



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE 2021

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 22 of 2021

Sitting of Wednesday 30 June 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. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 15) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 141 of 2021)

B. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The COVID-19 (Closing Down of Premises and Restriction of Activities) (No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 142 of 2021)
- (b) The COVID-19 (Horse Race Meeting at Champ de Mars) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 143 of 2021)

COVID-19 RESURGENCE – RODRIGUES RESIDENTS - STRANDED IN MAURITIUS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the many residents of Rodrigues presently stranded in Mauritius since the cessation of commercial flights on 07 March 2021, he will –

- (a) state the number of persons involved;
- (b) state the arrangements being made for their return home;
- (c) state if a list of hardship cases has been compiled, and
- (d) table a list of all persons repatriated since the March lockdown to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is widely acknowledged that Government has acted proactively in addressing the serious threat posed by the resurgence of COVID-19 since the detection of the first case in March 2021. The Government acted prudently and responsibly and took the right decisions at the right time so as to restore our country to its COVID-safe status. It is pertinent that Rodrigues was, and has remained, COVID-free until now. The only and best way of combatting this threat is to responsibly and scrupulously follow and abide by all the health and safety measures and orders legally imposed for the common protection and for the common good.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, Rodrigues has remained COVID-free, and the Government and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly are leaving no stone unturned to protect Rodrigues from the infection caused and generated by the invisible enemy that COVID-19 had proved itself to be.

Thus, to shield Rodrigues from imported infections, drastic and painful, but vitally necessary measures have been taken to ensure that passengers travelling to Rodrigues, including Rodriguans themselves, do not introduce the virus into the Island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the recommendation of the National COVID-19 High-Level Committee and in consultation with the Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Government took the decision that no passengers will be allowed to travel from Mauritius to Rodrigues as from Sunday 07 March 2021. The last scheduled passenger flight to Rodrigues departed on Saturday 06 March 2021 at 14.45 hours.

A NOTAM was issued for Rodrigues on 06 March 2021 valid until 15 March 2021, which was subsequently extended to 14 July 2021. No passenger flight was allowed during that period except under derogation.

Being conscious that residents of Rodrigues have been retained in Mauritius due to the travel restrictions, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly immediately conducted a survey to assess the number thereof, so as to plan their repatriation. A hotline was also made operational since then to capture details of all requests for repatriation. This is an ongoing process and requests are being registered almost every day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, as at date, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has received 718 requests for repatriation to Rodrigues from residents currently stranded in Mauritius as follows –

Officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly	: 50
Relatives of Officers	: 21
Patients and accompanying relatives	: 163
Athletes	: 29
Other Rodriguans on private visit	: 455

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, a repatriation protocol has been devised by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to allow safe repatriation of Rodriguans whilst ensuring that Rodrigues Island remains COVID-free. The protocol was submitted to the Ministry of Health and Wellness for approval and thereafter to the National COVID-19 High-Level Committee for consideration.

As at today, the repatriation process being implemented is as follows –

- i. a quarantine period of 14 days in Mauritius under the strict control and supervision of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and
- ii. a quarantine period of 7 days in a designated establishment in Rodrigues under the strict control and supervision of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

It must be pointed out that self-isolation would not be practicable in Rodrigues due to close family and community relationships.

In view of the repatriation process, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has devised, in a first instance, a priority list of passengers with a confirmed return ticket on or before 31 March 2021 comprising –

- i. health staff;

- ii. other officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly who were on official mission to Mauritius;
- iii. athletes;
- iv. patients who were referred to Mauritius for further treatment, and
- v. other residents of Rodrigues based on their scheduled date of return.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the quarantine centres being used in Mauritius are allocated by the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority. Three hotels have been identified in Rodrigues for use as quarantine centres, namely –

- i. Le Flamboyant Hotel;
- ii. Les Cocotiers Hotel, and
- iii. Escales Vacances Hotel.

Furthermore, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has agreed to provide a financial assistance to all those residents of Rodrigues currently stranded in Mauritius and who are in dire need. To date, a total amount of Rs2,080,000 has been disbursed under the Chief Commissioner's Relief Fund. 195 passengers were paid a one-off grant of Rs10,000 for the month of March 2021. 13 others facing financial difficulties have made a special request for the months of April and May. The Executive Council has exceptionally approved a sum of Rs10,000 to be paid to each of them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (d) of the question, a first group of 60 passengers comprising health staff and other officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly were repatriated on 18 April 2021 after completing their quarantine. Repatriation of health staff was of utmost importance in the first instance, since only when the health services would be functioning at its full capacity that the repatriation of other residents could be envisaged and expedited.

Five other groups were organised thereafter comprising 309 passengers, including 11 infants. The list was drawn up by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

A seventh group is presently in quarantine in Mauritius. It is composed of Officers of the Special Mobile Force and 21 patients and their accompanying relatives who were referred to Mauritius for further medical treatment. The patients were selected based on their dates of discharge and medical fitness to travel. They are expected to be repatriated to Rodrigues on Sunday 04 July 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that it would not be appropriate to table the list of hardship cases and the list of persons repatriated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Executive Council of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, at its meeting of Friday 25 June 2021, has approved a revised protocol for the reopening of passenger flights as from 01 August 2021. The draft protocol, which caters for vaccinated and non-vaccinated passengers, will be submitted to my Office for consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the closure of our borders inevitably caused many of our nationals, as well as residents, to be stranded abroad. For the same reason, many of our Rodriguan compatriots found themselves stranded in Mauritius. While we took all necessary measures to fight the pandemic and protect the health, lives, and livelihood of our population, the plight of our nationals stranded abroad and of Rodriguans stranded here in Mauritius was not overlooked and remains one of our priorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of justified pride for the Republic of Mauritius to portray Rodrigues as a COVID-FREE haven. We have a sacred duty to protect it and ensure that it remains a rare gem in the new normal era. Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, no one is questioning the need to protect Rodrigues and the strict quarantine laws, but there are also hundreds of people stranded here which need to be catered for.

The first question, therefore, which was in my main question, is the number of people presently stranded in Mauritius. Now, we have so many different figures. Commissioner Pierre Louis, a few days ago, stated that there were 120 to 150; in this House on Friday, two MPs from Rodrigues, one stated the number was 260 plus - that was hon. Léopold - and PPS François stated it was 375. So, the first point is: how many people are actually stranded, at this point in time, that we need to take care of?

The Prime Minister: Let me explain first of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, why there have been different figures that have been mentioned by different people of all political parties and of all sectors, even in Rodrigues. Because when a hotline was established for those who are willing to come and to return to Rodrigues, every day more requests were made to the Rodrigues Commissioner's Office and that number has thus been increasing. In fact, I had myself received requests from Rodriguans who are still here; probably, some of them have returned at that time, and they mentioned a figure of 80, if I can remember, who were stranded here. That figure has been increasing and, as I said, as at date, the figure that I have

from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is that we have 718 requests for repatriation. And I have given the details with regard to the categories of people who make the number 718. And I am sure that figure may probably be increased again, and later on.

Mr X. L. Duval: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree that there is complete disorganisation in such an important issue of our stranded citizens; complete disorganisation? Even the PPS from Rodrigues has given a vastly different figure from the Commissioner for Rodrigues.

May I ask the hon. Prime Minister why is there not a special help desk in Mauritius to deal with this and is he aware that the hotline number in Rodrigues never answers? I tried it several times myself.

The Prime Minister: It is not correct to say that there is a complete disorganisation. In fact, I must say there is, on the contrary, a well-established organisation. Since a hotline has been created, people are calling and...

(Interruptions)

... yes, it depends which telephone you are using, maybe.

Look, I am not there, but I am in constant communication with the Chief Commissioner. Obviously, I am not going to go into details about the discussions that we have been having about how to repatriate Rodriguans. And there are not only Rodriguans; there are other people also, comprising expatriates also who have been staying there and who want to go back.

As I have said, there are some people who are calling at a particular time and every day they receive requests. Of course, they have to consider all those requests, and to try to set up a priority list with regard to those requests. I can, therefore, assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that it is well organised. I am not saying that it cannot be improved. Surely, there must be room for improvement, but there is a system that has been put in place and each time we do get the list from the Chief Commissioner, we do, of course, try to organise repatriation flights accordingly, in view of the circumstances that are also prevailing here in Mauritius.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are many hardship cases. I will take this positively. Will the hon. Prime Minister accept to set up a help desk in the Ministry of Rodrigues, here, somewhere convenient, with a telephone number so that all the Rodriguans who are stranded in Mauritius can access easily this help desk at the Ministry of Rodrigues?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me repeat; as it is a repetition for me. There is, first of all, a hotline. Apart from the hotline, there are requests that are being made to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, to the Chief Commissioner's Office. There are requests that are being sent to me also, and I do relay those requests to the Chief Commissioner. So, there is a teamwork which is ongoing.

All the requests that we are aware of ont été canalisées pour que le RRA puisse établir une liste prioritaire, parce qu'évidemment on n'a pas suffisamment de places pour rapatrier tous les Rodriguais d'un seul coup. Il faut procéder par étape. Et je dois dire pourquoi on procède par étape. Tout d'abord, parce qu'il y a la quarantaine de 14 jours ; donc, il faut attendre. Et puis, il y a la quarantaine de 7 jours aussi à Rodrigues. A Maurice, quand même, nous avons suffisamment de places, mais à Rodrigues les places sont quand même limitées. Et donc, il faut agencer tout ça. Ce n'est pas comme si on aurait pu organiser des vols presque tous les jours. Ce sera la catastrophe à ce moment-là, surtout à Rodrigues.

Et je le redis, en tenant compte du fait que c'est exceptionnel que Rodrigues, jusqu'à présent - on ne sait pas qu'est-ce qui peut arriver à l'avenir - n'a pas eu un seul cas de COVID-19. Et il faut à tout prix essayer de garder Rodrigues comme cela.

Mr X. L. Duval: No one is disputing that, but we have very many hardship cases. Now, why did I ask for the list? The hon. Prime Minister must be aware why I have asked for a list of persons repatriated at the cost of the taxpayer, because Rodriguans themselves have persistently claimed a lot of favouritism. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I will give the situation of the people presently stranded here in Mauritius. We have very old people, even 80-year-old; we have mothers separated from their young 2-year old child; we have people suffering from cancer terminally; we have people who have no lodging staying here; we have separated families, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is just a few cases. We even have five corpses.

Mr Speaker: What ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Corpses. Dead people! They have been waiting for four months in the morgue, or more. Now, all these persons are hardship cases and they want to know why, for instance, an 80-year-old person has not been repatriated yet, whereas evidently – and this is why I presume the Chief Commissioner's Office does not want the list to be shown, to be public, because other people who did not deserve have been on the list. So, this is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will ask the hon. Prime Minister, if there is nothing to hide – I am sure there is

nothing to hide from the Government's side – why do you not publish the list? We will see then.

The Prime Minister: Let me say that there is also a help desk at the Ministry of Social Integration at Garden Tower where people can...

(Interruptions)

No, but there are different avenues. This is what I am saying. There is not only one hotline.

Now, with regard to cases which the hon. Leader of the Opposition considers as hardship, Mr Speaker, Sir, to speak frankly, I believe that, out of the 718 requests for repatriation, we can say that they are probably all hardship cases, in a way, because people want to go back, no matter in what situation they are. But I do agree that there must probably be some people who are in more difficult situations.

I have indeed been advised that it is not proper to publicise names, especially of people who are on medical treatment here because then people will know about their personal details also. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition should understand that. Now, if he has a particular case, he says that there is one case of somebody who is a cancer patient, if he will communicate the details of such cases which he considers to be priority cases to me, I shall take up the matter with Rodrigues and try to see what has happened. Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot right now pass any judgement on cases of persons whose name and particular circumstances I do not know.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I will contact the hon. Prime Minister directly or I will send the list; it is not a problem. I do not want this to become a political football.

Now, there are Rs765 m. in the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. One of the objects of that is to come to the help of people in need. These Rodriguans stranded here, many are small businessmen, and they have not worked for three or four months because their businesses are in Rodrigues. Many are old people, many are people who have no lodging and have to squat and sometimes they annoy the people where they are squatting. These are old persons, sick persons, who are in need, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Prime Minister consider asking the hon. Minister of Finance to give some money, some funds, maybe a daily allowance to all these persons - there are not many of them, 300 or so - for the few weeks that are left here so that they can have a decent life here in Mauritius whilst they are our guests?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that, based on the criteria that have been established by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, an allowance has been given to those hardship cases. I mentioned the number of persons who have been paid. There are already six repatriation flights and the direct expenditure for those six flights is Rs12,658,531, excluding all the other expenses with regard to PCR tests, laboratories and other expenses. We are indeed doing the needful, and we are providing financial support and making sure that, as fast as we can, we can repatriate the Rodriguans.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister himself said just now that all of them are hardship cases. Now he says some of them are hardship cases. Which is which? Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will ask the hon. Prime Minister this important question about vaccinations. Because we take it from the hon. Minister of Health that 46% of Mauritians have had their first dose. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the *seule solution, vaccination* is also applicable to Rodrigues and would he be surprised to note that only 13% of Rodriguans have had their first dose? Is there a sort of *deux poids, deux mesures* here? What is happening?

(Interruptions)

I am asking the question; 13% against 46%. This is the question and I think it is a genuine question.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first, let me respond to the first comment made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I think he knows the situation very well but is playing on words. When I say all are hardship cases, I did clarify anyone who is abroad, be it a Rodriguan here, be it a Mauritian abroad, who wants to come back to the motherland and wants to go back to Rodrigues. But there are degrees of hardship. In the case of our stranded citizens, we will consider all Mauritians abroad hardship cases. So, I believe he must not be demagogical when he tries to interpret what I say. Hardship cases, yes, all of them; all of them want to go back to Rodrigues, but there are degrees of hardship. Some people, some Rodriguans, about whom I have been communicated the circumstances in which they are living here, can wait for some time and we are also planning future repatriation flights.

Now, *il n'y a pas de deux poids, deux mesures*. There is only one policy with regard to vaccination. I have...

(Interruptions)

Sorry?

Mr X. L. Duval: Why the difference?

The Prime Minister: There is no difference! We...

Mr X. L. Duval: 13% against 46%.

