Several companies satisfied the requirements and were retained but could not go into operation due to the second COVID related lockdown as from March 2021.

With the change in circumstances brought about by vaccination and 15 July passenger flights being allowed, it was deemed appropriate to entrust the transfer of passengers to well-resourced and experienced operators. The general principle was approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness on the basis of a revised and updated sanitary protocol. For instance, it is generally recommended that operators make use of a collective means of transport as opposed to individual motorcars; this is the general recommendation.

Furthermore, all drivers bear an identification badge and are either protected by a plexiglass screen or wear a face shield in addition to their masks. The sanitary protocol provides that the company must designate an overall airport supervisor, equipped with a logbook and responsible for strict compliance with sanitary measures. Lists of staff and vehicles are submitted to the Ministry of Health and Wellness and other relevant authorities

two days prior to relevant flight arrivals. And all vehicles, by the way, cannot be private taxis hired by the company. All the vehicles belonging, therefore, to the company must be thoroughly disinfected between each airport or hotel transfer.

For recall, now, the hon. gentleman is signalling 'no', let me say this clearly, if you have any proof that private taxis are being used, please bring them to my attention because these companies have been expressly required not to use private individual vehicles that use their own vehicles. For recall, in order to ensure strict compliance with the set protocol, and for ease of monitoring, it was decided to entrust as from 15 July the responsibility to the operators selected in January 2021. The two companies concerned have more than 10 years of experience and operate a fleet of duly licensed vehicles, all equipped with a tracking system.

Moreover, all of their frontliners have been fully vaccinated and have benefited from COVID-related and protocol-based training dispensed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism. Their operation is subject to regular monitoring by the Health Authorities, the Police as well as by the Tourism Authority.

Now, according to the information obtained from the National Land Transport Authority, there are 72 private individual taxies that have as base of operation, the SSR International Airport. It is considered that entrusting transfer of passengers to quarantine facilities to 72 individual taxi operators would raise serious difficulties in terms of ensuring compliance with the sanitary protocol and monitoring thereof. For instance, tracking of movement of vehicles which are not entitled to stop at any time between the airport and the quarantine facility would raise serious difficulties.

Moreover, contact tracing would be rendered more problematic for the health authorities should the need arise. However, in view of the anticipated increase in the number of passenger flights and of incoming passengers, my Ministry will soon issue a new Expression of Interest in order to enlist services of a few more well-established, well-resourced, experienced and fully vaccinated operators for quarantine transfers.

We are fully conscious of the difficulty presently faced by not only airport, but also hotel taxi operators and look forward to 01 October and the taxi operators have been informed of this. 01 October, when conditional upon the generalised vaccination and attainment of herd immunity, all taxi operators may resume their normal work. 01 October! In the meantime, it is understood that my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport and Light

Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, who has already met representatives of the two unions the GTOU and the ATOA - I think it is called - he has met representatives of both associations on 24 June 2021 and it is understood that my hon. colleague will engage in further discussions with concerned parties in the near future to consider appropriate assistance and support.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(11.04 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to add on to what my colleague, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has just explained with regard to the matter raised by hon. Ramful concerning the contracting out of the transportation of passengers and tourists on arrival at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport with effect from 15 July, which results in the taxi operators based at the airport not able to resume normal operations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I, in fact, met the concerned taxi operators on three occasions and I chaired all the three meetings. On 24 June, I met with the representatives of the General Taxi Owners Union and the Airport Taxi Owners Association whereby the representatives of the taxi operators expressed their qualms with regard to the arrangements put in place with regard to the transfer of passengers from the SSR International Airport.

As the Deputy Prime Minister has just explained, since lockdown, the 72 taxis based at the airport have not been effecting transfers from the airport as same are being undertaken by destination management companies and this is, of course, impacting heavily on their financial situation. The representatives of the taxi operators hence requested that in the context of this novel situation which, as from 15 July, consideration be given by Government to allow the taxi based at the airport to effect the transfer of passengers upon their arrival. They also reassured that they would ensure that all the operators are vaccinated prior to the opening of borders and that they will comply with all the sanitary protocols to be imposed by the authorities.

In the light of the discussions held at the meeting, Mr Speaker, Sir, I informed the taxi operators that I would convey their grievances to Government as per their request and I also approached the Deputy Prime Minister to give consideration to their representations but the

hon. Deputy Prime Minister has just explained very clearly and elaborately what are the reasons that have prompted the decision that Government took and he has explained very clearly why the DMC have been chosen to transport the passengers and the tourists to the airport. I will not come back upon that.

So, the taxi operators met the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, and they were clearly explained that the arrangements have been put in place by Government to ensure the safe transfer of passengers from the airport in the context of the exceptional situation which is expected to last till the end of September of this year.

So, the taxi operators were enlightened during this meeting that during this first phase, the airport transfers would be undertaken by the two DMCs which have been selected following procedures including an Expression of Interest and involving a defined set of criteria. They have been apprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, by myself and by the Deputy Prime Minister also that Government is aware of the situation and Government is agreeable to consider any additional proposals that they may wish to submit.

I can assure the House and the hon. Member that I will be meeting the taxi operators soon, the representatives of these two unions and we shall hopefully, Mr Speaker, Sir, find a solution to the problems of the taxi owners. But I wish to inform the House also, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Government has been very attentive to the plight of taxi operators. In fact, as you will remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, we just set up a Taxi Welfare Fund. In the programme we announced the support to the tune of Rs100,000 to holders of taxi licence for them to acquire or renew their vehicle. This measure incentivises taxi operators to purchase better and more comfortable cars.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 740 licensees have availed of this one-off facility. Moreover, following the Wakashio oil spill last year, arrangements were made to include taxi operators plighting within certain regions impacted by the oil spill under the Wakashio Solidarity Fund Scheme for them to be compensated accordingly. I am informed that payment totalling Rs19.8 m. has been made to 352 beneficiaries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all remember how the taxi operators also benefited from the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. I am made to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that some Rs129 m. have been disbursed to that effect. Taxi operators based at hotels and at airport have also been receiving an allowance under the said scheme to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on

their activities. This demonstrates, in no uncertain terms, that our Government is considerate of the plight of taxi operators.

In the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, loan facilities up to Rs100,000 were extended by the DBM to hotel-based taxis with a very low interest rate of 2% as well as a one-year moratorium. I am made to understand that since July 2020 around 400 operators availed of this facility for an amount totalling Rs35 m.

I am informed also that in 2020, the DBM sanctions loans and financial assistance of some Rs52 m. in favour of taxi operators. This again constitutes concrete actions taken by our Government to alleviate the financial hardship of taxi operators.

Last and not least, Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the difficult situation in the tourism industry as a result of COVID-19, my Ministry decided that the replacement period for taxi-based at hotels and airport was increased for 10 years to 16 years and this decision was taken last year, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I must remind the House also in the aftermath of the confinement, work access permits were not made mandatory and taximen were allowed to circulate freely during lockdown, Mr Speaker, Sir and taxi operators at hotels, finally, were allocated an interim allowance of Rs4,275 as financial support for a period of 6 months as from January 2021 and this meant a financial implication to the tune of Rs4.6 m. monthly. *C'est la preuve, M. le président, s'il en fallait une, que notre gouvernement a toujours eu l'intérêt des taximen à cœur.*

And I wish to assure the House, the hon. Member, and the taxi operators, that once I meet them and the additional proposals are received from them, my Ministry will ensure prompt actions to be taken and therefore whatever recommendations they would be making, I will submit these recommendations to Government for consideration. And I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, with this positive track record of Government in terms of actions, positive measures taken to alleviate the difficulties of taximen, we will find a solution for the taxi operators at the airport and at the hotels.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend here! Enjoy the rest of your evening!

At 11.13 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 23 July 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MAURITIUS SHIPPING CORPORATION LTD - MISSING CONTAINERS - INQUIRY

(No. B/705) 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 recent alleged case of 56 containers belonging to the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd., which cannot be found in the port, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if same has been reported thereto and, if so, indicate where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police has informed that a declaration has been made by the Technical/Procurement Executive of the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd on 09 July 2021, at Line Barracks Police Station to the effect that an audit exercise in the Port Area where the containers of Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd are kept, has revealed that 83 containers were missing out of 942 containers. In fact, out of 942 containers outsourced to Associated Containers Services Ltd (ACSL) for stuffing and unstuffing of goods, only 859 were found.

It was also reported to the Police that during physical checks by officers of MSCL on 22 and 24 May 2021, 27 containers were also found and, therefore, 56 containers remained untraceable.

On 16 July 2021, the Port Police has reported the retrieval of 14 containers out of the 56 missing containers.

Police enquiry is progressing.