The Prime Minister: The figures that I have are as follows: 16,140 doses of vaccines have been sent to Rodrigues; the number of doses that have been used is 11,008 first, and the remaining doses, 5,142. So, we have around 13.8% of the population above 18 years who have already received two doses of vaccines, and we are already planning - as we are also receiving vaccines - to send another batch of doses of vaccines to Rodrigues to accelerate the vaccination.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: We are on the 30th June; I am going to table an official communiqué from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. It gives all the figures, confirming exactly what I have said. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will have a last question. Perhaps hon. Members would appreciate asking a question, if you give me a last question afterwards.

The Prime Minister: Can I have a look at the official communiqué also?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes. Can I open the floor for a few minutes and then come back to a last question?

Mr Speaker: I will allow the floor to hon. Bérenger.

Mr Bérenger: I have heard the hon. Prime Minister say that there is a priority list. Could we know the criteria being used to draw that priority list? Item by item; what is the formula; what are the criteria; in what order that is being used to decide priority cases?

The Prime Minister: First of all, there are personnel of the health sector in Rodrigues because the aim is to be fully equipped in terms of human resources to be able to cope with the health situation. We also have officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly; we have patients and their accompanying relatives. But then, for patients, there are, of course, other criteria; on the day of their discharge from their treatment - I did mention the other criteria - and their fitness to travel also because they must be in a position to travel.

So, the criteria have been devised, I must say, by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. *Et c'est l'esprit de l'autonomie. J'espère que c'est encore toujours dans l'esprit de l'autonomie qu'on laisse à Rodrigues, quand même, de décider et de proposer ses critères*

pour rapatrier les Rodriguais. Et je dois dire que cela a été fait, bien sûr, en collaboration et, donc, this is the work, in fact, that is being done, and I must say we are also planning other flights. There is already one flight which is being planned and which will be leaving on 04 July.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the event of the forthcoming opening of border with Rodrigues, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the same sanitary protocol will apply as in Mauritius, which is working perfectly, and to provide us...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: He did that 15 minutes ago!

(Interruptions)

15 minutes before you!

(Interruptions)

No, please! Please! Please! Please! Please! There is no point of order! There is no clarification, there is nothing! I saw hon. Léopold 15 minutes back, but I gave preference to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I also gave preference to former Prime Minister. You come last!

Hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the event of the forthcoming opening of the border with Rodrigues, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the same sanitary protocol will strictly apply as in Mauritius, which is working perfectly, and to provide us with all the necessary resources should we have a positive case in Rodrigues.

The Prime Minister: As I said, the Executive Council of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly met on 25 June 2021 and has approved a revised protocol for the reopening of passenger flights as from 01 August 2021. That protocol has been sent to me and will be discussed at the High-Level Committee, and then, of course, we shall make our views known to the Chief Commissioner. I cannot also prejudge how, in what way it is going to be amended, but that is subject to discussion and, of course, to agreement before we proceed with a new protocol. But rest assured, hon. Member, although it is difficult to balance the interests of everybody, one of the priorities, I must say, remains that Rodrigues should stay

COVID-19 free. But, at the same time, we must be able to repatriate as many people as we can, and under very safe conditions. We are going to apply strictly the conditions for repatriation.

Mr Speaker: Now your turn!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much; very nice of you. Since a list of priorities based on specific criteria has been established for repatriation, how many of our Rodriguan friends who are stranded have been vaccinated and how many are in quarantine, ready to fly back to Rodrigues?

The Prime Minister: Vaccinated to go back to Rodrigues, not yet. That will maybe form part of the new protocol we are actually discussing in the context of the arrival of other vaccines. We shall, of course, devise this new protocol, as I said, in reply to the hon. Member from Rodrigues. We are looking at this new proposal for a new protocol and most probably, there are going to be changes. I say most probably there are going to be changes because as we see, the situation has evolved even here, and a protocol is being established for passengers coming from abroad to Mauritius. So, likewise we are going to amend this protocol.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a widespread feeling amongst the 300 or more Rodriguans stranded in Mauritius that they have been forgotten and *laissés-pour-compte*; this is their feeling. Now, I am going to ask two things to the hon. Prime Minister –

- (1) Can he take positively any of the suggestions here? Because obviously, the Regional Assembly requires help.
- (2) Will he ensure, as my colleague has just said, that all the Rodriguans likely to return are vaccinated immediately, are given some sort of priority and facility to be vaccinated immediately so that they may return under the best conditions?

And Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to say that given the dismal vaccination percentage in Rodrigues, why don't we follow the Seychelles model and get all Rodriguans vaccinated quickly? There are only 25,000 adults. All of them vaccinated quickly; follow the Seychelles model, and we can open up the island for good.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, what is our aim? Our aim is to vaccinate all residents, not only Mauritians. We are catering for everybody here and in Rodrigues to be vaccinated as quickly as possible because we have said '*sel solision vaksinasion*'. I repeat

what I said yesterday. The hon. Leader of the Opposition should understand and he must be watching international news, and know what is going on around, how...

Mr X. L. Duval: Watch MBC.

The Prime Minister: You watch MBC also, very good! So, are you aware that it is not easy to procure vaccines? Are you aware of that? Do you think you go in a shop and the vaccines are on the shelves and then you just buy them?

Mr Speaker: Time over by 5 minutes!

The Prime Minister: I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I do not know in what world they are living. It is easy to criticise; it is easy to say we should have pre-ordered. I heard that so many times - pre-ordered. Do you know what pre-order means? What is the meaning? On the one hand, they speak about pre-order and, on the other hand, what do they say? This vaccine has not been recognised by the WHO! *C'est de la démagogie pure, à outrance!* No need for me to go into detail because you said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have already exceeded the time by 5 minutes, but we have done a lot, I must say. We have been in touch with so many laboratories. On the diplomatic front, we have constantly been in touch, every day, contacting and trying to acquire vaccines, and I must say, in a way, we are lucky. We have been lucky because *avec toutes les démarches qu'on est en train de faire, aujourd'hui 60,000 vaccins de Sputnik rentrent à Maurice, et vers le 4 et le 5 juillet, 500,000 vaccins de Sinopharm qui ont été achetés.* There are countries with far more resources than Mauritius which have not been able to acquire vaccines. Now, they like to compare. Compare the percentage of people vaccinated with the percentage in some other countries. We have above 40%, nearly reaching 50% right now. Compare with other countries and then you will see. This is what I say in reply to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.12 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILLS

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) (No. 2) Bill (No. XI of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE SECURITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. IX OF 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Securities (Amendment) Bill (No. IX of 2021).

(12.13 p.m.)

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, given that we are debating on a Bill relating to the Financial Sector, *permettez-moi avant de faire mon exposé sur le Securities Amendment Bill* to comment briefly on the outcome of the FATF Plenary Meeting held last week where Mauritius was commended for its efforts and for the substantial completion of its action plan at technical level.

As stated by hon. Minister Seeruttun yesterday in his Statement to the House, this progress leads us now to the final and decisive step towards the removal of Mauritius from the FATF Grey List, that is, the online inspection in Mauritius to take stock of the measures implemented as outlined in the last Progress Report submitted by Mauritius in April 2021. It is important to highlight, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the significant progress towards Mauritius getting off the Grey List translates the commitment, whether political or otherwise, of the Government to strengthen the effectiveness of our AML-CFT regime and to reaffirm the solid reputation of Mauritius as an international financial centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to highlight the relentless effort and hard work of my friend, hon. Minister Seeruttun, along with various other institutions, and with the support of the Prime Minister who chaired the Interministerial Committee on AML-CFT for working in order to pull Mauritius away *dans un délai surprenant de cette liste grise*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the Bill. Mauritius is strategically positioning itself as the preferred international financial centre for the region. Mauritius has established itself as a regional player with the FSC hosting the OECD Regional Centre of Excellence and the seat of the Secretariat being hosted in Mauritius. And to keep up with the pace, the status of being a preferred international financial centre, it warrants for more emphasis on high value added services. Although domestic equities are traditionally the most common form of instruments listed on the SEM, there is an increasing number of asset classes which are paving their way on the SEM. Over the years, the Stock Exchange of Mauritius has registered the listing of a growing number of bonds, shares in global business companies and other depositary receipts. *Par conséquent*, our exchange platform is trading in larger volumes and bringing international spotlight on the stock market of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, it is now right for us to move to the next step to open up and upscale our capital market and bring about the appropriate regulatory framework to shape Mauritius into a leading and competitive IFC. And this is what the Securities Amendment Bill proposes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I do agree with hon. Uteem that an unsuccessful attempt at creating another exchange platform was made in the past, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot equate the GBOT experience with Afrinext. GBOT was a hasty enterprise to make room for a second exchange platform without creating the legal accommodation for such platform. The very reason we are having these debates is proof that for Afrinext we are creating the right legal ecosystem to accommodate a second exchange platform which was not the case for GBOT, and this adds on to the amendments brought by the FSC to its Securities Authorisation for Foreign Investment Dealer Rules. Those changes were in view to streamline the processes for a greater pool of foreign investment dealers to access and trade on our exchanges, and again, in April this year, the FSC issued a Circular, allowing issuers to submit financial statements prepared in accordance with local GAAP for listing an ongoing disclosure. Similarly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the FSC rules were amended earlier this year so as to allow issuers to seek credit rating from any rating agency licensed by the FSC or from any equivalent foreign jurisdiction. This change in the FSC rules will serve to attract international issuers to Mauritius who now may comfortably use reputable credit rating agencies of their choice. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the parameters are different. Afrinext intends to list a variety of securities from the National Stock Exchange of India and the Bombay Stock Exchange, and it will benefit from the support of Bombay Stock Exchange which will provide assistance in terms of technology, training, market data sharing and surveillance. *D'ailleurs*, a

Memorandum of Understanding between Afrinext and Bombay Stock Exchange was signed in March 2018 to develop New Securities Exchange in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill contains the right ingredients to place our jurisdiction on the regional radar and to help consolidate the status of Mauritius as being a serious financial centre on the African continent. The amendments proposed will allow Mauritius to tap on the enormous potential that Africa has to offer and we need to understand why these amendments are being brought. I do understand the qualms of hon. Uteem, in relation to amendments to Sections 86 and 88 of the Securities Act, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing is being done to jeopardise the obligation to disclose. Section 86, Mr Speaker, Sir, is being amended, but not randomly. There is a point of reference when bringing those amendments and the point of reference, the benchmarking exercise has been made by looking at other leading listing jurisdictions like Luxembourg, South Africa, Singapore, London, and in these leading listing jurisdictions, filing of financial statements are made with the Exchange rather than the regulator itself. This is how it works. The obligation for issuers of securities to make disclosures to the market and to the investor community is not being removed. So, we are just removing a hassle in terms of an administrative process. The disclosure requirement, the disclosure obligation remains, but we are just simplifying the administrative process and filing of statements will be done with the market instead of the regulator. The amendment simply dispenses with the requirement for the issuer to make disclosures to the Regulatory Authority which will in this case be FSC, but the filing obligation remains, I say it again, towards the market, and the investors through the exchange which is the best practice in other leading listing jurisdictions.

As regards amendment to Section 88, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the benchmarking exercise with our leading listing jurisdictions, London, Luxembourg, South Africa, and yet again, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no quarterly submission of financial statements. They rather go for a half yearly submission of financial statements, and using these jurisdictions as benchmark. Today, with this amendment, we may streamline the requirement imposed by Section 88 of the Securities Act from quarterly submission to half yearly submission of financial statements, and it is good to highlight that the FSC has been receiving various requests for exemption of Section 88 of the Securities Act and instead filing half yearly financial statements, given the dual listing status. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, again, what we are proposing as amendments in the Securities Act today is not a random exercise, but it is an

exercise not only to open up our capital market to accommodate a second platform, but also to move upscale and follow the principles being adopted by leading listing jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that the proposed amendments to the Act will attract foreign investors and issuers to our jurisdiction, and will project Mauritius as a competitive and forward looking jurisdiction. The amendments will further encourage participation of African and global intermediaries in Mauritius. As rightly stated by hon. Minister Seeruttun yesterday, the new legal framework will allow foreign investment banks to offer non-broking, non-clearing capital market services to issues who are listing the securities with Securities Exchanges without the need for licensing or authorisation or approval from the FSC or the Official Exchange, again benchmarking with leading listing jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the success and growth of our capital market remains dependent on a supporting environment which includes a legal framework that catches for new avenues. With these proposed amendments, Mauritius will position itself on the global capital market scene and allow the country to compete with global jurisdictions. The Bill will not only help strengthen the position of Mauritius as a financial services and capital market destination but also encourage participation of African and global intermediaries in Mauritius and, finally, improving ease of doing business. I, therefore, congratulate hon. Seeruttun for coming forward with these amendments and with these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I reiterate my support in favour of the Bill.

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Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(12.24 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. I shall try not to be repetitive because most of the points have already been canvassed by hon. Seeruttun, hon. Teeluck and hon. Uteem yesterday. But it is worth pointing out, Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly elaborated yesterday by hon. Uteem that the FSC on 31 May 2021 has invited local consultants to send proposals to review the Securities Act. So, I take it that we shall soon be asked to debate on a new Securities Act before this House and that the purpose of this amendment Bill is thus solely with regard to the advent of Afrinex in our financial services landscape as rightly pointed out by hon. Teeluck.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been asked by many young graduates that this Bill is quite technical in nature, the amendment being brought and due to the fact that they have not gone through the debates when the Securities Act was debated in Parliament, I have been asked to briefly, concisely and in a very clear manner explain what the purpose of this Bill is all about and what are the amendments being brought, doing for the financial sector in this island.

In this line, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important that we go down memory lane to situate the efforts being made by legislators in the past, but also to place on record the politics of continuity that has helped in developing this investment component in our country. So, I will try to just go through a chronology as to how we are now bringing amendments to the Securities Act.

It all started way back in 1987, Mr Speaker, Sir, through the Act XI of 1987. There was the setting up of the Stock Exchange, the Stock Exchange Commission and the Chamber of stockbrokers. The limitative list of securities then comprised of share, debenture, bond quoted on the Stock Exchange and, Mr Speaker, Sir, at that time the stock brokers were pointed by the Minister to carry out the business of dealing in securities quoted on the Stock Exchange. Brokers who were appointed under the Brokers' Act could elect to be exempted by the Act. Then in 1988, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Minister, the new Stock Exchange Act came into operation thus repealing the Act XI of 1987.