CRIME & MISDEMEANOUR – MEASURES

(No. B/706) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to crime and misdemeanour, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the measures he proposes to take to combat same in the light of the latest

figures published in the Crime, Justice and Security Statistics 2020 showing an increase in the rate thereof from 35.6% in 2019 to 43.8% in 2020.

Reply: According to the Criminal Code Act 1838, crimes are offences punishable by penal servitude and fines exceeding Rs10,000, whereas misdemeanours are offences punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding 30 days and fines exceeding Rs10,000.

The Commissioner of Police has informed that the statistics on offences which have been compiled for the publication of the Crime, Justice and Security Statistics 2020 by Statistics Mauritius include offences classified as crime and misdemeanour as well as drug cases. It shows an increase of 8.2 in the overall offence rate from 35.6 to 43.8 over the period 2019 to 2020, which is due to breaches of COVID-19 legislation in 2020 which has impacted on the statistics for the year 2020 as stated in the report itself.

Since 23 March 2020, cases of COVID-19 were detected in the country. Consequently, the Government had taken various measures to prevent the proliferation of the disease and legislated several laws to sanction persons who fail to abide by the sanitary protocols. The following legislations have been passed –

- (a) on 16 May 2020, the Quarantine Act 2020 was enacted and it came into operation as from 12 June 2020. Section 12 of the said Act provides for a penalty not exceeding Rs500,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years;
- (b) on 17 May 2020, the Prevention of Resurgence and Further Spread of Epidemic Disease (COVID-19) Regulations was enacted. Any person who breaches regulation 4 (wearing of protective mask) or 5 (social distancing) shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs50,000 and to imprisonment for a term exceeding 2 years, and
- (c) on 30 May 2020, the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 was amended by Government Notice 100 of 2020 where the penalty of “Rs500” was increased to “Rs200,000” and the term of imprisonment was increased from “6 months” to “5 years”.

Several Regulations and Closing Down Orders were made under the Public Health Act 1925 and Quarantine Act 2020 for the purpose of preventing the spread of the COVID-19 disease in Mauritius. I am further informed that in order to enforce these legislations, the

Police have established 22553 offences which, *inter alia*, include “Breach of Curfew Order”, “Failing to wear face mask” and “Failing to observe social distancing”, among others. In addition, the increase is also due to the increase in the detection rate of drug cases. For the year 2019 to 2020, the number of drug cases detected and offences for breach of Bail Act have increased by 7.37% and 7.02 % respectively.

Furthermore, the increase in the overall offence rate also indicates that the Police have been rigorously enforcing the Regulations made under the Public Health Act 1925 and the Quarantine Act 2020 to prevent the proliferation of the COVID-19 disease and protect the population for contamination and they are relentlessly fighting the drug scourge in the country.

The Police also enforced the Bail Act 1999 particularly Section 12 which provides that persons on bail should report to the nearest Police Station of their locality in default of which they commit an offence, which is classified as a misdemeanour. For the years 2019 and 2020, the number of such offences has increased from 3727 to 3989 representing a rise of 7.02 %.

Besides ensuring public safety and security, the key objectives of the Mauritius Police Force as set out in its Annual Policing Plan 2021, also include crime reduction, promoting safer communities and promoting a law abiding culture among the citizens, improving road safety, strengthening Police and public partnership, combating illegal drugs, addressing gender-based violence, improving the quality of service and capacity building of the workforce.

In order to achieve its objectives, the Mauritius Police Force is providing Police Officers with sophisticated equipment and is using modern technology, such as Safe City Cameras, multimedia radios, vehicle mounted with GPS, iMAAP road crash data management system, Crime Occurrence Tracking System, drug kits, night vision cameras, drones, remotely piloted aircraft, for the preservation of law and order and prevention and detection of offences.

To ensure public safety and public security, targeted crackdown operations are carried out on a daily basis. During these operations suspicious persons, vehicles and habitual criminals are checked. The Police has also an Integrated Operational Patrol Plan for ensuring Police presence on a 24/7 basis around the island. During foot and mobile patrols, Police is checking places subjected to complaints and licensed premises, keeping surveillance at vital

installations and important buildings, ensuring traffic fluidity, protecting the vulnerable, preventing illegal dumping, combatting illegal drugs, and attending to emergencies and public requests, to mention but these.

With the advent of technology, offenders are now committing offence on social media. The Police Cybercrime Unit and Police IT Unit are carrying out cyber patrols on 24/7 basis as a proactive measure in order to prevent and detect cybercrime and other related offences. They are working in collaboration with the Central Informatics Bureau, Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius and have established informal contacts with international law enforcement agencies to fight cybercrime.

On a daily basis, Divisional Commanders carry out Monitoring Meetings to assess the crime situation in their respective Divisions and take appropriate measures to curb crimes and other illegal activities.

The Police are working in partnership with community representatives, private security companies, Non-Governmental Organisations, and other stakeholders for the preservation of law and order in the country.

Members of the public are being constantly sensitised on crime prevention measures and also on road safety. To this end, the Crime Prevention Unit has set up Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in different regions around the island. The Crime Prevention Unit is conducting door-to-door sensitisation with a view to raising awareness among elderly persons on security measures for ensuring their personal safety. Personnel of Crime Prevention Unit and Neighbourhood Officers are also sensitising planters, business operators and other vulnerable persons in order to prevent them from being victimised. Furthermore, the Crime Prevention Unit is partnering with the *Jeune Chambre Internationale* for combating illegal activities, including substance abuse, domestic violence, among others.

Similarly, the Police Family Protection Unit is taking innovative measures in a bid to addressing gender-based violence, including domestic violence. A new mobile application known as “*Lespwar*” has been introduced to respond effectively to requests for Police assistance by victims.

The *Brigade Pour la Protection des Mineurs* is in the process of restructuring its mode of operation. The aim is to adopt a holistic approach to address violence among youngsters in

schools and public places and to raise awareness on drug scourge and other anti-social behaviour. The *Brigade Pour la Protection des Mineurs* will work in collaboration with internal and external agencies such as Police Family Protection Unit, Crime Prevention Unit, ADSU Education Cell, Child Development Unit, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children and NGOs to come up with measures and best practices which will be in the best interest of our children.

The Police Force is doing its utmost to sustain the numerous and varied measures being taken to combat crime and misdemeanor in the country so as to ensure peace and security.

RODRIGUES - DRUG PROBLEM - REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/707) **Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues)** 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 entry of hard drugs recently in Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the provenance and types thereof;
- (b) the number of arrests effected in connection therewith, and
- (c) if the situation has been assessed with a view to taking measures to effectively counteract same.

Reply: It is assumed that the hon. Member has in mind drugs which are classified in the First to Fifth Schedules of the Dangerous Drugs Act as the term “hard drugs” is not defined in the Act.

The Commissioner of Police has accordingly informed that a drug operation was conducted by the ADSU Rodrigues on Thursday 08 July 2021 with a view to intercepting persons suspected to be involved in drug dealing and trafficking.

With regard to part (b) of the question, two persons were arrested at Gravières and Coromandel for having respectively in their possession 1.04 grammes and 0.25 grammes of drugs, inclusive of wrapping, suspected to be heroin. These constitute of thirteen and three doses respectively with a street value of Rs19,350.

The two persons were brought before Court on Friday 09 and Tuesday 13 July 2021. They have been charged for the offence of ‘Drug dealing: Possession of heroin for the

purpose of distribution’ and have both been remanded to jail as there was objection to their release.

Enquiry into these cases is proceeding, and, with regard to part (a) of the question, it is only on its completion that the provenance and source of the drug can be determined.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has further informed that, for the last ten years, most of the drug cases are cannabis related. In fact, only three cases related to heroin had been detected for the last three years.

The Commissioner of Police has also informed that the following measures have been taken, and operations mounted, to deal with the drug problem in Rodrigues –

- (i) deployment of ADSU Officers at the airport and port to reinforce vigilance thereat with a view to profiling suspicious passengers and employees and identifying potential drug dealers. Vigilance is also constantly maintained at the loading and unloading of luggage from the aircraft;
- (ii) surveillance at the passenger terminal on the arrival of ships and yachts;
- (iii) collaboration with the Mauritius Revenue Authority and Airport of Rodrigues Limited in the scanning of luggage;
- (iv) presence of Sniffer Dogs for checking suspicious luggage at the airport and search operations with ADSU;
- (v) crackdown and targeted operations involving the ADSU and other Units of the Police Force throughout the island;
- (vi) intelligence gathering by field officers. Regular update of mapping and zoning of drug prone areas is effected;
- (vii) operational, training and inspection visits to Rodrigues by ADSU Mauritius since the year 2015 to improve operational standards, and, so far, six such visits have been effected;
- (viii) installation of 93 cameras at Plaine Corail Airport since 2015. 51 of these cameras were upgraded in 2018 for the sum of Rs950,845. Provision has also been made in this Financial Year for the installation of 12 additional cameras to cover the car parking area, the apron, the arrival and the baggage search

areas. The installation of these cameras would reinforce the surveillance at the airport;

- (ix) examination of all imported goods meant for the Rodriguan market is conducted by MRA Customs prior to shipment to Rodrigues;
- (x) procurement of one baggage scanner by the Mauritius Revenue Authority at the estimated cost of Rs1.8 m. for the scanning of passengers' luggage at Port Mathurin Passenger Terminal in this Financial Year, and
- (xi) installation of 26 CCTV cameras by the Mauritius Ports Authority in the port area covering the perimeter fencing and other sensitive areas. Monitoring of CCTV images is undertaken by the National Coast Guard at the Guard Room of MPA Office.