In 1996, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Securities (Central Depository, Clearing and Settlement) Act 1996 has made provision for the establishment and regulation of a Central Depository, Clearing and Settlement Service in order to facilitate dealings in securities and, Mr Speaker, Sir, thereafter Mauritius has experienced a real boost in Securities Legislations. Drafting was done and prepared in 2004. There was the Securities Act of 2005 that was enacted and in year 2007, more precisely on 28 September 2007, it was proclaimed and became operational. The

Securities Act in force, Mr Speaker, Sir, has indeed established a framework for the regulation of securities markets, depository, clearing and settlement facilities, security exchanges and intermediaries and provides for self-regulatory organisation and regulates the offering and trading of securities and other related matters. It's coming into operation as a one-stop shop has done away with various legislations, Mr Speaker, Sir, scattered in several enactments. So, I will not go into all those Acts because all have been repealed and we have got our Financial Services Act, then we have got our Securities Act, but I would go on what this amendment is all about, the advent of Afrinex.

The regulator, the Financial Services Commission recently introduced a review of the regulatory regime through various rules that have already been prepared and already operational. Significant changes were made to its licensing rules for market intermediaries, dealings in derivatives. The changes were made in the context of operations of Afrinex Ltd which will be a new securities exchange in Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, as it stands, the amendments being brought cater basically for accommodating Afrinex Ltd in our jurisdiction. In line with the Bill, amendments to the Securities Licensing Rules 2007 to cater for new category of investment dealers, namely the investment dealer derivatives which replaces the former three categories of investment dealer, commodity derivative segment, investment dealer, currency derivative segment and investment dealer equity segment were already in place.

To put it in the context, Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by hon. Teeluck, in November 2018, the FSC licensed Afrinex and its subsidiary Afrinex Clearing House Ltd, a clearing and settlement facility in Mauritius. A Memorandum of Understanding between Afrinex and Bombay Stock Exchange Ltd was signed in March 2018 to develop this new Securities Exchange in Mauritius. As per information being circulated, Mr Speaker, Sir, we now know that Afrinex intends to list a variety of securities from the National Stock Exchange of India Limited and the Bombay Stock Exchange and this will benefit from the support of the Bombay Stock Exchange, which will provide the technology, the training, the market data sharing and surveillance. These developments are in line, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the ongoing policy and objectives of our country as a niche jurisdiction to develop and internationalise capital markets in Mauritius to diversify the range of listed financial products available in this market and thereby further enhance its role as a regional financial hub.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, I pose here to raise a note of caution. With this novel venture, strict adherence to the provisions of the Securities Act is of paramount importance

for the perennity of this activity. Here, I shall refer to section 17 and section 18 of the Securities Act respectively which read as follows - obligations of securities exchange, Mr Speaker, Sir.

“Securities exchange shall perform its functions so as to ensure fairness, efficiency and transparency of transactions effected through the securities exchange and publish daily and periodic information and averages on its activities in order to ensure transparency and equity to investors.

Securities exchange shall also submit to the Commission, that is, the FSC information at such intervals as the Commission may request”

And there also under the legal obligation to submit to the Commission their trading logs at such times for such periods as it may require. And there is an important section in the Securities Act that should be adhered to also, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is section 18 relating to Directors of Security Exchanges.

“18. (1) The directors of a securities exchange shall ensure that, at all times –

(a) at least one third of the number of directors are independent of the management of the securities exchange; and

(b) the directors include in their number directors who have experience in the operations of such securities exchange.

(2) A director of a securities exchange has a duty to act in the best interests of investors and, where there is a conflict between the interests of the investors and the interests of the securities exchange, the director shall give priority to the interests of the investors.”

And Section 19 of this same Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, -

“A director of a clearing and settlement facility shall, in acting as such a director, have proper regard to safeguarding the interest of users of the facility and the public interest.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is now public knowledge when you peruse the website of Afrinex to get to know that one of its Directors is the Chairman of SBM Holdings Ltd which is listed on the stock exchange of Mauritius and that he is also one of the administrators appointed for Air Mauritius Ltd which is also listed on the stock exchange of Mauritius.

There are pertinent questions to be asked, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can this gentleman wear three hats? Has there been a proper due diligence exercise done by the FSC to see to it that there is no conflict of interest in the position being occupied? Because when you apply to become a Director for example, in an entity which is licensed by the Bank of Mauritius, there is a questionnaire of Fit and Proper person and when you go through those questionnaires, even if you are somebody of very high calibre or great credentials, you cannot sit on several bodies, institutions and companies that are licensed by the Bank of Mauritius.

So, I would invite the hon. Minister to look at this particular aspect so that there is no perception of conflict of interest when this very component is being canvassed and ask investors, especially retail investors, to invest in this domain. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, the notion of proper accountability fairness, good governance but also a perception of good governance should prevail to avoid position and perception of conflict of interest. There should be strict guidelines as to who can be eligible to sit as Directors and I am of the humble view that politically exposed persons, political nominees should satisfy those guidelines to be put in place by the FSC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, reputation and good governance practices should be the key words to drive this venture. The more so, Mr Speaker, Sir, with such types of activities, market manipulations, insider trading are real risks that can jeopardise the whole structure being put in place. FSC should also be at the forefront, Mr Speaker, Sir, to protect retail investors where the facts demonstrate abusive or manipulative trading activity that is prohibited by the security rules, regulations and the Act. Likewise, foreign issuers, Mr Speaker, Sir, must ensure compliance with our laws for any contemplated offers or sales of their own securities. FSC should also step in to facilitate a robust public dialogue among market participants and investors on the structure and operation of our securities markets.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, to drive this venture, we need independent, resilient and proactive institutions and I know the Financial Services Commission is doing a good job with professionals around so that there is a conducive environment for investors to use these platforms. But, more personnel and more facilities should be given to the Financial Services Commission because this particular component is a very technical component so that the Enforcement Division at the Financial Services Commission should comprise of technical people and also experts even if we should bring foreign experts in this field.

A few words on the stock exchange of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, as it is, the Stock Exchange of Mauritius will now compete with Afrinex, but it is being forecasted that this will complement each other, that is, Afrinex will specialise in listing of securities, derivatives and commodities and I just hope this is the case and it goes in line with the policy of internationalisation of the SEM which has been going on since 2013. We have now moved on to a new stage of development and I just hope that SEM shall continue also to give due importance to its regulatory functions - very important, Mr Speaker, Sir, - when we are embarking on such activities that the regulatory functions of SEM are put into perspective and Section 23 of the Securities Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, gives the SEM regulatory functions to ensure that there is adequate supervision on the market operations and conduct of market participants; they also empower to ensure adequacy and efficiency of internal controls; and also investigate misconduct or apparent misconduct by market participants and their representatives that could seriously affect investors or other participating organisations. They are also asked upon to investigate possible market abuses, including insider dealing and fraudulent behaviour and take disciplinary measures or agree to a settlement after a public hearing.

So, I would also urge the hon. Minister that this aspect of the law should be consolidated with further regulations or rules by the FSC in the Financial Services Act and in the Securities Act to give maybe, additional powers to the Stock Exchange of Mauritius in its regulatory operations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a matter of concern with regard to people and business entities that are continuing to invest in the stock exchange of Mauritius. But they have lowered their weights and grasped prospects of vanishing and illiquidity has become a major problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is, assets which cannot be exchanged for cash easily. This might be because there are not enough investors willing to buy them. In business terms, Mr Speaker, Sir, illiquid companies, without enough cash to cover their financial obligations, may struggle to continue trading. Even a company with plenty of assets, such as land, property or machinery may face the prospect of insolvency if these cannot be converted into cash quickly.

A vivid example, Mr Speaker, Sir, is Air Mauritius Ltd. I am also very concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the depreciation of our Mauritian rupee. This is seriously impacting on the transaction of the SEM. There has been a massive disinvestment of some Rs1.5 billion with sales from foreign investors, Mr Speaker Sir; this is as per the figures and tables found in the

Bank of Mauritius monthly statistical bulletin. Thus, foreign investors' net sales on the SEM, over a one year period from May 2020 to May 2021 is around Rs1.5 billion.

Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is that this may be linked to COVID-19 pandemic but the more so, because of the trend of depreciation and devaluation of our rupee, investors would be losing in terms of currency effect, even if they might win in terms of Capital gains but the net effect could be a loss when taking currency into account, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is worrying for the stock exchange of Mauritius Mr Speaker, Sir. We need a stable rupee to make our jurisdiction attractive for investment.

In a nutshell, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill brings more exchanges, more clearing houses, more financial products, potentially more brokers and more sophisticated products to be offered now to retail investors who may not properly assess the risk factor with regard to the investment, should also provide and cater for a check and balance in the Bill. This is also very important because we are introducing this concept of retail investors. I am humbly requesting the hon. Minister, maybe through regulations or further detailed rules from the FSC, that this aspect be looked into as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a law practitioner, I join many professionals working in the financial sector to hopefully wish to see the silver lining in the coming years in this sector, with proper laws and regulations in place, proper monitoring and applying the principle of accountability, transparency and fairness to ensure continuity in this sector so that the young professionals of this country, Mr Speaker, Sir, will have better and future job opportunities.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(12:43 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Financial Services sector is one of the highest contributor of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) counting to 13% in 2020. One of the major components of the sector is the capital market and it is therefore crucial to continuously build a robust and adaptive framework for its efficient functioning. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Securities Act (2005) is an instrumental piece of legislation which empowers the Financial Services Commission with the authority to regulate and supervise all aspects of the securities industry in Mauritius.

In order to ensure the orderly functioning of the capital market in Mauritius, it is essential to ensure proper monitoring, supervising and regulation of the system. The Securities Act establishes a framework for the regulation of the securities market, market participants, the offering and the trading of securities to ensure a fair, efficient and transparent securities market. It aims at striking the right equilibrium between the protection of investors and the interest of market participants as well as establishing the financial system in general.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the time when the Securities Act was being drafted in September 2004, the securities market in Mauritius was in its early stage but continuous efforts have been made in previous years to stimulate the growth of the market. In 2004, there were 40 listed companies on the official market with a total market capitalisation of Rs67 m. Today, the Stock Exchange of Mauritius boasts 119 listing on the official market and the Development Enterprise Market with a total market capitalisation of Rs358 billion. At the very outset, the main object of the Securities Act is –

- to promote the confident and informed participation of investors and consumers in the securities market in Mauritius;
- to improve the protection of investors in Mauritius from unfair, improper and fraudulent practices in relation to the securities, and last
- to foster fair, efficient, transparent and informed market for securities in Mauritius among others.

The capital market is a dynamic sector characterized by changes in the global financial landscape. As such, this sector needs to adapt to latest development on the international front in order to keep pace with international best practices. Nevertheless, markets are challenged in numerous ways and investors need to remain cautious and be willing to take risks in search for better yield. Consequently, the attention of the capital market's stakeholders is focused on continuous regulatory changes, innovation in technology, business transformation and market structure. In the recent years, the financial landscape has witnessed major changes and the pace of the change has been particularly rapid and has had a major impact on market, investors and issuers.

One of the lessons learnt is that there is a strong need for continuous review of our financial architecture and a need to promote at a higher standard of market conduct to encourage efficient and well-functioning market. Furthermore, a dynamic, liquid and well-

regulated capital market is instrumental in financing the economy and is the foundation for a thriving private sector, a key driver of jobs and growth. As noted by the World Bank, well-functioning capital markets, I quote –

“Helped ensure the financial systems efficiency, stability and risk management preventing costly crises and helping channel saving towards capital that is essential for economic development and poverty reduction.”

Indeed, well developed and regulated markets can play a variety of roles that are beneficial to the economy. Building on the solid foundation, we already have, these amendments will cater for the provision that will graduate our capital market sector to the next level of sophistication and in line with the best international practices and standards. The new Amendment proposed is a lineal descendant of the previous proposal and continued symbiosis of Government and industry. Some of the avenues that will be covered in the Amendment include among others –

- (1) adapting the regulatory framework to keep pace with the market development and international best practices;
- (2) grow the market by allowing new market players in the capital market landscape, and
- (3) consolidation of the regulatory framework of the debt market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these current amendments for the Securities Act are key, in as much as, they will create the much needed buoyancy in our global business sector as global business entities will be able to offer securities in a less cumbersome manner. This will therefore allow our global players to domicile in Mauritius and thus make the market more vibrant and liquid.

In terms of increased efficiency and liquidity, amendment will be brought to cater for the automatic recognition of foreign fund in the Security Exchanges in Mauritius. This will, in turn, make the market more vibrant, dynamic and will also enhance liquidity in the market. Moreover, it will also broaden the spectrum and sophistication of the financial instrument available on the market for investment purposes.

The proposed amendment will enhance the position of Mauritius as a securities market jurisdiction regionally and globally by enabling the automatic recognition of foreign funds listed on other Securities Exchange by the Financial Services Commission on the basis

of information provided by the Exchange to the FSC. In particular, funds from the leading fund jurisdiction will be allowed to list with Security Exchange in Mauritius without additional level of approval by the regulators. It is noteworthy that leading fund jurisdiction such as the UK and Singapore have already implemented such measures. In view to align with international trends and standards in matters regarding securities regulation, the proposed Amendment is catering for the introduction of the concept of retail investors and extends the definition of sophisticated investors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has continuously worked towards promoting Mauritius as a jurisdiction of excellence and choice and as a recognised International Financial Centre. Our main objective has been to position Mauritius as a leading player in the field for the African continent and in the world. We therefore encourage the participation of African and global intermediaries in Mauritius. Consequently, the Amendment that are proposing to allow foreign investment bank to offer non broking, non-clearing capital market services to issuers who are listing their securities with Securities Exchanges without the need for licensing or authorisation or approval of any sort from the FSC or the Exchange.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I have heard since yesterday from the hon. Members from the other side of the House, and today, from hon. Lobine, I understand that some Members are uncomfortable with the concept of the automatic recognition and no licensing requirements from the FSC. However, I wish to reassure the House that recognition is not like in marketplace whereby anyone from anywhere can come and operate without any supervision. In fact, it is reserved for sophisticated and professional investors.

When it comes to recognition, it refers to the mutual understanding and arrangements made between the regulators and the supervisory bodies that, funds, exchanges or other securities instruments would be recognised and allowed to operate in a jurisdiction, subject to have to cleared and be properly licensed in its jurisdiction of origin.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in an era of globalisation, with free movement of people, goods and services and beyond. Our aim is to open access and welcome international players to be part of this revamping and rebooting. We are seeking to strike the right balance with one hand the opening of access and, on the other hand, rightly regulating the sector; we are actually seeking to well regulate and not over regulate.