On its part, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly stresses on continuous, meaningful and purposeful sensitisation campaigns against drug abuse. Following the recent detection of hard drugs like heroin in Rodrigues, the Committee on Drugs and Substance Abuse Prevention amongst Youth in Rodrigues held an urgent meeting on Tuesday 13 July 2021.

In this context, the Commission for Youth in collaboration with that Committee and the civil society, is organising a Mega Sensitisation March against Drug on the theme '*Ene Rodrig Ekolozik, Enn Rodrig San La Drog*' on Saturday 24 July 2021 from Coromandel Community Centre to Graviers.

As I have stated on a number of occasions in this august House and in other fora, the fight against the drug scourge is relentless and unflinching, and it should concern all citizens while my Government also continues, in a no retreat no surrender stance, to resolve the drug problem in the entire Republic of Mauritius, including Rodrigues.

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION REPORT - FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

(No. B/708) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Report of the International Maritime Organisation on the audit carried out at the Mauritius Ports Authority, in 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the

main findings and recommendations contained therein, indicating the corrective measures, if any, taken in relation thereto and table copy of the said report.

Reply: The Director of Shipping has informed that the International Maritime Organisation Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS) is a mandatory audit which applies to all International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Member States, including Mauritius. This audit creates a basis on which to assess the extent to which a Member State complies with its obligations as set out in the various IMO instruments to which it is a party.

The IMO commissioned the audit for Mauritius based on the IMSAS audit schedule and time table for the year 2020. Accordingly, this audit was carried out from 08 to 17 February 2020 by three auditors selected by the IMO itself.

It is to be pointed out that as a Member State of the IMO, it was the Republic of Mauritius as a whole and not solely the Mauritius Ports Authority which was audited.

The objectives of the audit were to determine the extent to which Mauritius meets the obligations imposed upon it through its adoption of the applicable mandatory IMO instruments, such as the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, the International Convention on Standards of Training and Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers; and to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of these instruments.

The organisations which participated in the IMSAS audit 2020 were –

- (a) the Shipping Division of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping;
- (b) the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change;
- (c) the Mauritius Hydrographic Service of the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning;
- (d) the National Coast Guard;
- (e) the Mauritius Radio Services;
- (f) the Mauritius Meteorological Services;
- (g) the Mauritius Ports Authority, and
- (h) the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd.

A draft interim report with all findings and observations was presented at the closing meeting on 17 February 2020 to all concerned stakeholders. Subsequently, following consultations with all stakeholders, amendments made to the draft interim report were transmitted by the Director of Shipping to the IMO. However, the finalisation of the report was delayed due to the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerning the MPA together with other entities, the report highlighted that the practices concerning handling of dangerous goods in the port were inadequately regulated, controlled or supervised by the relevant competent authorities. The root cause for this non-compliance was found to be a lack of coordination among the relevant entities and a lack of awareness of the requirements of the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code by cargo operators. The corrective action was worked out by the Shipping Division of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping in consultation with the stakeholders. The target completion date for implementation of this corrective action is 31 December 2022.

Similarly, the root causes of all the other non-compliances mentioned in the report were identified and corresponding corrective actions were worked out at the level of the Shipping Division of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping in collaboration with the concerned stakeholders. The Final Corrective Action Plan was submitted to the IMO on 29 November 2020 and was included in the final report.

The IMSAS final report for the Republic of Mauritius was submitted on 29 April 2021 by the Audit Team Leader of the International Maritime Organisation through the Director of Shipping who was the IMSAS Special Point of Contact.

The necessary follow-up for the implementation of the Corrective Action Plan, which also includes the target dates, is being done at the level of the Shipping Division of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping under the purview of the IMO. The target dates for the implementation of the corrective actions span from 30 June 2021 to 31 December 2022.

As regards the tabling of a copy of the IMO audit report, since the Director of Shipping is the recipient of the Report, the request should, accordingly, be addressed to the Minister responsible for Shipping.

GOODLANDS POLICE STATION - OFFICERS POSTED GRADE-WISE

(No. B/709) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External

Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Goodlands Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of officers, grade-wise, posted thereat since 2015 to date, indicating if it is adequately resourced to discharge the roles and responsibilities thereof optimally.

(Withdrawn)

PORT – IMPROVED REGULATORY FRAMEWORK & BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

(No. B/710) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the port, he will state if Government proposes to come up with an improved regulatory framework and business environment to stimulate growth and investment.

Reply: As an island economy, Mauritius relies on its maritime and aviation capacities to connect with the world. The COVID-19 pandemic experience has impressed upon us the critical importance of those sectors and of the respective institutions that operate in those fields.

I must thank all those operating in those sectors and who have, in these difficult times, ensured the continuity of services and networks in order to maintain the security of supplies for the Mauritian economy and food for the country. Thus, we have been able to avoid any instances of shortage for consumers.

The pandemic has also imposed on the world a new order for trade and logistics. We have, with great concern, witnessed the rise in freight charges. Freight rates for Asia-Europe route which stood at around USD2,000 for a 40-foot container in 2019 has risen from USD8,000 to USD12,000, caused by a vicious circle of port congestion, vessel cancellation, container shortages and escalating prices in the maritime industry.

Mauritius has not been spared and freight rate for Asia to Mauritius has similarly experienced a threefold rise from about USD2,000 in 2019 to USD9,500 currently.

In addition, there have been disruptions in maritime traffic following the temporary closure of the Suez Canal as a result of the incident involving Vessel MV Ever Given.

In line with the Government policy, the vision of the Port is to provide modern infrastructure ahead of demand, streamline port processes and enhance security and environment protection.

In 2016, the MPA has carried out a Port Master Plan Study to define the land use and infrastructure development up to the horizon 2040. Most of the projects recommended have already been implemented or in the process of implementation.

In order to sustain the competitive position of the Port and to cater for increased port activities, it is proposed to update the Port Master Plan with a view to capturing new opportunities in the port sector following the COVID-19 pandemic. In the light of the recommendation of the updated Port Master Plan, the Government will consider undertaking a port reform which will be carried out at three levels –

- (i) reforms for the modernisation of business processes and for enhancing competitiveness of container handling and other port services, with a commercial outlook;
- (ii) procedural reforms to streamline existing licensing and clearance procedures for efficiency gains, for example, the proposed single maritime window which will facilitate vessel clearance, and
- (iii) forward-looking strategies to enable the MPA to attract additional shipping lines and enhance its international connectivity.

Appropriate regulatory framework will be considered to accompany such other reforms as may be proposed. The regulatory aspects of Port environment, Port Security and Port emergency will be reinforced, whilst the commercial competitive advantage of the port, as an enterprise, will be enhanced.

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY - HORSE RIGGING -ADVERSE COMMENTS

(No. B/726) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the adverse comments of horse rigging made recently by Mr P. B., former Head of Integrity of the Gambling Regulatory Authority, he will state if the matter has been referred to the Commissioner of Police and/or other relevant authorities for inquiry.

Reply (Prime Minister): I refer to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/379 on 18 May 2021 on the same subject matter, whereby I informed the House that the Police was investigating into the alleged attempts of horse rigging. The Commissioner of Police has informed that the enquiry into the matter is ongoing.

AMNESTY PROGRAMME – FISHERS OF RODRIGUES ISLAND – LOANS

(No. B/736) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed amnesty programme for the writing off of the outstanding loans of the fishers, as announced in the 2021-2022 budget, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof regarding the fishers in Rodrigues Island, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof concerned therewith, and
- (b) cost implications thereof.

Reply (Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development): Dans le Discours du Budget 2021/2022, j'ai annoncé la mise en place d'un nouveau programme d'amnistie qui sera déployé au travers la *Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM)*.

Ce programme verra comme bénéficiaires les planteurs, les petits pêcheurs et les éleveurs de bétail qui rencontrent des difficultés financières pour rembourser leurs prêts en souffrance depuis plus de 10 ans.

Le programme s'applique aux prêts d'un montant maximal de 200 000 roupies et sera implémenté de la façon suivante –

- D'une part, pour les prêts contractés allant jusqu'à un montant de 100,000 roupies, la DBM renoncera au capital ainsi qu'aux intérêts et pénalités liés.
- D'autre part, pour les prêts supérieurs à 100,000 roupies mais n'excédant pas 200,000 roupies, la DBM renoncera à tous les intérêts et pénalités.

Les bénéficiaires ne devront s'acquitter que du montant du capital.

La DBM gèlera également tout intérêt en cours sur le compte de prêt du bénéficiaire.

Le montant total qui sera annulé dans le cadre du nouveau programme d'amnistie s'élèvera à environ 160,1 millions de roupies.

Pour les bénéficiaires décédés dont le montant est compris entre 100,000 et 200,000 roupies, la DBM annulera toutes les dettes au cas par cas.

La DBM a prévu une somme de 25 millions de roupies pour cette catégorie de bénéficiaires.

En ce qui concerne Rodrigues, les prêts accordés aux pêcheurs individuels par le biais de la *Nassola and United Cooperative Union*, la DBM effacera toutes leurs dettes, c'est-à-dire, les intérêts en capital et les pénalités.

Cette mesure coûtera quelque 30 millions de roupies et bénéficiera à quelque 276 pêcheurs.

NEW SHIPPING CARGO VESSEL – PROCUREMENT

(No. B/737) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed procurement of a new shipping cargo vessel to serve the outer islands of Mauritius, as announced in the 2020-2021 budget, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: The Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd (MSCL), a State-owned private limited company and as the national shipping line, it ensures shipping connections among the island communities of the Republic of Mauritius namely Rodrigues and Agalega to allow Government of Mauritius to fulfill its social obligations.

The MSCL owned and operated a passenger cum cargo vessels; the ex-MV Mauritius Pride. The vessel was sold in September 2014 since she had already reached its economic useful life and was becoming costly to operate and maintain, in compliance with SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) and IMO (International Maritime Organisation) regulations.

Following the sale of MV Mauritius Pride, the MSCL operated two vessels namely the MV Mauritius Trochetia, a passenger cum cargo vessel and a chartered cargo vessel MV Anna for Rodrigues and Agalega voyages. MV Anna was chartered from 2015 to 2018 and was replaced by MV Black Rhino in 2019.

One of the budgetary measures for the financial year 2018-2019 announced by the hon. Prime Minister, in his Budget Speech on 14 June 2018 was in order to ensure safe and timely transportation of fuel and food provisions to Rodrigues and Agalega, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd (MSCL) would acquire a new multipurpose cargo vessel.

Following a tender process, the Board of MSCL approved the construction of a multipurpose cargo vessel fully funded by the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. On 28 August 2019, Government took note of the decision of the Board of MSCL. Subsequently, on 18 October 2019 MSCL signed a contract with Huanghai Ship Building Co. Ltd of China for construction of a multipurpose cargo vessel for the sum of USD 18.49 m.

Initially, the vessel was expected to be delivered in China in October 2021 and to reach Mauritius by December 2021 but there had been delay due to the fact that the first model test failed and secondly because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My Ministry requested MSCL to seek the possibility of negotiating with the builder for converting the cargo vessel into passenger cum cargo vessel with approximately 150 passengers and 300 containers. However, the builder has informed MSCL that it was not possible to convert the cargo vessel into passenger cum cargo vessel for following reasons –

- i. the passenger cum cargo vessel has different rules of design;

- ii. almost all equipment had been finalised and ordered, and
- iii. it will impact on the cost by over 50 %.

Based on the above, the Board of Directors of MSCL had decided to continue with the Multipurpose Cargo Vessel project. At its meeting of 23 October 2020, Cabinet took note that the Board of Directors of MSCL had decided to continue with the Multipurpose Cargo Vessel project.

In March 2021, MSCL had received the report of the second test of the model which was positive.

Subsequently, at the meeting held in April 2021, where a 3D presentation was made by the Ship Building Yard to the Technical Consultant of MSCL, it was noted that certain technical modifications had to be brought before going ahead with the steel cutting. Consultations between the shipyard and MSCL's Technical Consultant are ongoing.

It is to be noted that due the COVID-19 pandemic, the officers of MSCL had not been able to travel to the shipyard and virtual approval of notification is not an easy task. In the meantime, the Board of MSCL had signed a contract for MV Black Rhino to serve the island of Rodrigues for a further period of 14 months, i.e. until July 2022 with extension clauses as we expect the new vessel to be ready for operation in about August 2022.

ZONE D'ÉDUCATION PRIORITAIRE SCHOOLS – INITIATIVES, ACHIEVEMENTS & NEW AVENUES

(No. B/738) Mrs 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 *Zone d'Éducation Prioritaire* schools, she will state the present number thereof, indicating the –

- (a) initiatives taken by her Ministry to support the teaching and non-teaching staff, the students and the parents thereof for the promotion of education;
- (b) achievements thereof in the Primary School Achievement Certificate Examinations 2021, and
- (c) new avenues being explored in respect thereof.

(Withdrawn)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – VICTIMS – SAFETY & SECURITY

(No. B/739) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to domestic violence, she will state the mechanism presently in place between her Ministry and the Mauritius Police Force to ensure the safety and security of victims or potential victims thereof, indicating the mechanism, if any, existing between her Ministry and the Mauritius Police Force for information sharing in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

ASPHALT - PROPOSED RECYCLING

(No. B/740) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed recycling of asphalt in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

FAKE MORCELLEMENT PERMITS & PIN NUMBERS - INQUIRY

(No. B/741) 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 allegations of fake morcellement permits and fake pin numbers having been issued by his Ministry, he will state if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto at the level of his Ministry and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

NEW SOCIAL LIVING DEVELOPMENT LTD - HOUSING UNITS

(No. B/742) 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 proposed development of 12,000 housing units, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the New Social Living Development Ltd., information as to whether the recent increase in construction costs has

impacted on the viability of the project, taking into account estimated selling price of the units upon signature of contract/completion of project, as the case may be.

(Withdrawn)

OPENING OF BORDERS – HOTELS/QUARANTINE CENTRES

(No. B/743) 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 opening of our borders and the expected increase of arrivals of passengers from abroad, he will state the measures being taken to improve conditions of stay and of communication at the hotels/quarantine centres.

Reply: I wish to point out that the period 15 July to 30 September 2021 is referred to as the first phase of the reopening of our borders. In actual fact, while borders remain closed until 30 September, selected passenger flights from abroad are being authorised by special derogation.

Prior to 15 July, only repatriation flights were authorised and all arriving passengers were required to observe an in-room quarantine for a period of at least 14 days. Private hotels as well as State-owned Recreational Centres were used by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as quarantine facilities for arriving passengers but also for quarantine of local population following contact tracing.

The COVID landscape has fundamentally changed with vaccination, both in our key tourism markets and in Mauritius. Locally, the rapid roll out of the National Vaccination Programme has allowed, as at yesterday, for vaccination of approximately 49% of the whole population with a first jab and 39% with a second jab. This corresponds to two adults out of three having been vaccinated once and one adult out of two fully vaccinated. Moreover, all crew of passenger flights of Air Mauritius and most frontliners deployed at the airport, designated drivers conveying tourists to quarantine facilities, as well as staff of quarantine facilities and their immediate family, have been vaccinated.

In the circumstances, as from 15 July, Government has introduced the Resort Hotel concept whereby fully vaccinated arriving passengers are provided the possibility of undergoing the 14-day quarantine requirement in a number of Resort Hotels with free

movement on hotel premises, subject to a specific sanitary protocol developed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

As a result of resumption of passenger flights and introduction of Resort Tourism, the number of arriving passengers is expected to gradually increase.

As of today, a total of 35 hotels and 3 Recreational Centres are being used as quarantine facilities. All such hotels remain under private management whereas relevant Recreational Centres are being run by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. All quarantine facilities operate subject to sanitary protocols developed by the Health Authorities.

It is also worth highlighting that the hotels providing accommodation for incoming passengers are well-anchored operators in the tourism industry, with vast experience in providing quality hospitality services to recognised standards in their respective star rating category. These hotels possess the know-how to be able to enhance the customer experience with the right balance of comfort and safety.

These hotels were given a properly defined “*cahier de charges*” to operate as a quarantine facility. These requirements pertain to catering, sanitary kits, provision of amenities including towels, bed sheets, blanket, kettle, complimentary tea and coffee, bathroom amenities as well as provision of high-speed internet/data points and satellite TV channels.