As mentioned earlier, it is a dynamic sector which needs leeway to operate, boxing it with stringent and obsolete legislations will not help the sector to expand and reach the next

level. However, by creating a conducive regulatory environment which is built on good ethics, values and the international best standards set out by the OECD, World Trade Organisation, UN and FAFT will be the core principle to ensure investor protection, market integrity and financial stability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when speaking about opening access and innovation, I cannot skip the newly established Afrinex Exchange. The exchange is a first of its kind multi-currency and multi-asset universal exchange.

Mr Speaker, Sir, yesterday in his intervention, and today also, hon. Lobine mentioned indirectly that our Government are giving preferential treatment for the setting up and operation of this exchange. However, I think that the hon. Member is going completely in the opposite direction of the core of the subject. He is omitting to see the bigger and brighter picture, that is, the revamping of the sector, bringing innovation, opening access to international players and our alignment with leading International Financial Centres (IFCs). The establishment of this exchange, together with the series of proposed amendments and reforms will firstly address the current vacuum present in our system and, secondly, bring the much needed buoyancy in the capital market sector.

No stone will be left unturned in our stride to modernise our system. In this respect, the Minister of Finance, Dr. the hon. Padayachy, announced in the Budget key measures to reinforce this objective, namely, the introduction of a new Securitisation Bill to bring further sophistication to the legislative framework.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Financial Services Commission for showcasing expertise in this field by recently amending a number of its rules to support the Government vision of making Mauritius a leading IFC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with keeping pace with innovation and emerging technological global trends, the FSC has recently, not later than last week implemented the Financial Services (Robotic and Artificial Intelligence Enabled Advisory Services) Rules 2021. This will enable holders of this licence to provide advisory services through expert systems using artificial intelligence and algorithms with limited human intervention.

The Securities (Amendment) Bill goes in the same direction and I thank the Minister Seeruttun for taking bold measures to bring sophistication to the securities market at a time when the whole world is facing unprecedented challenges resulting from the global pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot end this intervention without making reference to this Government's commitment at the highest level to combat money laundering and countering of terrorist financing.

The recent announcement by the FATF recognising the country's efforts bears testimony to this effect. I would like to commend and applaud our Prime Minister, the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance, the Minister of Finance, the Government and the various institutions of the country for the great work undertaken to renew trust in our financial system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while speaking of the FATF issue, I cannot proceed without mentioning the despair of the leader of the Labour Party. The latter has been desperately claiming the paternity of this tedious work that our Prime Minister and the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance, and the related institutions, have undertaken.

I would like to enlighten the House that the procedures and running of the FATF is not based on '*petits copinages*', but rather it is based on assessment, reviews, monitoring and reassessment by a Highly Technical Committee comprising of country and institutional members and observers from the globe.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is funny and at the same time regrettable that the leader of the Labour Party is tainting the very integrity and the neutrality of this institution. This shows how low they could stoop to be in the limelight.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if the leader of the Labour Party had actually the powers to remove us from the blacklist, I guess that he had the powers at the very outset to negotiate for us not to be on the list at all. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that his contribution has not been in removing us from the blacklist but he has on contrary contributed to put us on the blacklist. We should not forget the *coffre-fort* with Rs220 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the very essence of AML/CFT is the source of fund which for the leader of the Labour Party remains as at date unexplained, unknown and black.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

At 1.02 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, c'est un honneur pour moi d'intervenir aujourd'hui sur le *Securities (Amendment) Bill* amené par mon collègue, ministre des Services financiers et de la bonne gouvernance, l'honorable Mahen Seeruttun.

Ce projet de loi témoigne une fois de plus de l'engagement de ce gouvernement, sous le leadership de notre Premier ministre, à améliorer en permanence le cadre juridique qui régit notre secteur des services financiers et son efficacité. Et cela afin que la juridiction mauricienne soit en conformité avec les meilleures pratiques internationales.

Malgré la pandémie de Covid-19 et les différents défis qui se sont présentés à nous, le secteur des services financiers a largement démontré sa résilience. Il a été et reste un moteur de croissance pour notre économie. Les chiffres en sont la preuve irréfutable. Pour l'année 2020, il a contribué à hauteur de 13% de notre PIB et a connu une croissance positive de 1,1%. L'un des seuls secteurs de l'économie mauricienne à avoir cru en pleine pandémie.

M. le président, tout en continuant à élargir notre offre, nous nous efforçons également de renforcer la résilience du secteur. Le point de départ de cette stratégie revient à veiller à ce que notre cadre législatif en matière de lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent et le financement du terrorisme soit en accord avec les préconisations faites au niveau mondial. Notre engagement au plus haut niveau pour mettre en œuvre le plan d'action du Groupe d'Action Financière, le GAFI, en vue d'une sortie rapide de la liste des juridictions sous surveillance accrue porte ses fruits.

En effet, la semaine dernière, lors de sa session plénière, le GAFI a reconnu et salué les efforts de Maurice pour compléter les différentes composantes de son Plan d'Action. Le GAFI a ainsi recommandé d'accorder à Maurice une visite sur place dans les meilleurs délais afin de confirmer de visu la conformité de Maurice avec les standards du GAFI.

Je sais l'envergure de la tâche et le travail abattu par l'ensemble des ministères, notamment celui des Services Financiers et de la bonne gouvernance, et des institutions concernées par l'implémentation du Plan d'Action du GAFI. C'est un combat de longue haleine qui touche à son but, mais dont la finalité n'est pas seulement le retrait de Maurice de ladite liste.

Maurice, en tant que centre financier international, ne s'arrêtera pas en si bon chemin. Nous continuerons de faire évoluer notre cadre juridique et surtout de nous assurer de sa bonne implémentation afin de combattre, efficacement et sans relâche, le crime financier.

M. le président, dans cette même perspective, nous avons annoncé une série de mesures dans le Discours du Budget 2021-2022.

Il s'agit notamment de –

- la création d'une *Financial Crime Commission* ;
- l'introduction d'un nouveau corpus législatif au travers de la *Bank of Mauritius Act* et le *Banking Act*, ainsi que de
- l'octroi d'une force de loi au *Core Group on AML/CFT matters* dans le cadre de la *FIAMLA*.

M. le président, la *Securities Act* a initialement été introduite en 2005 pour remplacer la *Stock Exchange Act* de 1998. L'objectif derrière l'introduction de cette loi était de développer les services financiers dans le pays tout en mettant en place la structure de réglementation et de supervision appropriée. Aujourd'hui, afin de s'adapter à un paysage réglementaire en constante évolution ainsi que de lutter contre des risques divers et croissants, il est nécessaire de repenser la *Securities Act*.

C'est à cet effet et comme annoncé dans le récent discours du Budget, qu'un nouveau projet de loi, le *Securities Bill*, est rédigé et présenté aux membres de cet auguste Assemblée.

Ce faisant, les modifications apportées en ce jour à la *Securities Act* favoriseront l'innovation dans le secteur et permettront l'entrée de nouveaux acteurs sur le marché. Cet aspect est fondamental d'une part, pour la croissance du secteur des services financiers en elle-même, mais d'autre part et surtout, pour que cette industrie continue à soutenir le développement économique de Maurice. Car pour reprendre les mots de Michael Porter, Économiste et Professeur à l'Université d'Harvard –

« L'innovation est la clé de la prospérité économique. »

M. le président, les amendements proposés permettront également aux entités commerciales internationales d'offrir des titres sur le marché local. Il s'agit donc de promouvoir notre centre financier comme une destination attractive pour les acteurs internationaux.

Nous pensons que ces opérateurs internationaux ont la propension à consolider non seulement notre position en tant que juridiction de levée de capitaux mais également à induire un niveau supérieur et sain de concurrence sur notre marché des capitaux. Comme nous le savons tous, la concurrence incite les entreprises à accroître leur efficacité et leur productivité. Elle joue donc un rôle décisif dans l'amélioration de l'allocation des ressources, la stimulation des perspectives économiques locales et le développement économique soutenu au niveau mondial.

Le projet de loi prévoit en outre la reconnaissance automatique des fonds étrangers dans les bourses de valeurs mobilières de Maurice. Ce progrès rendra moins coûteux pour les fonds étrangers d'être cotés sur nos marchés de valeurs mobilières.

M. le président, une autre proposition clé de ce projet de loi est l'ouverture de nos marchés de valeurs mobilières à davantage d'émetteurs locaux et internationaux. Dans cette même perspective d'ouverture, le projet de loi prévoit les amendements nécessaires afin d'encourager la participation d'intermédiaires régionaux et internationaux à Maurice. Par ce biais, nous créerons un marché plus compétitif pour les fonds étrangers à coter à Maurice.

M. le Président, le projet de loi présenté à cette Assemblée par mon collègue est une pièce constitutive essentielle de notre stratégie visant à développer davantage le secteur des services financiers et cela conformément au *Blue Print* pour les services financiers. Les actifs virtuels, les *FinTech*, la gestion d'actifs et de fonds ainsi que les *Family Offices* sont quelques-uns des segments du secteur des services financiers que nous avons à cœur de promouvoir.

Maurice a toujours été reconnu comme un pays précurseur dans la région. Le classement de Maurice dans *l'Ease of Doing Business* de la Banque Mondiale en atteste. Je rappelle que Maurice s'est hissé au 13ème rang mondial et au 1er rang régional.

Notre ambition ne s'arrête pas là. Nous visons une entrée dans le Top 10 du classement, et nous y parviendrons. Grâce à son développement économique, sa stabilité politique, son régime fiscal attractif et la solidité de son cadre réglementaire et juridique, notre pays offre l'environnement le plus attrayant pour faire des affaires en Afrique. Nous disposons également d'un pool de professionnels hautement qualifiés et multilingues, ce qui est essentiel à l'expansion du secteur.

Sur ce point, le Budget 2021-2022 prévoit d'ailleurs un soutien supplémentaire afin d'étendre la formation aux individus dans le secteur des services financiers. Nous voulons

également davantage ouvrir le pays à des professionnels spécialisés et talents internationaux, notamment dans le domaine de la gestion des fonds et des actifs.

M. le président, notre objectif est de faire en sorte que Maurice continue de figurer parmi les centres financiers régionaux et internationaux les plus résilients et les plus prisés par les investisseurs, les opérateurs, les institutions financières et les grandes fortunes. Alors que nous sommes pleinement engagés dans le processus de transformation du secteur, la juridiction possède toutes les cartes en main pour faire fructifier son statut d'International Centre of Finance. Cadre réglementaire adapté, bonne gouvernance et promotion de l'innovation constituent les atouts majeurs que ce projet de loi ne fera que renforcer.

M. le président, je conclus mes propos en apportant tout mon soutien au vote de ce projet de loi.

Merci de votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(2:47 p.m.)

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Allow me at the very outset, Mr Speaker, Sir, to thank the hon. Members from both sides of the House who have intervened on this very important Bill before this House today. The importance of this Bill which aims at strengthening our position as an International Financial Centre of choice and increase our attractiveness has been well understood by the hon. Members from both sides of the House and I will also try today, Mr Speaker, Sir, to shed light on any further clarifications which have been sought by Members from the other side of the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as policy makers our role for the financial services sector is twofold. Firstly, we have the duty to protect this sector. You will appreciate that since February 2020, the officers of my Ministry and other key stakeholders such as the Financial Services Commission, the Bank of Mauritius, the Registrar of Companies, the ICAC, the FIU to name but a few have been working relentlessly to complete the Action Plan of the FATF. As the saying goes, hard work pays. Last week, the FATF has publicly stated that in view of the substantial completion of the Action Plan at a technical level, the FATF assessors are planning an onsite assessment before October 2021 Plenary. And secondly, our objective is to make strategic decisions to promote our financial sector, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Whilst we are constantly reviewing our legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure that our jurisdiction is sustainably protected against any illicit flows or money laundering transactions, we also have the mandate to promote the jurisdiction by ensuring that our financial services sector continue to remain relevant and can continue to compete with other IFCs such as Singapore, Luxembourg, Gift City and Dubai.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a demonstration of the commitment of the Government to relentlessly raise our profile and ranking in terms of making it easy to do business in Mauritius. It will help consolidate our legislation so that it merits the continued confidence of an investing public and attracts business and listings from across the world.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our objective is to broaden the operation of approved exchanges in Mauritius and also to allow for other clearing and settlement facilities to provide services in Mauritius with respect to the deposit, clearing or settlement of securities transactions. These amendments will go a long way in promoting the participation of African and global intermediaries in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, last year my Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Standard Chartered Bank for the preparation of sustainable financing framework for Blue, Green and Sustainable Bonds. In February 2021, the Bank of Mauritius published a guideline on issue of Sustainable Bonds. To make Mauritius a preferred platform for issue and listing of green bonds, it is important that we have the right infrastructure to attract new investors and new players.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I note that the hon. Reza Uteem, unfortunately he is not here, but he agrees that there is a need for other exchanges in Mauritius. However, the Member is wrong when he claims that these amendments would benefit one exchange only. I wish therefore to clarify that the objectives of these amendments would benefit any current securities exchange or future ones which intend to set up in Mauritius. It is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when a jurisdiction is opening up to new players, they should all be treated at par. One exchange cannot be privileged to the detriment of another. This is what we are addressing in this Bill.

Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to highlight that the hon. Member is misleading the House in stating that the operations of Bourse Africa Ltd did not really take off in Mauritius. I wish therefore to clarify that Bourse Africa Ltd which was formally known as Global Board

of Trade Ltd (GBOT) started its operation on 18 October 2010 as the first International Multi Asset Exchange in Mauritius.

However, in March 2014 on the basis of an order from the Forward Markets Commission in India and the SEBI they had to surrender their licences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will, now, address the concerns of hon. Reza Uteem regarding our compliance with IOSCO Principles for disclosure obligations by issuers. I wish to refer to Principle 16 which state that, I quote –

“There should be full, accurate and timely disclosure of financial results, risk and other information which is material to investors’ decisions.”

As such, Section 86 of the Securities Act is being amended after benchmarking exercise with other financial centres such as Luxembourg, London, South Africa and Singapore, where filings of financial statements are made with the exchange rather than the regulator itself. It is the obligation for issuers of securities to make disclosure to the market and the investor community, is not being removed at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. The amendment simply dispenses with the requirement for the issuers to make disclosures to the regulatory authority but the disclosures obligations remain towards the market and investors through the exchange as it is the best practice in other financial centres of good repute.