The sanitary protocols have, over time, been updated and improved in the light of experience as has general management of quarantine facilities.

Additionally, the Tourism Authority and the Ministry of Health and Wellness have carried out site visits at the hotels to ensure that all the required facilities are available.

I wish to assure the House that my Ministry and the Ministry of Health and Wellness remain attentive to all complaints and suggestions and shall endeavour to continually improve the experience of incoming passengers in quarantine.

CANALS ANGLAIS, MALAKOFF & ALLIMAN, PORT LOUIS – FLOODING PROBLEMS

(No. B/744) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the identified high-risk inundation-prone Canals Anglais, Malakoff and Alliman, in Port Louis, he will state the immediate mitigating actions being envisaged by his Ministry pending the implementation of the long-term permanent solutions therefor.

Reply: I wish to inform the hon. Member that my Ministry is already implementing full-fledged permanent solutions to the problem of flooding at Canals Anglais, Malakoff and Alliman and, therefore, the need for immediate mitigating measures does not arise.

Regarding Canal Anglais, following a bidding exercise, the National Development Unit has awarded a contract to Super Builders Co. Ltd on 30 October 2020 for an amount of Rs114.7 m. mainly for –

- (i) the general cleaning of the canal;
- (ii) replacing and restoring damaged stretches;
- (iii) construction of a new reinforced concrete drain of 4.45 metres wide;
- (iv) refurbishment of existing steel footbridges;
- (v) construction of a new pedestrian walkway, and
- (vi) installation of new fencing along the existing walls of the canal.

Work started on 01 December 2020 and to date (October 2021) around 60% has been completed. The scheduled completion date is April 2022, and upon completion, the project will attenuate flooding in the region.

Moreover, my Ministry is currently constructing a footbridge in the region of Paul Taureau, which will facilitate access to the Mosque located adjacent to Canal Anglais.

As regards Canals Malakoff and Alliman, I am informed that the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has already undertaken the cleaning of the two canals in October last year with a view to removing the obstructions and restoring the canals into their original state for an efficient flow of water. Regular cleaning will be carried out by the Municipal Council.

In addition, the National Development Unit has implemented a drain project at Cité Rozemont, Vallée Pitot with a view to reducing excess flow of water towards Canal Malakoff

and Canal Alliman, thus attenuating flooding in the region. The drain works were completed on 13 August 2021.

I also wish to inform the House that the NDU will be implementing drain projects along Malakoff and Alliman Canals during the current financial year for which preliminary surveys are presently being carried out. The project is estimated to cost around Rs12 m.

SURINAM, *TERRE COUPÉE* – STATE LAND LEASE

(No. B/745) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State Land at Terre Coupée leased in Surinam, he will state the reasons for the disparity in the quantum of the lease payable by the 50 lessees thereat.

(Withdrawn)

CITÉ CHA, CHAMAREL – SEPTIC TANKS

(No. B/746) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the defective septic tank at the *Cité* CHA of Chamarel, he will state if land has been acquired for the installation of septic tanks in replacement thereof and, if so, indicate when same will be operational.

(Withdrawn)

PROFESSIONAL FISHERS – *CONTRIBUTION SOCIALE GÉNÉRALISÉE* – PENSION BENEFITS

(No. B/747) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the registered professional fishers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if they are eligible to any existing pension scheme for enhanced pension benefits upon retirement, under the Fishermen Welfare Fund and, if not, will he state if consideration will be given for them to benefit under the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Social Security.

(Withdrawn)

PROFESSIONAL FISHERS – FACILITIES & SUPPORT GRANTED

(No. B/748) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Fishermen Welfare Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if consideration will be given for –

- (a) an extension of the facilities granted thereunder to the families of the registered professional fishers who meet with problems at sea in the course of their professional activities, and
- (b) a review and increase of the support granted thereunder.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS SHIPPING CORPORATION –VESSELS - REPAIRS

(No. B/749) 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 Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) reasons and details of the ongoing repairs on the Mauritius Trochetia, in Sri Lanka, indicating the cost thereof, and
- (b) frequency of vessels thereof sailing to Rodrigues, Agalega and St Brandon.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am given to understand that as per the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Regulation, all vessels are required to complete survey of the hull in a dry dock twice in five years. The maximum interval between dry dock inspections should not be more than three years. The last dry docking of MV Mauritius Trochetia was carried out in May 2018.

The dry docking works comprise of the following -

- i. under hull inspection, repairs and painting, and
- ii. ballast and fuel tanks inspection, repairs and painting.

However, during the dry docking, it is a normal practice to seize the idle time of the vessel to carry out all other possible inspections/surveys and repairs of the whole vessel including deck, accommodation and engine.

The present repairs of MV Mauritius Trochetia, amongst others, include the following

–

- i. hull treatment;
- ii. bow thruster overhaul,

- iii. calibration and alignment of engine and tail shafts,
- iv. repairs and coating of ballast and fuel tanks,
- v. electric motors overhaul,
- vi. crane repairs,
- vii. general steel repairs, and
- viii. uplifting of passenger cabins and common areas.

The MV Mauritius Trochetia left Mauritius on 12 April 2021 for dry docking and reached Colombo, Sri Lanka on 20 April 2021. Initially, the dry docking was expected to be carried out within 18 days.

In any dry docking works, there are always variations because it is only when the vessel is on dry that the hull and other parts could be clearly inspected. Thus, additional variations works were identified by the dockyard included the following items amongst others –

- i. chain locker steel renewals;
- ii. water ballast tank steel and general steel renewals,
- iii. crane jib & crane cabin repairs, and
- iv. propellor shaft seal renewal.

All the works are physically supervised at the Colombo Dockyard PLC by MSCL Technical Superintendent. Prior to proceeding with additional repairs, all the costs have to be scrutinised and recommended for approval by MSCL.

I will table a detailed list of variations works and indicated costing once the repairs are completed.

It is to be noted that all dry dock works were stopped for more than one month when half of the crew members were found COVID-19 positive. During the lockdown, it was found that the two jib heads of the two cranes of the vessel were severely corroded and RINA, the Classification Society ordered not to use the two cranes until they are repaired.

However, approval for materials was received on 16 July 2021 by the Classification Society. The materials have now been ordered from both India and Holland and the vessel is expected to sail mid-August and available for operation as from 01 September 2021 after the COVID-19 protocol had been observed.

As at date 90% works amounting around USD 684,000 have been completed.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I have been informed that the chartered vessel MV Black Rhino effects three (3) trips per month to Rodrigues in an interval of 10 to 12 days. Whereas, the MV Mauritius Trochetia usually effects three (3) to four (4) trips to Agalega per year for Outer Island Development Corporation (OIDC) on a voyage charter basis. During these voyages, the MV Mauritius Trochetia transport food stuff, general commodities and passengers. The vessel effects trip to Rodrigues when the need arises.

In addition, since 2018, the MV Mauritius Trochetia has effected around 24 voyages to Agalega for AFCONS Ltd on a voyage charter basis for transportation of construction materials, general commodities and Indian workers.

The Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd does not service St. Brandon Island.

NATIONAL PRICE CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL – COMPOSITION, MEETINGS & DECISIONS

(No. B/750) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the National Price Consultative Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) composition thereof, indicating in each case, the remuneration drawn
- (b) number of meetings held in 2020 and 2021 respectively, and
- (c) major decisions taken and/or recommendations made by the Council.

Reply: The National Price Consultative Council comprises representatives of my Ministry, the Ministry of Health & Wellness, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry and three representatives of Consumer Protection Associations.

The Chairmanship of the Council is vacant since 28 February 2020 and the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry is chairing the Committee, temporarily.

A remuneration per sitting is drawn. The Chairperson is paid Rs10,000, while Members are remunerated Rs5,000 and the Secretary Rs1,225. A travelling allowance of Rs230 per member is provided to representatives of the private sector and consumer protection associations.

With regard to the second limb of the question, since 2020, four meetings have been held on 11 February 2020, 24 June 2020, 13 August 2020 and 02 December 2020. Due to the COVID-19 sanitary protocol, meetings were not held more frequently.