The regulator may still request information at any stage, as may be required in the discharge of its regulatory duties. This amendment is aimed at reducing the regulatory burden for issuers while maintaining high transparency standards towards the market. This will encourage more companies to list on any local exchange, for example, regarding the application of Section 88(1) of the Securities Act, it has been noted that leading listing jurisdictions like Singapore, London, Luxembourg and South Africa do not impose quarterly submissions of financial statements but rather half yearly financial statements and I wish to draw the attention of the House, that I was informed by the FSC that they have been receiving various requests for exemptions from Section 88(1) of the Securities Act, which requires quarterly filing of statements. As the practices in other leading listing jurisdictions require half yearly disclosures. Given the dynamism and timeliness of information requirement for listed entities, the proposed amendments of the Securities Act will ensure market symmetry.

It is also equally pivotal to know that these listed entities will still have to adhere to their listing requirements insofar as reporting obligations are concerned. For issuers listed in other jurisdictions and seeking a dual listing on the local exchange, the disclosures to the

regulator has proved to be burdensome in many cases as the existing disclosure requirements are higher in comparison to other leading financial centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing I do not understand from Members of the Opposition, all throughout they argue that Mauritius should see forward and be in the league of major IFCs but I am under the impression that they do not understand the key features which other IFCs and leading listing jurisdictions are offering. The hon. Reza Uteem mentioned that the amendment brought to Section 31 will no longer protect sophisticated investors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, investors possess vastly different degrees of financial sophistication, some are institutional investors or professionals with adequate resources and substantial investment experience to deal with market intermediaries, others are individuals with lesser or fewer resources and less experience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refresh the memory of the Member, that this Bill amends the definition of sophisticated investor which broadly falls within the category of Government entities or regulated entities and also introduces the idea of retail investor for the very reason that retail investor requires a higher level of protection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of both sides of the House are aware of the relentless efforts we have been investing to implement FATF Action Plan to get out of the list of countries under increased monitoring. These actions were reinforced in the Budgetary Speech. These efforts have been recognised by the FATF, whose assessors have agreed to conduct the imminent on-site assessment before October 2021 plenary. The hon. Member will appreciate that this Government will take no risk in putting our position before the FATF in jeopardy. In the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to give the comfort to the hon. Members that these entities which fall under the definition of sophisticated investor are principally Government entities or regulated entities which are required to comply with FIAMLA.

Mr Speaker Sir, I also wish to refer to the comments of the hon. Member regarding why the current amendments are being brought at this stage, why a tender has been launched to review the Securities Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, at the risk of repeating myself, the capital market is very dynamic, we cannot sleep on our laurels, we have to put Mauritius back on track and ensure growth of our sector. A full overhaul of the Securities Act will require extensive public consultations which can take 6 to 8 months. This should not stop us from seizing near-term opportunities, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now take the opportunity to refer to the comments of hon. Member Khushal Lobine regarding the issue of independent directors on the Board of Exchanges. I would like to confirm that all licensees, including the stock exchanges, clearing facilities houses have to seek FSC's approval under Section 24 of the Financial Services Act before appointing an officer which includes directors, independent or otherwise. As such, I have no reason to believe that such approval has not been sought from the regulator. Furthermore, under the same Section, the FSC has an obligation to ensure that such officers are fit and proper and again I have no reason to believe that such vetting or assessment has not been conducted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly mentioned by the hon. Member that as per Section 18 of the Securities Act –

“The directors of a security exchange shall ensure that, at all times –

- (a) at least one third of the number of directors are independent of the management of the securities exchange”.

I wish to reassure the House that matters pertaining to composition of the Board and governance are vetted at the time of licensing and ensured by way of ongoing supervision.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure hon. Khushal Lobine that the FSC has robust surveillance tools to ensure that the risk of market abuse is mitigated. It has also been confirmed by the FSC that the trading logs are regularly reviewed for unusual transactions and reviews undertaken of transactions to identify, *inter alia*, insider trading.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also take note of the request from the hon. Member to come up with new adequate and innovative legislation for the financial services sector. Here, I wish to assure the hon. Member that since last year the Financial Services Consultative Council, the FSCC has the mandate to implement the blueprint recommendations. As such, a Financial Services Law Advisory Committee has already been set up under the FSCC to review all legislations pertaining to the financial services sector and ensure their relevance to the ever-changing landscape.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is one of the building blocks for our ‘*relance*’. It already demonstrates that our Financial Services Sector is set to grow. You will recall that as per the Blueprint Report, our objective is to double the contribution of the Financial Services Sector to the GDP. For this objective to become a reality, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to take such

strategic decisions to enable new players to enter the capital market, which can attract more investors to our jurisdiction.

This Bill is sending a strong signal to the business and investors community that our financial services sector is set to become even stronger and reassure them regarding our political commitment. This Government is determined to uphold the good repute of Mauritius as a trusted jurisdiction of choice to conduct quality businesses.

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

Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE SECURITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

(No. IX of 2021)

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

Clause 6 (Section 70 of principal Act amended)

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

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 6 –

- (a) in subsection (1) –
 - (i) by repealing paragraph (j) and replacing it by the following paragraph –
 - (j) an offer or issue of securities by a corporation holding a Global Business Licence;
 - (ii) by adding the following new paragraph –
 - (k) an offer or issue of securities by an insurer to persons residing outside Mauritius.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 7 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Chairperson, after clause 15 (*New Second and Third Schedules added to principal Act*), I move that there be a new clause 16 (*Consequential amendment*), and that the existing clause 16 be renumbered clause 17 accordingly.

New clause 16 – Consequential amendment.

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

“16. Consequential amendment

The National Payment Systems Act 2018 is amended, in subsection (3) –

- (a) in subsection (1)(b), by deleting the words “the Central Depository & Settlement Co. Ltd under the Securities (Central Depository, Clearing and Settlement) Act” and replacing them by the words “an Official Clearing and Settlement Facility under the Securities Act”;
- (b) in subsection (2), by deleting the words “the Central Depository & Settlement Co. Ltd under the Securities (Central Depository, Clearing and Settlement) Act” and replacing them by the words “an Official Clearing and Settlement Facility under the Securities Act”.

New Clause 16 read a second time and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 16 renumbered 17 accordingly.

Clause 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Schedule was agreed to.

The title and the enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Securities (Amendment) Bill (No. IX of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

PUBLIC BILL*Second Reading***THE MAURITIUS EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES COUNCIL BILL****(NO. VIII OF 2021)**

(3.08 p.m.)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with much enthusiasm that I wish to share my perspectives on a subject matter of utmost importance for the future of our economy and our country.

As we would all reckon, in this new era of high Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity, world economies are actively looking for sustainable solutions to socio-economic challenges through the adoption of technology across all spheres. In that pursuit for enhanced economic performance and excellence, Mauritius has relentlessly endeavoured to embrace the latest technologies and their applications to the local context, through diverse initiatives over the past decades. These accomplishments have put Mauritius on the world map of Global Innovation and Technology and have made us a reference and a leading player in the world.

With this in mind, this Government is constantly investing in new strategies to take our ICT sector to even new heights. We are pursuing a journey that started in the early 2000's and it is important to mention here, the visionary role and contribution of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who laid the foundation of the ICT sector and gave it the necessary thrust on its development path.

After being the driving force behind the creation of the Ebène Cybercity, Sir Anerood Jugnauth created in 2014 a dedicated Ministry where the portfolio of innovation was added to ICT, with the vision that innovation would give the necessary impetus to harness the potential of the ICT sector, for making Mauritius a high-income and inclusive economy.

M. le président, ce n'était pas le fruit d'un hasard que l'actuel chef du Gouvernement fut le Premier ministre responsable du portefeuille de l'Innovation en décembre 2014. Cela démontre l'engagement du Gouvernement de donner à l'innovation sa lettre de noblesse et d'en faire le moyen par excellence pour mettre le pays sur la voie du progrès soutenu.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are standing at a time where we need the most creative out-of-the-box thinkers, the most inventive agents of change; people with ambition and big ideas to help us disrupt, transform and solve big challenges of our time. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic storming over the world is a stark reminder of the crucial role played by innovative and emerging technologies to ride out the disruption caused in key areas such as education, commerce, health sectors, entertainment, just to mention a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, It is against this backdrop that I am humbled and privileged today to champion as Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill in this august Assembly. And, here, I would like to quote the former President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln, I quote –

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

And we are creating tomorrow today!

The future, Mr Speaker, Sir, will, without any doubt, be driven by innovation and technology as we embrace the fourth industrial revolution. A future where we will see the prevalent exploit in every sphere of our life and emerging technologies as, for example, artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data, augmented and virtual reality, robotics, internet of things, blockchain, 3-D printing, digital currency, 5G, amongst others.

I am comforted and extremely confident that the forthcoming Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council will play a pivotal role in creating the right ecosystem for emerging technologies to become the driver of sustainable socio-economic growth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the pressing and urgent need to integrate the use of emerging technologies are more than ever crucial for our economic resilience and upgrading of people’s standard of living in the medium to long term.

As a nation, we need to embrace these emerging technologies and tap their potentials to address the challenges as well as to create new areas of gainful economic activities. Emerging technologies, globally, are evolving at a much faster pace than the industry itself predicted.

Allow me to share some examples, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let’s take the case of Rwanda, one of the African countries, which is really in the forefront of adoption of emerging technologies. In Rwanda, there is a major challenge in the delivery of blood from the blood

bank to hospitals located in rural areas; it is due because of the mountainous topography of the country and the bad state of the roads outside the capital. On average, a trip for the delivery of blood to rural hospitals by normal routes takes approximately 4 hours. And this time lag poses a life-threatening situation for patients, especially in cases of emergency.

But now with the adoption of emerging technologies, today Rwanda is delivering blood by drone technology to those hospitals. Blood is being transported by drones from the blood bank and being delivered to those rural hospitals in Rwanda and that is done in 15 minutes only. Here, the House will appreciate how emerging technologies are helping to save lives.

Another example, Mr Speaker, Sir, is in Singapore. In order to enforce social distancing among the population since the COVID -19 pandemic, the Government has deployed one of the most advanced commercial robots. It is a robot in the form of a dog named Spot. “Spot” is shown roaming around in public areas, in the parks and giving advice to joggers and cyclists to stand one meter apart. It has been created by an American company as a test to show how machines and artificial intelligence could help reduce human contact in public spaces as some Governments begin to ease social restrictions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are living in the fourth industrial revolution. Industries 4.0 fundamentals and dynamics are much at play in different countries worldwide, and each one of them has adopted and adapted, in their own unique and advantageous way, emerging technologies into their everyday workflows.

Automation and Robotics are transforming the manufacturing industry in a more thriving manner. The drone technology coupled with Big Data Analytics and AI are bringing unparalleled and unprecedented benefits to Agriculture, Construction and Healthcare sectors around the globe. Organisations are using the Internet of Things (IoT) and are instantly capturing valuable data, to improve efficiency across their operations and their respective value chains, thus enhancing the experience and satisfaction for consumers at large.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our objective of establishing the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council, is not only to harness the full potential of the ever-evolving technologies and platforms or to bridge the gaps of a fully established Industry 4.0 ecosystem, but what is important is to lay the foundation for Industry and Society 5.0 as it is the case in other countries such as Japan, Switzerland and Finland, where digital transformation is combined with creativity and human values to develop a sustainable society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to both leap-frog and step into the future, much faster than we did before. Time is of the essence if we want to play in the international league of advanced and developed countries. By channelling our serious engagements on emerging technologies through this proposed Council, we are laying the foundations for a brighter and innovative Mauritius, while establishing what will be a proud legacy for generations to come.

This Government, through the vision of our hon. Prime Minister, firmly believes that Mauritius will continue to shine as a leading digital country for decades to come and establish itself as a reference for other countries. Our Government will pursue all efforts in that direction.

We have also noted a visible and an increased interest from organisations getting trained on AI technologies and developing AI based solutions to be used within their respective organisations through the support of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council and Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) amongst others.

Robotic Process Automation, commonly known as RPA, is becoming a reality in different sectors, especially in the insurance and the Fintech sector. The emergence of technologies performing routine processes and providing predictive analysis, in collaboration with human experts, for quicker decision-making process, is becoming more and more common in organisations these days.

Last week, we saw the issuance of the “Robotic and Artificial Intelligence Enabled Advisory Services Rules” by the Financial Services Commission. The rules provide for a supportive regulatory framework for the promotion and the adoption of new and emerging technologies in the financial sector in Mauritius. This initiative of the FSC can only be strengthened and supported through an organisation dedicated to emerging technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another commonly adopted and accepted technology these days in various sectors is the Blockchain Technology. Blockchain Technology is allowing storage and exchange of sensitive data and transactions amongst stakeholders in the most cost-effective, immutable and secure manner, which means to say, with this technology it is tamper-proof, which gives an added comfort to organisations and individuals transacting online, using Blockchain. This innovative Technology is also making its way into Government Services like the Land Administration Valuation and Information Management System (LAVIMS) which is the database of Land and Properties, including deeds and valuation.

The LAVIMS is currently being revamped and would incorporate Blockchain Technology so as to eliminate any potential frauds in the land transactions and especially preserve the integrity of data.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Artificial Intelligence is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. Applications of AI include self-driving cars, chess-playing computers, chatbots, digital assistants, or simply using Google Map on your smartphones.

In order to prepare our next generation to adopt emerging technologies, my Ministry, through the National Computer Board, will start robotics initiation classes for our young ones at primary and secondary schools.

We firmly believe in coding at a tender age and exposure to emerging technologies as the basis for a brighter future for our country and for the years to come.

These initiatives will also kindle interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics as we call STEM subjects giving our children a solid base for their future careers in ICT and other related fields and to face the challenges of this brave new post-COVID World.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, our tertiary institutions are already offering degree courses in technology-related fields for example, *Université des Mascareignes* is running a Master's Degree in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, the Open University of Mauritius offers a Bachelor's Degree in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. The University of Technology Mauritius has a Master's Degree in Artificial Intelligence with Machine Learning and the University of Mauritius provides a Master's Degree in Artificial Intelligence.