As regards the third part of the question, I am informed that the Council has, amongst others –

- (i) examined a request from the *Association des Propriétaires de Boulangerie (APB)* for an increase in the price of scheduled bread and has made recommendations accordingly. Subsequently, this Government extended the subsidy on the price of flour for 25 kg bags from Rs217.50 to Rs155.50;
- (ii) endorsed the proposal of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security for the price of potatoes and onions to be fixed at Rs40 per kg since 23 March 2020;
- (iii) noted that internationally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the supply chain of imports would be drastically affected and a shortage of basic necessities including food items would occur on the local market. Therefore, officers of my Ministry have been monitoring the situation closely so as to ensure that there is adequate stock of basic necessities in Mauritius;
- (iv) commissioned a study on the basmati rice market in Mauritius regarding importation for the last five years, its supply chain, trade routes, and consumer behaviour based on sales and price. This has allowed my Ministry to introduce Basmati and long grain rice under the Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2020, and
- (v) been apprised of a technical study carried out by my Ministry regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the price level of commodities in Mauritius. As such, since 12 July 2021, the Government fixed the price of seven categories of products including canned fish (pilchard and sardines), canned tomatoes, cheese, edible oil, margarine, milk powder, pulses.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 1 – FOOTBALL PLAYGROUNDS – RENOVATION & MAINTENANCE

(No. B/751) 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 football playgrounds in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will state –

- (a) if the renovation thereof is being envisaged, and
- (b) the measures being contemplated for the maintenance thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that there are seven football playgrounds in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, namely –

- (a) St Louis Football Ground;
- (b) Pailles Football Ground;
- (c) Camp Chapelon Football Ground;
- (d) La Tour Koeing Football Ground;
- (e) Grand River North West Football Ground;
- (f) Nelson Mandela Vallijee Football Ground, and
- (g) Freddy Desvaux Football Ground.

Renovation works are envisaged at Grand River North West Football Ground with respect to the lighting which is out of service, and the repairs would be undertaken by the end of this month at an estimated cost of Rs130,525.

In addition, at La Tour Koeing and Camp Chapelon Football Grounds, the fences need to be repaired again as there are constant acts of vandalism. The works would be completed by first week of August 2021.

It has to be noted that at La Tour Koeing Football Ground, the pitch has been leveled and a new system of irrigation has been installed in June 2021. The lighting thereat is functioning properly.

For the Camp Chapelon Football Ground, the cloakroom has been completely renovated in June this year and the lighting of the pitch is also functional. The cloakroom at Camp Chapelon Football Ground will be shortly connected to electricity and water supply as requests have already been made to relevant authorities in this respect.

On the other hand, at the Nelson Mandela Football Ground, the fences have been repaired, the doors of the cloakroom have been reinforced in the month of February this year and the lighting system is functioning properly.

In regard to part (b) of the question, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has also informed that those facilities are regularly cleaned and maintained.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – VARIANTS – TREATMENT PROTOCOLS

(No. B/752) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19

pandemic, he will give the list of the variants thereof detected in Mauritius, since January 2021 to date, indicating the –

- (a) number of persons contaminated therewith, region-wise, and
- (b) treatment protocols established and other actions taken in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

DIRECTEURS TECHNIQUES NATIONAUX – CONTRACT

(No. B/753) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the *Directeurs Techniques Nationaux*, he will give the list thereof currently under contract with his Ministry, discipline-wise, indicating, in each case –

- (a) the terms and conditions of contract, and
- (b) if his Ministry proposes to renew same and, if not, indicate the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

FISHERMEN INVESTMENT TRUST – DISMANTLEMENT

(No. B/754) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Fishermen Investment Trust, he will state if same has been dismantled and, if so, give reasons therefor, indicating the quantum of funds available therein at the material time and where same has been transferred.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 SELF-TESTING KITS

(No. B/755) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state if consideration will be given for the provision of COVID-19 Self-Testing kits to the workforce in the face of the new surges thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PATIENTS – TREATMENT PROTOCOL, MORTALITY RATE & COMPLAINTS

(No. B/756) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to COVID-19 patients, he will state the –

- (a) current treatment protocol applied thereto;
- (b) mortality rate wherein COVID-19 is the –
 - (i) direct cause of death, and
 - (ii) underlying cause of death thereof, and
- (c) number of complaints received therefrom or from family members thereof by his Ministry for poor treatment administered thereto.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC HOSPITALS – COVID-19 HEALTH PROTOCOLS

(No. B/757) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public hospitals, he will state the –

- (a) COVID-19 health protocols put in place thereat, indicating the number of complaints received, if any, for non-compliance therewith;
- (b) number of times same have been fully or partially shut down due to COVID-19 positive testing of the staff thereof, and
- (c) number of persons COVID-19 positive tested thereat as at to date, indicating the number of persons placed in quarantine after contact tracing exercise.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD TRAFFICKING – REPORTED CASES – JANUARY 2015-20 JULY 2021

(No. B/758) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child trafficking, she will state the –

- (a) number of reported cases thereof since January 2015 to date, indicating the number of convictions secured in connection therewith;
- (b) measures taken to combat/prevent same, and

- (c) protection afforded and care provided to victims thereof.

(Withdrawn)

FOOD WASTAGE REDUCTION BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/759) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to food wastage, he will state –

- (a) the amount thereof for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively and commercial value thereof;
- (b) the actions taken, if any, to reduce same, particularly in hotels, restaurants and bars, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the introduction of a Food Wastage Reduction Bill.

(Withdrawn)

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – COVID-19 POSITIVE TESTED PERSONS

(No. B/760) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the educational institutions, she will state the –

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

(Withdrawn)

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - OUTPATIENTS - APPOINTMENTS

(No. B/761) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the regional hospitals, he will state the number of outpatients awaiting fixing of appointments to undergo –

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

(Withdrawn)

GOODLANDS - NEW MARKET – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/762) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new market in Goodlands, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

NEUROSURGERY – QUALIFIED SPECIALISTS & PATIENTS

(No. B/763) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to neurosurgery, he will state –

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

(Withdrawn)

BRUNO CHEONG HOSPITAL - RADIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

(No. B/764) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Bruno Cheong Hospital at Flacq, he will state the number of radiological investigations carried out thereat, particularly CT scan, MRI and mammography, respectively, over the past four years, indicating the number –

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

(Withdrawn)

EXPATRIATES – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/765) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the expatriates, he will state the -

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

(Withdrawn)

ASSISTIVE DEVICES – BENEFICIARIES - JULY 2020-JULY 2021

(No. B/766) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the provision of assistive devices by her Ministry, she will give the list of beneficiaries thereof since July 2020 to date, indicating the number of pending applications therefor.

(Withdrawn)

CASH GRANTS IN LIEU OF PROVISION OF ASSISTIVE DEVICES

(No. B/767) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the decision of Government for the provision by her Ministry of cash grants in lieu of the provision of assistive devices, she will state if the prices thereof will be regulated and, if so, indicate the expected date of implementation of the said decision.

(Withdrawn)

FAKE PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS & MORCELLEMENT PERMITS - INQUIRY

(No. B/768) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the recent allegations of fake Parcel Identification Numbers and *Morcellement* Permits having been issued, he will state if his Ministry has initiated an inquiry thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS - STORAGE FACILITIES - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/769) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the Construction of Storage Facilities for Petroleum Products Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the quantum of funds collected from the sale of Mogas and Gas Oil to date therefor;
- (b) the estimated cost thereof, and
- (c) where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, indicating the expected date of operation thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the State Trading Corporation (STC) that as at 30 June 2021, the quantum of funds collected under the item “Contribution to the Construction of storage facilities for petroleum products” in the price structure of Mogas and Gas Oil was Rs839.1 m. This contribution was introduced in the price structure of Mogas and Gas Oil in 2015 in order to cater for the construction of storage facilities for petroleum products.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the STC that the estimated costs of constructing storage facilities would amount to around USD 15 million for Mogas/Gas Oil for 25,000 MT capacity, USD 35 million for LPG of around 10,000-15,000 MT capacity about USD 15 million of 20,000 MT capacity.

As for the last part of the question, I am informed that out of the amount collected under the item “Contribution to the Construction of storage facilities for petroleum products”, Rs79.4 m. has been used by the STC as investment in the Mer Rouge Oil Storage Terminal Co. Ltd (MOST), which is a private storage facility in which STC holds 23.5 % shares. The Mer Rouge Oil Storage Terminal consists of five storage tanks of a total capacity of 25,000 MT, of which 15,000 MT are for Mogas (*l'Essence*) and 10,000 MT for Gas Oil (*Diesel*).

The construction of MOST started in 2016 and the commissioning was done in April 2018. The cost of the project amounted to around Rs600 m.

As the sole importer of the country's requirements for petroleum products which includes Mogas, Gas Oil, Jet fuel and LPG, STC still intends to have its own storage facilities for these strategic products in order to ensure continuity of supply of these products and would invest in the construction of storage tanks for LPG and Jet A1. The implementation of the projects would take approximately 2 years to be completed for LPG and 4 years for Jet A1 excluding feasibility studies.

MAURITIUS NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD SYSTEM – REVAMPING

(No. B/770) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the revamping of the Mauritius National Identity Card System, he will state –

- (a) the expected cost thereof, and
- (b) where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PARCEL POST OFFICE, PORT LOUIS - SCANNERS

(No. B/771) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Parcel Post Office, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Post Limited, information as to the number of scanners presently available for the detection of illicit items thereat.