Even students not in the mainstream tertiary education have the opportunity to follow courses on emerging technologies at Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd, for example, Diploma in Big Data Analytics and Diploma in Internet of Things among others.

Another application of AI is in gaming. Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, we see our children playing online games such as Fortnite, creating new worlds on Minecraft and gaming online. According to Gartner, the World's Leading Research and Advisory Company, the application of AI in the gaming industry across the globe, is valued more than USD300 billion. Opportunities are wide open for us in Mauritius to exploit the gaming industry with the developments occurring in emerging technologies including AI.

M. le président, la révolution de la connectivité dans le monde de demain, c'est bien sûr la 5G. C'est la 5ème génération du standard pour la téléphonie mobile, elle succède à la 3G et à la 4G. Comme prévu dans le manifeste électoral de ce gouvernement, nous sommes à l'aube du déploiement de la 5G à Maurice. L'ICTA a récemment octroyé les permis d'opération de la 5G aux opérateurs *Telecom* du pays afin qu'ils puissent exploiter pleinement cette nouvelle technologie qui nous permettra d'assister à un véritable boom technologique.

Encore une fois, M. le président, nous avons démontré que nous ne sommes pas un gouvernement qui se cantonne à des promesses creuses et vaines, mais nous nous engageons à des actions concrètes avec des objectifs définis, menant à des résultats probants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the 5G Technology, we must look at the adoption curve, by being one of the earlier countries to be enabled with 5G, and the full benefits will grow over time, we will see the creation of a smarter, safer and more sustainable, more competitive country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has achieved major milestone as part of this Government Programme in relation to our ICT Strategy. Last week, in the presence of the hon. Prime Minister, the first Mauritian Nano satellite MIR-SAT1 was deployed in orbit, which is without doubt a historical technological feat and a testimony of the creativity and capability of our local scientists and engineers.

N'en déplaise à certains, M. le président, notre petite île se permet de jouer dans la cour des grands. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are joining the league of big nations. Just a few months ago, in January 2021, the US Secretary of State approved the setting up of a Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies. Just a couple of months! With the setting up of this new Council, we can say that Mauritius is on the right path and not far behind big countries like the United States.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, in the Budget Speech 2018-2019, it has been announced that a Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council would be set up to spearhead AI related activities and advise Government on the way forward for development of AI in Mauritius. While the setting up of the Mauritius AI Council, the discussion was happening; the challenges inherent in the adoption of emerging technologies become apparent. This prompted Government to enlarge the Mandate of the Council through this Bill so as to encompass all emerging technologies and remain at the forefront of developments.

The Bill, once enacted, shall give the Council the Mandate to accompany Government in its digitalisation journey. The Council will be empowered to make recommendations on how to maximise the societal benefits of all these technologies as well as digital and data driven-technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to dwell over the salient provisions of the Bill. Clause 4 of the Bill provides that –

“The objects of the Council shall be to –

- (a) advise the Government on the formulation of national policies and strategies in emerging technologies;
- (b) promote the application of emerging technologies in line with national, economic and social objectives;
- (c) advise the Government on matters related to emerging technologies with respect to their adoption, use, development, harnessing, value and wealth creation, research and innovation and capacity building;
- (d) advise on the establishment and sustainability of an appropriate ecosystem in the field of emerging technologies and other emerging technologies; and
- (e) facilitate and coordinate the implementation of ready-made emerging technologies solutions in Mauritius to boost the national economy.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it can be appreciated, a holistic and inclusive approach is being adopted in the establishment of the Council. Ranging from having an advisory function to promoting and coordinating emerging technologies related activities, the Council will have an all-encompassing role so that there is no operational vacuum to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the achievement of the stated objects.

In order for the Council to meet its objectives, Clause 5 provides for the Council to act as a Centre of Excellence for emerging technologies, and to be responsible for the rationalisation and coordination of strategies of Government in relation to the adoption of emerging technologies. The Centre of Excellence will provide training schemes and training for professionals to master emerging technologies as well as advisory services to firms and companies on how best to tap into selected emerging technologies for growth and expansion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Council also caters for the creation of links amongst different stakeholders of the knowledge economy in the country as well as with other regional and counterpart international institutions. It will also adopt such policies that will facilitate start-ups and support researchers with the participation of the private sector towards the development of businesses adopting emerging technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 7 of the Bill specifies the membership of the Council. It has been ensured to have on board people with extensive experience and expertise in the field of emerging technologies. Thus, membership of the Council comprises representatives of relevant sectors from both private and the public sector. A representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of industrial development will also form part of the Council to ensure the link with the SME's and the industry. A representative from the Attorney General's Office also forms part of the Council to address novel and complex legal matters related to the emerging technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the introduction of the digital Rupee, crypto currency, the Bank of Mauritius will be engaging in emerging technologies and thus become a partner of the Council with the emerging technologies ecosystem. The Bank of Mauritius will be eventually called upon to join the membership of the Council in accordance with Clause 77. The Bill at Clause 10 provides for the Council to be headed by an Executive Director who shall be the Chief Executive Officer. The permanent staff of the Council will be responsible for the technology reviews, idea generation analysis, just to mention a few. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Council will be empowered to establish other specialists sub-Committees deemed necessary in assisting in fulfilling its objectives.

I have consulted the Association to have their views on the need of the Bill and I am pleased to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that both the Mauritius Information Technology Industry Association (MITIA) and the Outsourcing and Telecommunications Association of Mauritius (OTAM) have commended the Bill and have expressed their full support to this initiative, which comes at the right time to give a boost to Mauritius, and especially on its recovery path following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I am confident that the Members of this august Assembly will appreciate the importance and the pertinence of this Bill. The subject which is being debated today is beyond politics. We are fully aware of the pertinence and importance of embracing the latest and emerging technologies across all sectors of the economy and

society in order to ignite the different growth vectors of our country. In this era of fast technological evolution and where change is the only constant, Mauritius should not miss this important and historic step into building its sustainable future to enter the league of advanced nations.

Time has come for us to forge our way ahead by constituting a platform to leverage and unleash the potential of emerging technologies for the benefit of our economy and the quality of life of our people. It is our responsibility for the future, for the next generation and I am sure that they will be thankful that we are taking this step today.

With these words, I commend the Bill to the House. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

(3:38 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First, let me point out that we are not against the emerging technologies and we believe it is the way forward for a modern and digital Mauritius. But, what we are against, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a duplication of Council, a waste of resources that emerged into creating another parastatal body while we do have a settled Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the Bill and I have compared the Bill to the one of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council; they are almost similar.

I will elaborate today on three points regarding the Bill and my first point is the budget allocation of the new Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council. If I start from Budget 2020-2021, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development announced at paragraph 113, and I quote –

“The world is changing and we can no longer wait for others to drive innovation for us nor we can wait for them to react to global changes”.

We fully agree that we need to adapt to the new world. The Cote d’Or Data Technology Park was launched *première pierre* during the injury time of the previous financial year and it was in late May.

Mr Speaker, Sir, emerging technologies is novel and has deep impact on the society and the economy. It is related to the fourth industrial revolution with technologies like robotic, artificial intelligence, internet of things and block chain, Mr Speaker, Sir. In Budget 2021-2022, the hon. Minister said that research is a key to knowledge, industry and that the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council will have a broader mandate for fostering research and innovation. He mentioned the word research as well as innovation.

We also note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there was a budget of Rs125 m. that has been earmarked for Ministries to finance research project, again, in the property field. I cannot see any specific budget for the operation and running costs of the Council in the Estimates, Mr Speaker, Sir, unless I have missed something. There have been some beautiful words like block chain, artificial intelligence, internet of things that has been announced under the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and I am only afraid that it was announced as in the previous Budget, it will be only *effet d'annonce*, *M. le président*.

In fact, there is one amount that has been mentioned this year, it is Rs2 m. and it is only applicable for payment of consultancy fees. What it means is that the Council will not be fully operational this year and it is still under setting up and Government is investing Rs2 m. only to pay the Consultants! I hope there will be transparency in appointing the right Consultant to advise or set up the Council properly. You know, in 2018, there was already a report on Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Strategy and we heard nothing about the recommendation and the implementation of the said report.

Coming back to consultation, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the Minister to tell us whether he had consultation with local players involved in emerging technology before he came to the House with the Bill. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid that there has been no consultation at all with the local players and that this Bill will be only *pour la galerie*, no budget, no running costs, no operation costs until the Bill is on the table of the National assembly this year.

It defeats the purpose and duplicates the work of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council. This is my humble opinion.

My second point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is again about the duplication of objective and functions of the Council. I have gone through the two Acts and if you read the objective and functions of both Councils, we tend to understand that both will have the same function in research, innovation and emerging technology.

Let me give you some examples, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we take the Bill of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill, object of Council, paragraph 4(c), when we talk about advise Government on wealth creation, research and innovation and capacity building and we compare to the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, under object of the Council, paragraph 4, item (b), you see the same thing – research, innovation and entrepreneurial culture. You can go further down on paragraph (c) in the Emerging Technologies, we talk about create strategic link between research and development and you find the same thing on paragraph 5(a), when we talk about developing every five-year a national strategy for research and development.

So, to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is only a duplication of duty, a duplication of Council. This is where we fail to understand why we are now voting to have another Council, another parastatal body with a full-fledged structure, a Chairperson, an Executive Director and members, and they are going to be paid from public funds, Mr Speaker, Sir. We already have the Mauritius Research Innovation Council set up and they only had to extend the function to empower emerging technologies, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Secondly, we are of the view that for the appointment of the Executive Director, the Council must call for an open vacancy, not appoint another blue-eyed boy as Director; members of the Council must be professional in the sector and not political agents, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I have done some research work about what is going on in Singapore as far as emerging technologies are concerned. I have noted that the Minister mentioned about the robots and all. I can go further down in that Singapore had four predictions that they have established, and this is very comfortable; they comfort the whole population on how technologies are going to help the country into facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, in Mauritius, we are still at the stage of appointing a Consultant to launch the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, there is duplication of functions and the objectives in the Council. We have to note that this Ministry has under its responsibilities various organisations, namely the State Informatics Ltd., the National Computer Board, ICTA and IBA. What I propose, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to see what they are doing in Singapore; they had the Government Technology Agency which has everything under one whole body. I know that in Mauritius, we sometimes talk about putting all our IT sectors innovation under one

roof. I believe this is also the way forward, that we can put everything under one roof to have more synergies between our councils and organisations.

Another suggestion, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the fact that this Council is going to be governed by a parastatal body; we have the contribution of the private sector and this would be a valuable support in emerging technology. In many countries, the university has a faculty of emerging technology; we could also create a faculty under the University of Mauritius or even under the University of Technology for research and innovation. This will definitely benefit from the input of the private sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, and, this will enable our youth to get involved in the emerging technology sector.

My third and last point is about the Government's failure in the digital Mauritius. We all agree that we need to adapt; I have said it at the beginning of my speech. We all agree that there are lots of technological changes in a very short amount of time and businesses have to adapt for their survival or development. Eventually, adopting new technologies will provide competitive advantage to company, avoid possible extinction and prevent financial loss.

I had a look at the Digital Mauritius 2030 Strategic Plan. First thing I have noted in the introduction letter of the Prime Minister is that there will be the setting up of the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council. Meanwhile, we had the creation of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, and today, the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council, but no Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council as announced previously unless it has been renamed.

Since 2014, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have four Ministers of ICT. Again, in 2021 there has been a strategic decision for period 2021-2024, as announced in the Budget. Government is proposing to accelerate the digital transformation in Government, whereas the Mauritius Digital Agency to leave the digital transformation of Ministries and Departments is not fully operational. The Government is proposing to encourage interaction of citizens with Government through user-friendly public e-services, whereas no scheme for development of innovative solution has been developed.

Government is proposing the transition of Mauritius into an innovation driven nation through research and adoption of emerging technologies, whereas today we are setting up a Council with similar objective and functions as the other Council. The Government propose to strengthen cyber security, whereas the introduction of the Cybercrime Bill is still outstanding.

I recall and remind the House that, in 2016, the then Prime Minister, Minister of Finance said: “ICT and innovation: the next backbone of next phase of development.” This was said in 2016 and now we are in 2021, it is more than five years, Mr Speaker, Sir, and it is still not fully implemented.

To conclude, we need the development of new applications that will help this sector to emerge and grow. We really need to foster and build a mindset that will promote this industry. We should not create several councils and parastatal bodies to duplicate objectives and functions and waste public funds. In 2020, the FSC published a consultation paper about Robotic and Artificial Intelligence, and the minimum unimpaired stated capital of an applicant is Rs600,000. There has been a Press article, where professionals gave their views on the consultation paper, and I can quote from it –

“Les experts du secteur parlent d’une décision irréfléchie qui va tuer le secteur avant même son démarrage.”

This is how this Government is encouraging emerging technologies when we impose a high unimpaired capital of Rs600,000, in foreign currency, *s’il vous plait* and an insurance of Rs2 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are here today debating on emerging technologies in this House, but outside people are still queuing in front of Cash Office of the Government; you go at the community division at all municipalities, it is the end of the financial year, everyone is queuing. So, I believe that we have failed somewhere in the application of technologies for a modern Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given my views. I do hope that the Minister will avoid wasting public funds and that we will find our way in emerging technology for a digital and modern Mauritius. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. The floor is for hon. Mrs Mayotte.

(3.51 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président, de m’accorder ces quelques minutes pour m’exprimer sur le *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill*.

M. le président, l’évolution fulgurante des technologies depuis 25 ans a été plus que bénéfique pour nous à bien des égards. Les technologies apportent des transformations

rapides et récurrentes dans divers secteurs et le monde du travail, la santé, le transport, la communication, l'environnement et les énergies renouvelables, la sécurité, et j'en passe, en bénéficient pleinement.

M. le président, dans les années 60, le monde découvrait l'ordinateur et ses cartes perforées. Dans les années 80, l'ordinateur devenait plus accessible. Dans les années 90, nous découvrons pleinement les joies de la téléphonie mobile nous permettant d'être en liaison permanente où que nous soyons. Et, dans la même période, l'ordinateur affirmait sa place dans les foyers. Internet arrivait alors avec des sites internet. Pendant longtemps, les technologies étaient au service de l'homme pour effectuer des calculs ou des actions que l'homme ne pouvait pas faire lui-même. Depuis internet, les technologies ont également une vocation de communication. Cette notion de communication est devenue toute aussi présente. La technologie, telle qu'on la considère actuellement, renoue avec des aspects de la technologie, telle qu'elle s'est construite au XVII^e siècle.