Reply: There is one scanner, owned by the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) Customs, for the detection of illicit items located at the Parcel Post Office, Port Louis.

All scanning exercises are carried out by a team of ten officers comprising four Customs Officers, five representatives of the Mauritius Post Ltd and one ADSU Officer. Moreover, all incoming mails packages and parcels are subject to sniffing by trained dogs of the MRA and Police.

CAMP ROUILLARD - SEWERAGE WORKS

(No. B/772) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewerage works undertaken

in Camp Rouillard, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to the work progress thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - OVERSEAS TREATMENT - PROTOCOL

(No. B/773) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to overseas treatment, he will state the protocol put in place therefor amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - EXIT WAVE

(No. B/774) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, he will state if an exit wave from the COVID-19 pandemic is being envisaged and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: An exit wave refers to an increase in COVID-19 cases which occurs as a result of easing of sanitary restrictions. As we entered our 3rd phase of *déconfinement* on 01 July 2021 and with the resumption of schools on 05 July 2021, we have been witnessing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases being registered daily.

However, this increase can be explained by non-adherence to sanitary measures such as wearing of face masks at all times, physical distancing and regular washing and sanitisation of hands by the public at large. These sanitary norms should be maintained at all times to prevent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the local community.

CANDOS - MONSEIGNEUR LEEN AND KINGSTON STREETS - TRAFFIC CONGESTIONS

(No. B/775) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to Monseigneur Leen and Kingston streets and the vicinity thereof in Candos, he will state if he is in presence of complaints of huge traffic congestions occurring thereat from the inhabitants thereof and, if so, indicate the remedial measures taken in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) that Monseigneur Leen Street is an urban road and it stretches from its junction Candos –

Vacoas Road at La Louise to Residence Kennedy and bears two-way traffic. Kingston Avenue is a part one-way, part two-way road stretching from La Paix Avenue to Jawaharlal Nehru Road and it crosses Monseigneur Leen Street at approximately 200 m from the junction Monseigneur Leen Street/Candos –Vacoas Road. On both sides of its junction with Monseigneur Leen Street, Kingston Avenue bears two-way traffic.

Given that Monseigneur Leen Street is the major road at this junction, vehicles from Kingston Avenue are required to stop at the junction before egressing.

I am also informed by the TMRSU that a restaurant is located along Monseigneur Leen Street near its junction with Kingston Avenue. Following complaints received, the TMRSU carried out a survey at the locus. It was observed that a considerable number of motorists proceeding to the restaurant park their vehicles along Monseigneur Leen Street near the restaurant and at the junction with Kingston Avenue. This causes localised traffic congestion thereat reducing visibility and creating maneuvering problems for vehicles.

I am further informed by the TMRSU that double yellow lines have been implemented at the junction Monseigneur Leen Street/Kingston Avenue to prohibit stopping of vehicles at the junction and hence providing better visibility for vehicles egressing from Kingston Avenue. This measure also allows for better movement of vehicles in both directions. Moreover, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes would be requested to ensure that the restaurant provides adequate off-street parking.

Following the implementation of double yellow lines, the TMRSU is closely monitoring traffic at this location and any such measures as deemed necessary will be recommended thereafter. Likewise, Police will also be requested to undertake necessary enforcement measures for illegal parking of vehicles thereat.

MV WAKASHIO OIL SPILL - COMPENSATION

(No. B/776) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the fishers, fishmongers and all those whose livelihoods have been impacted by the MV Wakashio Oil Spill, he will state if they will be entitled to compensation till full recovery of the coastal areas.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that following the grounding of MV Wakashio on 25 July 2020 and the ensuing oil spill, it is indeed a fact that the livelihoods of the local population and local businesses been adversely impacted by the marine casualty. Financial

losses have been incurred by individuals and entities engaged in fishing and tourism related activities.

Based on the “polluter pays principle” the tortfeasor is strictly liable to pay compensation to the victims of such oil pollution damage. In the case of MV Wakashio, the registered owners, Okiyo Maritime Corporation Ltd, the Charterer, Mitsui, and the vessel’s insurers, namely Japan Protection and Indemnity Club, are the entities to whom the claims for compensation are being submitted.

At the initiative of Government, an E-platform was set up since 14 August 2020, which has facilitated the channeling of claims made by individuals and organisations to the owners/ insurers.

As at 15 July 2021, 4569 claims have been received on the E-platform. These claims encompass demands for compensation for the following types of damages –

- (1) 141 claims for clean-up operations;
- (2) 18 claims for preventive measures;
- (3) 147 claims for property damage;
- (4) 1743 claims for economic loss in the fisheries, mariculture and fish processing sectors;
- (5) 1431 claims for economic loss in the tourism sector;
- (6) 26 claims for cost of measures to prevent pure economic loss;
- (7) 129 claims for environmental damage;
- (8) 3 claims for post-spill studies, and
- (9) 931 claims in the “others” category.

Out of the claims received on the E-platform, 1,738 are from fishers, both registered, unregistered and applicant fishers and 237 from fishmongers. In view of providing immediate relief to this particularly vulnerable segment of the population, my Ministry has paid a Solidarity Grant of Rs10,200 per month to all registered artisanal fishers, applicant fishers and fishmongers from August 2020 to March 2021. As such, a total amount of Rs82,983,909.60 has been disbursed as Solidarity Grant to registered fishers, applicant fishers and fishmongers.

A claim for additional compensation for 825 fishers to the tune of Rs134,616 per fisher has been submitted to the Japan Ship Owners’ Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association, insurer of MV Wakashio, for pure economic loss. Moreover, 174 fishmongers

operating within the affected region are concerned by the proposed demand for additional compensation to the tune of Rs140,160 per fishmonger.

In line with international practice, compensation is paid by the insurers after assessing the claim and the evidence provided to support the claim. Some 348 individuals have already been paid compensation by the insurers.

It is not an easy task to assess the full extent of damage sustained by the community or caused to the marine environment. In this respect, an international bidding exercise was launched by Government on 02 April 2021 for consultancy services in respect of environment and socio-economic impact assessment of damages caused by the MV Wakashio oil spill in the immediate, short, medium and long run.

The objective of the assessment is also geared towards the recovery and restoration of the environment and the livelihood of dependent local communities. As per the bidding document, the assessment will target marine, coastal related activities in the affected region, including tourism, fisheries, agriculture, pleasure craft operations, leisure activities and diving, among others.

The salient features of the Terms of Reference are as follows –

- Elaborate and carry out field assessment covering the whole oil spill impacted zone.
- Evaluation of oil pollution, considering ecological and social/health effects post-traumatic stress disorder and psychological effects, threats and liabilities.
- Carry out socioeconomic survey, through public consultations, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews.
- The assessment will also build on initial rapid or/and detailed assessments undertaken by Government and partners and the data collected by other agencies and civil society groups.
- Assessment of the adverse consequences at micro and macro-economic levels, focusing on the key economic variables and policies to recover losses and promote sustainability.
- Assess the impact of the oil spill on the quality of life of communities dependent on affected natural resources for their livelihood against the following five key indicators –

- (i) impact on living conditions;
 - (ii) impact on livelihoods (fishers, pleasure crafts, tourism, aquaculture)
 - (iii) impact on food security
 - (iv) impact on gender, and
 - (vi) impact on most vulnerable populations and marginalised groups.
- Assessment and quantification of pollution damage following the shipping casualty and ensuing oil spill having regard to the oil spill compensation legal regimes, excluding the claims already settled in full and final satisfaction.
 - Valuation of damages, including irreversible and irretrievable damages, caused to the environment.
 - Valuation of damage and losses incurred by economic sectors that depend on the affected natural resources.

It is only when the assessment exercise is completed that it will be possible to assign a figure to the extent of the compensation.

MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF COASTAL ZONES IN MAURITIUS PROJECT - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/777) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of Coastal Zones in Mauritius Project, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed that the project, 'Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of the Coastal Zone in the Republic of Mauritius' which is being implemented by my Ministry is supported by UNDP Mauritius and GEF funding to the tune of USD4.66 m.

This project which started in June 2017, is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Agro Industry and Food Security and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

The objective of the project is to mainstream biodiversity into the management of the coastal zone of Mauritius including Rodrigues. I am also informed that deliverables of the project specifically for the Government of Mauritius include -

- Economic evaluations of coastal and marine ecosystems such as coastal wetlands, Mangrove forests, mudflats, algal beds & sea grass and coral reef;
- Producing management plans through a consultative process for the 6 Fishing Reserves of Mauritius. These plans will assist in the conservation and protection of its marine biodiversity;
- Development of an investment framework and financing strategy to realise the values and benefits of MPAs, and increase the financing flows to MPAs. This measure will assist in making MPAs financially self-sustainable;
- Develop livelihood opportunities for local communities to reduce pressure on lagoon resources and demonstrate the benefits of MPAs.