Pour aller vite, la technologie est née par une philosophie de la connaissance, une approche scientifique des savoirs qui s'est déportée à la fin du 18^e siècle vers les métiers puis l'industrie et qui renoue actuellement avec son sens général dans ce moment où précisément la philosophie cognitive cherche à développer des structures d'élaboration de la connaissance.

Permettez-moi de citer les noms de quelques hommes qui ont contribué à la construction de connaissances scientifiques autour du terme *tecnologia*. Il y a d'abord dans les années 1500, Pierre de La Ramée (Ramus), professeur disparu lors de la Saint-Barthélemy. Puis on bascule dans l'espace allemand et là notamment dans le milieu des réformés, le premier à retravailler en profondeur le concept, c'est Johann Heinrich Alsted, professeur de théologie et de philosophie à Herborn et dans l'actuel Est, puis Alba Lulia, en Roumanie. Alsted va profondément influencer la philosophie allemande et la philosophie européenne jusqu'à Leibniz et Wolff. Et puis il y a eu, entre autres, pour élève le grand pédagogue John Comenius. Et dans son *Encyclopaedia Cursus Philosophici*, en 7 volumes, publié à partir de 1630, il pose les bases cognitive de la philosophie allemande, en particulier, et européenne en général, c'est le premier à donner une théorie de la technologie.

Alors si on remonte un peu le temps dans ces interconnexions, on a souvent du mal à se positionner car ces technologies génèrent des rencontres nouvelles et inattendues. Et grâce à Internet et notamment grâce aux réseaux sociaux, nous sommes en train d'assister à une révolution technologique qui va nous proposer de relier toutes nos technologies entre elles

pour toujours plus de souplesse et de facilité. La prise de conscience est peut-être difficile car nous avons été éduqué à utiliser les outils les uns après les autres alors que bientôt nous allons devoir les utiliser ensemble; ils seront intimement liés.

M. le président, dans un monde en mutation rapide, l'évolution des Sciences et de la technologie est sans précédent. Les technologies émergentes en sont déjà à un stade bien avancé et commence à devenir largement accessible. De plus, avec le phénomène dit de la convergence NBIC, c'est-à-dire la nanotechnologie, biotechnologie, informatique et sciences cognitives. Nous sommes donc en train d'assister à cette ouverture, à de nouvelles perspectives d'utilisation. Cela étant l'utilisation de ces technologies visant essentiellement à améliorer la vie humaine ne sera que bénéfique pour chaque citoyen mauricien.

Selon l'*Economic Development Board*, l'industrie des TIC est un moteur essentiel de l'économie mauricienne avec une contribution de plus de 5.6% au PIB. Elle emploie plus de 24,000 personnes avec plus de 800 entreprises opérant des activités relatives aux TIC. Le pays possède l'un des écosystèmes technologique les plus riches d'Afrique qui se nourrit d'innovation et de collaboration entre tous les secteurs. L'industrie est dynamique et s'étend des start-ups aux multinationales dans divers segments tels que le commerce électronique, les services numériques, le support technique et le développement d'applications entre autres. Pourtant, cet univers nouveau est souvent perçu à la fois par un sentiment de dépassement, d'incontrôlabilité et donc de peur. Et en même temps par un sentiment d'excitation, vis-à-vis de toutes ces possibilités qui s'offrent à nous.

M. le président, vu la rapidité des changements en matière de développement et d'adaptation des technologies émergentes et numériques, l'île Maurice est appelée à évoluer. J'imagine, M. le président, que vous avez un petit peu plus de 35 ans, n'est-ce pas?

Mr Speaker: Merci pour le compliment!

Mrs Mayotte: Alors, M. le président, vous devez sûrement vous souvenir de la procédure et du coût d'un appel longue-distance avant l'arrivée de Skype, de FaceTime, de WhatsApp. Vous vous rappellerez également qu'avant le GPS et Google Maps comment nous utilisons notre mémoire comme seul moyen pour arriver à notre destination. Et ces dernières innovations s'inscrivent dans le cadre plus large des bouleversements liés à la 4^e révolution industrielle. Et des avancées dans le domaine de la numérisation, de la robotique et de l'intelligence artificielle qui transforment notre manière de vivre. Qui aurait imaginé qu'un

jour ce petit point dans l'océan Indien qu'est la République de l'île Maurice, aurait lancé un 03 juin 2021 un nano-satellite depuis le centre spatial de la NASA en Floride.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, de féliciter le ministre de l'Information et des technologies, de la communication et de l'innovation qui avec le soutien indéfectible de notre Premier ministre, a lancé ce premier nano-satellite mauricien.

Ce fut pour moi, comme beaucoup d'autres compatriotes, un moment fort en émotion. Nous avons tous suivi ce lancement en direct d'ailleurs.

Cependant si ces technologies émergentes améliorent notre façon de communiquer, de produire et de transporter les biens, de nous divertir et de nous informer, elle s'accompagne néanmoins d'un certain nombre de préoccupations essentielles. Et là permettez-moi, M. le président, d'ouvrir une petite parenthèse.

Les récits quotidiens sur les violations de la vie privée, des insultes gratuites, les attaques sexistes ainsi que le harcèlement et les discours de haine sur les réseaux sociaux, tout cela peuvent saper la confiance dans certaines de ces technologies émergentes. Aujourd'hui, il est devenu trop facile de s'abriter derrière un écran d'ordinateur, de lancer des missiles et mettre KO quelqu'un ou alors ceux que l'on n'aime pas.

Insulte, diffamation, humiliation, agression, propos racistes, sexiste, homophobe, complotiste, négationniste, en fait, la liste est longue, de contenus indésirables présents sur la toile et qui s'agrandit de jour en jour, malheureusement. Peu importe la forme finalement, vidéo, audio, images, texte, message, ce qui dérange, c'est le fond et la facilité qu'ont les internautes à accéder à ces publications.

Si tout le monde s'accorde sur le besoin de freiner la prolifération des contenus haineux de ces *fake news* sur Internet, à ce jour, M. le président, trop peu de solutions concrètes sont mises en place pour contrer ce phénomène inquiétant. Et c'est là que je lance un SOS à notre ministre des TIC.

M. le président, en 1995 lorsqu'il créa *Classmates.com* une plate-forme en ligne simple, ayant pour objectif d'aider les utilisateurs à retrouver leurs amis d'école, l'ingénieur américain Randy Conrads était loin d'imaginer qu'il allait changer l'histoire du web, et plus largement, celle de notre société en inventant le premier réseau social du monde. La base du projet, mettre en relation des personnes physiques sur un espace de dialogue virtuel. C'était un pari réussi et plus de 20 ans plus tard selon une étude de *We Are Social*, plus de 3 milliards de personnes soit environ 40% de la population mondiale utilisent un ou plusieurs réseaux

sociaux pour communiquer, se divertir ainsi que s'informer. En tête du peloton, bien sûr, il y a Facebook avec 2,2 milliards d'utilisateurs, suivi de YouTube, WhatsApp et Instagram qui ont dépassé la barre des 1 milliards de personnes actives sur leurs réseaux.

La toile est un espace ouvert sur lequel tout se commente, se partage, se sait, s'amplifie, se multiplie, se note, s'anonymise, se généralise et se repartage à nouveau de boucles en boucles, de répétition en répétition, la masse d'information créée par les internautes est telle que créer du contenu et ne pas passer inaperçu sur le web est devenu une obsession pour beaucoup de marques, d'institutions, de personnalités qui se noient dans ce flot constant de surinformations, de mauvaises informations et de mauvaise communication.

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, j'insiste et je le dis haut et fort, ce projet de loi sur les technologies émergentes est plus qu'essentiel. Le *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill* aura toute son importance dans sa mission de Libconseiller le gouvernement sur la formulation de politique et les stratégies nationales concernant les technologies émergentes, promouvoir l'application des technologies émergentes conformément aux objectifs nationaux, économiques et sociaux. Conseiller le gouvernement sur les questions liées aux technologies émergentes, en ce qui concerne leur adoption, leur utilisation, leur développement, leur exploitation, la création de valeur et de richesse, la recherche et l'innovation et le renforcement des capacités. Également donner conseil sur la création et la durabilité d'un écosystème approprié dans le domaine des technologies émergentes et faciliter et coordonner la mise en œuvre de solutions technologiques émergentes.

Ce conseil agira en tant que centre d'excellence pour les technologies émergentes, rationalisera et coordonnera les stratégies du gouvernement pour la promotion et l'adoption des technologies émergentes et facilitera la collaboration avec d'autres personnes et l'échange d'idées et de connaissance. Ce conseil, ce projet de loi donnera la possibilité de créer des liens stratégiques entre la recherche et le développement, l'innovation, la propriété intellectuelle et d'autres composants de l'économie, de la connaissance dans le domaine spécifique des technologies émergentes.

Et si vous permettez, M. le président, pour terminer, je voudrais justement ouvrir une petite parenthèse en ce qui concerne la propriété intellectuelle. Le droit d'auteur et la technologie ont une histoire longue et étroitement liée au cours de laquelle les deux ont ressenti leur influence l'un sur l'autre. Les droits exclusifs de reproduction et de distribution accordés aux créateurs d'œuvres artistiques et littéraires d'aujourd'hui sont très différents de

ce qu'ils étaient il y a 500 ans lorsque cette relation a commencé. La convention de Berne reste d'ailleurs l'accord international le plus important sur le droit d'auteur et la plupart des lois et des instruments internationaux se sont développés en référence à elle.

Après l'ère de l'imprimerie, les prochaines technologies majeures pour influencer le droit d'auteur étaient les nouvelles technologies d'enregistrement et de diffusion apportant avec eux des révolutions qui ont forcé des changements majeurs dans la législation sur le droit d'auteur dans ses efforts pour lutter contre la violation. Et l'ère numérique actuelle pose le plus grand défi auquel la législation sur le droit d'auteur a dû faire face dans son histoire avec une technologie permettant des violations du droit d'auteur d'une ampleur dépassant de loin toutes les autres périodes combinées.

De nombreuses lois et litiges ont marquées le chemin menant à la situation actuelle avec de nombreux recours s'avérant inefficaces pour inverser l'ampleur de la violation du droit d'auteur. Et là, je vous parle d'une situation mondiale. Je voudrais apporter cette petite suggestion, une petite réflexion en disant qu'il serait peut-être temps que l'industrie du droit d'auteur pense autrement, essaie de ne plus lutter contre les nouvelles technologies et réalise que sa survie pourrait dépendre de la recherche de nouveaux modèles commerciaux intégrant de nouvelles technologies.

M. le président, pour conclure, je dirais que nous vivons une époque singulière dans un monde en pleine mutation et les technologies émergentes peuvent aider à fixer notre cap et le *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill* va réglementer, sécuriser, surveiller, moderniser et faire évoluer les technologies pour accompagner la population mauricienne dans son immersion personnelle dans le monde du digital et faire de l'île Maurice une île intelligente. C'est cela la vision de notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth et du gouvernement.

J'en ai fini, M. le président. Je vous remercie.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ms Jutton, the floor is yours.

(4:07 p.m.)

Ms T. Jutton (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to congratulate the hon. Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation under the visionary leadership of our hon. Prime Minister for crafting such a comprehensive piece of legislation.

We are currently in an era fuelled by sweeping technology changes thrusting forward the fourth industrial revolution. This has led to the World Economic Forum, developing strategic intelligence capabilities to assess the complex forces driving transformational change across the globe. The unprecedented impact of emerging technologies calls for leaders to rethink their roles. New generation of leaders become ready to take on the new challenges and crafting public policies that govern technology access and ability to apply responsibility and purpose is key.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me here, again, to commend the vision of our hon. Prime Minister *qui épouse aussi la vision de Sir Anerood Jugnauth*, vision 2030 which was that of transforming the country into a high income and inclusive economy. The vision of the Ministry of ICT is exactly to make Mauritius a cyber-island and an ICT leader in the region. And for this Government, it is action and resource that count as compared to others for whom *rezilta lor rezilta* is just a mere tag line.

The children today learn how to use and apply technology faster than their fathers and mothers. This new generation called digital natives has a thirst for new technology as they seem to never have got enough of it. It is therefore in this very endeavour to quench this thirst that manufacturers are coming up with new gadgets at an even faster pace.

We may not realise it but emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, big data, quantum technology, robotics, autonomous systems, the Internet of Things, blockchain, natural language processing to name but a few are already having an impact on our daily lives without us even being conscious of it. In the special report of November 2020, the World Economic Forum even highlights that the top emerging technologies for the years to come will be groundbreaking for the human civilisation.

Allow me to enumerate just a few of them. Virtual patients, Mr Speaker, Sir, what if I tell you that you do not need to go to the clinic for your next health test and that by staying in the comfort of your lofty residence, you can provide your blood sample and get the result promptly after. It is amazing to know that a virtual structure of your body with the organs can be reconstructed and algorithms used to give out high resolution imaging where the organs behave as real ones. Such simulations are a reality in some countries for clinical testing in lieu of using human beings. Just imagine if testing for the Corona Virus vaccines could have been done on virtual patients or digital replicas, the development of the vaccines would have

been today much faster and the world would not have been witnessing this chaotic and an unwarranted human devastation.

The panacea, Mr Speaker, Sir, lies verily in research and emerging technologies. I am pretty sure that with emerging technologies we will have clinics conducting virtual testing trials to develop new therapies and antidotes. We have today intelligent, driverless cars which are a reality in Japan, we all watched the military officer flying over the sea during a military exercise. So, should we not give more time and investment to these causes, real causes which can help humanity and Mother Nature to be healed in progress rather than destroyed?

As hon. Mayotte mentioned, we were all very happy and still very proud of the deployment of Mauritius first Nano satellite. I firmly believe that we will set the base for other Small Island Developing States to follow suit. Likewise, there is a need to develop electric driven transports in the aviation sector. This will even help us reduce our carbon footprint as well as saving fossil fuels. As a young Parliamentarian, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that if investments are channelled in the right sector, then it will be a huge opportunity to tap in for creating new jobs, setting out the stepping stone for the creation of a technological hub in Mauritius in the region, establishing research and development corporations, creating centres of excellence where youth, both local and international, can benefit.