Moreover, the project also provides for the development of other measures to assist in conserving the marine and coastal biodiversity, namely -

- Provision of an online platform and knowledge management system on all marine and coastal biodiversity. This will involve acquisition of IT equipment such as laptops, printers, plotters, servers and associated softwares including GIS;
- Development and implementation of ICZM plans for Rodrigues and Black River with a view to conserve all coastal ESAs;
- Finalisation of the Wetland Bill, and
- Assessment of the carrying capacity of the lagoons with regard to nautical activities.

I am further informed that the UNDP has recruited a project team headed by a Project Manager to implement the various components under the project. Moreover, a Project Steering Committee chaired by my Ministry and comprising representatives of all the implementing Ministries has been set up to monitor progress under the project.

As far as the status of the project is concerned, I am informed that, as at date, the following have been achieved -

1. mapping of coastal and marine ESAs;
2. development of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, (ICZM), plans for Black River and Rodrigues;
3. management plans for MPAs and Ramsar sites in the Republic of Mauritius;
4. development of a communication and awareness strategy for the project;
5. installation of a server to host the online platform as an Environment Information System, and

6. creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) Unit in Rodrigues.

I am also informed that, though substantial progress has been achieved, the project has suffered significant delays. In fact, the project which was signed in June 2016 for a duration of five years actually started in June 2017 with an initial delay of one year mainly due to the time taken to recruit the project personnel. Thereafter, the project was further delayed due to the investigation carried out by the UNDP Social and Environmental Compliance Unit following a complaint lodged by the AKNL (*Aret Kokin Nou Laplaz*) in 23 March 2019. During the whole investigation, progress under the project was slowed down and only consultancy services already awarded were kept running. The final compliance report of the UNDP Social and Environmental Compliance Unit was received in 30 October 2020. The project also suffered delays due to the two confinement periods in 2020 and 2021 related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, some critical activities estimated at \$1.9 m., representing, 45% of the project budget, could not be completed by the project end date of December 2020.

Accordingly, in May 2021, my Ministry made a request for an extension of the project end date to allow completion of all the incomplete activities so that the project meets its objective. The GEF Council has approved an extension for 18 months up to December 2022. I am also informed that the Project Steering Committee which is chaired by the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry met on 15 July 2021 to, *inter alia*, approve a revised implementation plan so as to ensure that all incomplete activities are completed by the revised completion date of December 2022.

NATIONAL INTEGRATED COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT PLAN

(No. B/778) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the National Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, he will state if same has been finalised and, if so, indicate the way forward.

Reply (Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change): In line with the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 2002 in respect of development of an Integrated Management Plan in relation to the coastal zone, an Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Framework Study was commissioned by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change in year 2007 and the Consultant Landell Mills Ltd of the United Kingdom submitted the final report in year 2010. The

Framework Study comprised an ICZM strategy for the Republic of Mauritius, policy, legislative and institutional frameworks and also ICZM plans for six pressure zones. These zones were at Grand Baie, Ile d'Ambre/Poudre d'Or, Le Morne/La Gaulette, Belle Mare/Palmar, the south coast of Mauritius as well as the eastern coast of Rodrigues. Through these six plans, several recommendations had been made for those regions, which include marine zoning, control of erosion, protection of seagrasses, monitoring of macro algae, sewage and community plan as well as drainage networks, amongst others. Several recommendations have been implemented while some are underway by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change in collaboration with various stakeholders. Officers of the ICZM Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change are closely following up on the implementation of same.

In 2015, further to the ICZM Framework Study, a three-year technical assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on a project on Capacity Development in Coastal Protection and Rehabilitation in the Republic of Mauritius was carried out. On the basis of their detailed assessments, coastal conservation plans for 14 sites were drafted, namely –

- (i) Grand Sable;
- (ii) Pointe d'Esny;
- (iii) Bel Ombre;
- (iv) Le Morne;
- (v) Flic en Flac;
- (vi) Albion Beach;
- (vii) Albion Cliff;
- (viii) Pointe aux Sables;
- (ix) Baie du Tombeau;
- (x) Pointe aux Cannoniers;
- (xi) Mon Choisy;

- (xii) Bras d'Eau;
- (xiii) Quatre Cocos/Trou d'Eau Douce, and
- (xiv) Ile aux Cerfs.

Accordingly, it had been recommended that existing vertical structures at those sites be improved and setback policy be adhered to, along with beach nourishment, sand recycling, coral transplantation, seagrass and mangrove plantations, amongst others, at those sites. Implementation of these measures is ongoing in collaboration with various stakeholders and is being monitored at the level of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

Additionally, in 2017, the Global Environment Facility funded the Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of the Coastal Zone in the Republic of Mauritius project, which is to the tune of USD 4.66 m., through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The overall purpose of the project is to address the urgent need for more effective management of resources in the coastal zone of Mauritius, with specific emphasis on preservation of biodiversity. This project is being spearheaded by a Steering Committee under the Chair of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and comprises three components as follows –

- (i) Component 1 is on the mainstreaming of biodiversity into local level physical development planning and tourism management and for which my Ministry is one of the Executing Agencies;
- (ii) Component 2 is on strengthening Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Management in respect of which the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping is the Executing Agency, and
- (iii) Component 3 is on erosion control and ecosystem services restoration in sensitive areas for which the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security is the Executing Agency.

Component 1 of the Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of the Coastal Zone in the Republic of Mauritius project, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change in collaboration with concerned

stakeholders, including the Rodrigues Commission of Environment, consists, *inter alia*, of the development of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) plans for Black River District and Rodrigues, using the ridge to reef concept and the nature-based approach.

Accordingly, the UNDP Country Office awarded the consultancy services to FCG ANZDEC LTD in October 2018 and the reports were expected to be submitted in December 2020. FCG ANZDEC LTD has submitted draft reports in December 2020, which have been circulated to stakeholders for views and comments. The views received had been compiled and submitted to the UNDP Country Office on 08 April 2021 for onward submission to the Consultant. FCG ANZDEC LTD is currently reviewing the ICZM plans.

According to the UNDP Country Office, the final ICZM plans for Black River District and Rodrigues are expected to be submitted by the end of this year for implementation in 2022, subject to identification of sources of funding. It is expected that the implementation of the ICZM plans for Black River District and Rodrigues would be replicated in the other districts of Mauritius.

MULTI-PURPOSE SUPPORT VESSEL INVESTIGATOR II – COST, WARRANTY CLAUSE ETC.

(No. B/779) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Multi-Purpose Support Vessel “Investigator II” acquired by his Ministry, he will state –

- (a) the cost thereof;
- (b) if there is a warranty clause included in the purchase contract, and
- (c) the reasons why emergency procurement was resorted to for the insurance cover thereof, giving details of the process followed.

Reply: I am informed that the Multi-Purpose Support Vessel “Investigator II” was acquired at the cost of about Rs57 m., jointly funded by Government of Mauritius and the Government of Australia in 2018 and started its operations in 2020.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the statement in the Operators Manual of Investigator II provides for a warranty for a period of 12 months on the vessel hull against any defect in workmanship or materials designated for the vessel.

However, the contract/build list signed between the Government of Mauritius and the supplier does not contain a warranty clause.

As far as part (c) of the question is concerned, I am informed that prior to the delivery of the vessel “Investigator II” on 27 February 2020, my Ministry had already sought informal quotations from five insurance companies for an insurance cover. However, my Ministry did not receive any response from the potential bidders by the closing date.

I am also informed that since the launching of the vessel had been planned for 05 March 2020, my Ministry decided to have recourse to an emergency procurement for the insurance cover of the vessel to ensure that it can be operated safely.

I am further informed that the current insurance contract will expire in August 2021. On 20 May 2021, my Ministry launched bids through opened advertised bidding for the new insurance cover and the contract has already been awarded.

SHELTERS – UNDECLARED BIRTHS – FORMAL EDUCATION

(No. B/780) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to children admitted in shelters, she will state the number thereof whose birth have not yet been declared to date, indicating if these children are attending formal education.

Reply: There are at present 30 children admitted in shelters who are still undeclared. Out of these 30 children, 18 are babies and toddlers and, by virtue of their age, they are not yet eligible to attend formal education, whilst 12 children are attending formal education as follows –

- 4 children are attending Pre-Primary School;
- 6 are attending Primary School;
- 1 is attending a Specialised Educational Needs School, and
- 1 is attending a Secondary School.