Our Government, through the inspired leadership of our Prime Minister, will definitely assist us to drive this change in industry 4.0. This proposed Council will accelerate digital innovation by skilling up this Government's efforts.

The main objectives, which consist, *inter alia*, of advising the Government on the formulation, adoption and promotion of national policies and strategies will not only promote the latest technology but will also, present them to stakeholders. It is not always easy to implement them at the workplace. For instance, impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, many traditional businesses have hinged towards hybrid, online, offline models to engage in transact with the consumers.

Companies also want to be fully engaged in the fourth industrial revolution and this cannot happen without the integration of the latest technology in our daily routine. So we need to rethink the business model and if a company wishes to leverage on emerging technologies and has several questions such as which technology to go for, where to get the technology, how much it will cost, how to get the support, etc. The propose council will support the identification and implementation of the emerging technologies. We must

continuously search for technology driven solutions that can have a beneficial impact on our economic growth while transforming our nation into a hub for digital innovation.

As the hon. Minister Balgobin announced, 5G will now play a pivotal role in creating the new digital ecosystem. We all know that we will not achieve the desired success by just providing the infrastructure. This is why we need to strengthen the collaboration between solution providers, service providers, and end users. This is why again it is so important to have this Council.

I am also very happy to note that a large number of initiatives are involved in building capacity and attracting talent to this sector which is indeed a challenge and this reminds me, here, of the words of the hon. Prime Minister, who during the launch of the Digital Magazine had said –

“In the same vein, due attention is being given to addressing the skills mismatch and skills divide. My Government will leave no stone unturned when it comes to upskilling our youth. The plan to build a culture of innovation whilst laying the foundations for emerging technologies as drivers of socioeconomic growth and through the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in our education system, our technopreneurial spirit will take us to new frontiers.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, speaking of STEM and being a fervent gender advocate, I have, myself, in the past been leading research on the national level and how to encourage our young girls to embrace STEM. And allow me, here, to share a few of the results of one of the main studies I conducted while being a lecturer at the Open University of Mauritius and which offered valuable insights into what can boost our ICT sector by encouraging more girls, more women to embark in an ICT related job.

With women outnumbering men in our society and given the potential of girls to outperform boys in Computer Studies at school, there is no reason why the Mauritian IT sector should forego the affordability and availability of such resources. I am pleased to also inform the House that the reports from this study have been published and a conference was organised last year to disseminate the findings where the hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology was also present.

For instance, a few of the suggestions include sensitisation programmes to be carried out in schools by female role models, providing our girls a wider choice to take Computer Studies, and allowing Computer Studies to form part of the different subject combinations offered at school. Also, while organisations may have fewer women currently, they may introduce a kind of positive discrimination when promoting employees to higher posts by, for instance, having a quota for women. A women excellence award can also be organised at different levels including one at national level to acknowledge and reward women who excel in this sector.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, while highlighting the unlimited merits of Information Technology and the huge advantages it arouses in overall human and national development, one should not lose sight of the dark and obnoxious side of this technology, which when misused by unscrupulous, vile and dastard individuals causes untold damages to the reputation, dignity, and honour of innocent and defenceless people. Being trolled is one thing, however, being constantly targeted with built-up stories, fake, unfounded allegations with the clear and malicious intent of tarnishing the image and reputation, is tantamount to harassment, Mr Speaker, Sir. And making unauthorised use of pictures and clearly breaching the law by using telecommunications device to cause annoyance and disrepute is a serious offence punishable by law.

Oui, M. le président, je suis une de ces victimes de ces lâches sans visage, qui se cachent derrière l'anonymat qu'offre la nouvelle technologie pour calomnier des gens sans défense à travers des vidéos montées de toute pièce. Des vidéos qui ne contiennent rien que des faussetés avec l'unique objectif de nuire à ma réputation de femme et de politicienne. M. le président, nul membre de cette auguste Assemblée souhaiterait que leurs filles, que leurs sœurs, que leurs épouses, que leurs mères soient victimes de tels veuleries et d'humiliations de la part de ces mécréants, de mercenaires drapés dans une couardise si dégradante.

M. le président, j'interpelle ainsi les membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre, en particulier l'honorable Ms Anquetil et l'honorable Ms J. Bérenger, parce que je crois bien, M. le président, qu'en tant que femme ce qui nous unit restera plus fort que ce qui nous sépare. Et qu'au-dessus de nos différences, nous allons nous pencher à créer cet environnement sain pour qu'on puisse tous évoluer ensemble. M. le président, je ne comprends pas ...

Mr Speaker: You mentioned hon. Ms J. Bérenger ...

Ms Jutton : Malheureusement, le PMSD n'a pas de membres féminins mais tous les autres membres féminins - l'honorable Madame Navarre-Marie, honorable Madame Foo Kune-Bacha et tout le monde.

(Interruptions)

C'est bon !

M. le président, je ne comprends vraiment pas pourquoi cet acharnement contre moi ? Est-ce parce que je suis une femme politicienne qui passe pratiquement tout son temps à œuvrer pour les démunis de notre société et le bien-être de mes mandants ? M. le président, cela fait plusieurs mois que ces détracteurs patentés persistent dans leur bassesse en fabriquant de toute pièce des faussetés et des inventions totalement sans fondements. En tant que président du *Gender Caucus*, je vous interpelle aussi pour soutenir les femmes parlementaires de cette auguste Assemblée. Aujourd'hui c'est moi demain se pourrait être une de mes collègues.

M. le président, l'honneur d'une femme est ce qu'elle chérit le plus et j'en ai vu moi, M. le président, beaucoup de jeunes femmes qui à cause de certains sans scrupules utilisant justement les réseaux sociaux qui sont des plates-formes électroniques de prédilection pour ceux imprégnés de couardise qui se cachent derrière l'anonymat, porter atteinte à la dignité de ces femmes. Et ces dernières n'ont pas pu tenir le coup. Certaines victimes de ce genre d'harcèlements mentales se sont même suicidées. J'en connais M. le président, et c'est pourquoi d'ailleurs dans un récent passé j'ai moi-même mené toute une campagne sur la santé mentale évoquant ces sujets tabous tel la dépression, l'isolation et le suicide. Et j'ai même produit des court-métrages dessus avec la collaboration de la MFDC – la *Mauritius Film Development Corporation* et le ministère de la Santé et du bien-être. Et je me demande bien si certains ont même des quiétudes dessus. Pas plus tard qu'hier ils ont frappé encore, M. le président, déjà en l'espace de trois jours deux vidéos et plusieurs *posts* avec des contenus dégradants et dénigrants.

Et à l'heure que je vous parle, M. le président, ils font circuler sur les réseaux sociaux des vidéos remplies de veuleries et de mensonges. Ils sont peut-être en train de m'écouter maintenant et prêts à rebondir. On ne sait jusqu'à quel niveau de bassesse ils iront. Mais M. le président, ces mécréants ne mesurent peut-être pas les dégâts de leurs actes abominables avec tout cet acharnement pour me dénigrer.

Avec toute cette violence, verbale visuelle, mentale, on s'efforce à s'interroger si leur objectif est de mettre fin à ma carrière politique ou à ma vie même. M. le président, permettez-moi de dénoncer avec toutes mes forces et énergies, ces calomnies et ces mensonges abhorrant, allant jusqu'à créer des rencontres fictifs et des incidents au Citadelle Mall, lieu où nous, les *PPS*, travaillons sans répit, et c'est avec une profonde émotion dans l'âme et en pensant ma mère souffrante et face à ma conscience, M. le président, que je jure et affirme solennellement que tout ceux-ci dans ces vidéos diffamatoires sont faux, archi-faux est absolument faux.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, the choice of being a victim of circumstances or a victor lies in our hands, and I choose to transform my wounds into purpose and to help change things for others. This is where my power lies to help make a difference for others so that other young girls too do not become victims like me, so that mothers of other young girls like mine do not fear for their daughters and do not stop their daughters from joining politics, so that other capable young girls do not feel disgusted with politics. As a Member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I have added my voice to an online campaign against online abuse of women parliamentarians, and all women parliamentarians across the Commonwealth are coming together to tackle this issue and discuss legislature for appropriate support. As a Member on the Board of young parliamentarians of the IPU, I have also decried this as a matter of concern and nations will be coming together to discuss on the growing threats of cybercrimes, same for the Organization of Women Science for the Developing World (OWSD), of which I am member.

Warrior I was, warrior I am, warrior I will stay till my last breath, Mr Speaker, Sir. And allow me to end along these chosen words of Maya Angelou –

“You may write me down in history

With your bitter, twisted lies,

You may trod me in the very dirt

But still, like dust, I'll rise.(...)

Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head and lowered eyes?

Shoulders falling down like teardrops,

Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,
 You may cut me with your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulness,
 But still, like air, I'll rise."

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

(4.26 p.m.)

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Permettez-moi d'abord de regretter le fait que l'honorable Ms Jutton ait choisi cette Chambre pour venir régler ses comptes avec je ne sais pas vraiment qui, mais je me contenterais de parler sur le Bill et...

(Interruptions)

Ms Jutton: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Make sure it is a point of order.

Ms Jutton: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Go ahead!

Ms Jutton: I want to make a point of order and a point of clarification. *Je ne choisis pas cette Chambre pour régler des comptes. I was making a speech et je vous ai fait part de mon état d'âme, c'est tout.*

Mr Speaker: Okay, let us respect each other's speech.

Ms J. Bérenger: Le fait est que son *speech*...

Mr Speaker: We have the freedom of speech.

Ms J. Bérenger:... n'est absolument pas en rapport avec le *Bill* et donc je me contenterais de parler sur le *Bill* qui nous est présenté...

Mr Speaker: This has already happened in this, if I...

Ms J. Bérenger:... aujourd'hui et pour répondre quand même à l'honorable membre, je tiens à préciser que le MMM a toujours défendu...

Mr Speaker: Can you...

Ms J. Bérenger: ... la cause féminine...

Mr Speaker: Can you listen to me?

Ms J. Bérenger:... et à ce jour...

Mr Speaker: Can you listen to me? Can you listen to me? I am giving my ruling. In this House, on many occasions, Members have gone outside the Bill and this is a speech, you have to respect; we have the freedom of speech in this country. Thank you.

Ms J. Bérenger: M. le président, elle a quand même fait références aux noms des différents membres de l'opposition. Donc, permettez-moi quand même d'y répondre.

Mr Speaker: No, no. You can rebut, but you cannot prevent a Member from speaking!

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: I can't prevent since I am talking after her. So, I won't prevent anything.

Mr Speaker: So, are you making your speech towards me? Are you debating - am I the subject of the debate?

Ms J. Bérenger: No, absolutely not.

Mr Speaker: You promised me you would be talking on the Bill and you are talking on me!

Ms J. Bérenger: Yes, I am only asking...

Mr Speaker: Please! I know you are a young Parliamentarian, follow my advice!

Ms J. Bérenger: Yes, I...

Mr Speaker: Continue with your speech!

Ms J. Bérenger: I know also that it is a tradition to give an answer to the hon. Member who talked before me...

Mr Speaker: Come on, if you continue like this, I will suspend the Sitting for 45 minutes.

(Interruptions)

At 4.29 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.18 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

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

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) : Merci M. le président. Donc, pour faire suite au discours de l'honorable Jutton, je voudrais simplement insister sur le fait que le MMM défendra toujours la cause féminine, se tiendra toujours aux côtés des femmes, victimes de dénigrement et qui réclament la justice.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

Ms J. Bérenger : Et j'ai eu l'occasion de participer pour la première fois, il y a quelques jours ici même, à l'exercice du *Committee of Supply* et j'ai pu constater l'existence d'innombrables *Councils* en tout genre financés par l'argent des contribuables mais qui ne fonctionnent pas comme il le devrait. La plupart du temps parce que les outils, les moyens nécessaires pour atteindre les objectifs ne leur ont pas été attribués. L'exemple le plus flagrant qui me vient en tête est le *National Adoption Council* qui a coûté beaucoup d'argent aux contribuables mais qui n'a traité que d'un seul cas en une année alors que des centaines de parents attendent de pouvoir adopter un enfant. Notre crainte est donc que ce *Council* vienne s'ajouter à la longue liste des institutions qui ne sont pas fonctionnelles, que ce *Council* soit un gaspillage des fonds publics, que ce *Council* soit une raison de plus pour le Directeur de l'audit de rappeler que l'argent des contribuables n'est pas dépensé à bon escient.

Une raison de cette inquiétude peut s'illustrer d'abord par le fait que ce *Bill* ne fait aucune mention de standard, de benchmark ou d'objectif à atteindre et ce alors même que la section 5(g) nous dit qu'une des fonctions du *Council* est la suivante, *I quote* -

“Adopt and implement appropriate accountability standards in the various operations of the Council.”

But those accountability standards should be in the Bill itself. Parce que là, le gouvernement crée une nouvelle institution qui sera juge et partie à la fois, ce qui n'ont seulement n'est certainement pas un bon exemple pour la bonne gouvernance mais qui en plus ouvre la porte au laissez- aller et au manque d'*accountability*. Est-il donc réellement indispensable de créer cette nouvelle institution qui sera financée par l'argent des contribuables pour nous dit-on promouvoir les nouvelles technologies émergentes à travers l'innovation, la recherche, la propriété intellectuelle, etc., alors qu'il était possible de simplement étendre les responsabilités du *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council*, par exemple, afin d'y inclure également les nouvelles technologies.

L'honorable Armance, juste avant moi, a fait la comparaison entre les responsabilités de ces deux différents *Councils*, *the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council* et celui qu'on nous propose aujourd'hui et on voit clairement que c'est pratiquement la même chose. Il s'agit pratiquement des mêmes responsabilités. Donc, il est naturelle que l'on se demande aujourd'hui si la création de ce niveau *Council* est en réalité une aubaine pour, encore une fois, faire plaisir aux copains, aux copines et aux autres amis d'enfance étant donné que le *Bill* nous dit que c'est le ministre, lui-même, qui nomme le *Chairman* mais aussi quatre autres experts et que c'est lui également qui décide des *fees* et *allowances*. Est-ce que ces personnes nommées par le ministre auront droit à des voitures ? Est-ce que leur essence sera payée ? Est-ce qu'ils auront des maisons ? Tout est possible et ce sont les contribuables qui vont, encore une fois, passer à la caisse.

Et je vais vous donner peut-être, M. le président, une autre raison de croire en aberration entourant la création de cette nouvelle institution. L'honorable Mayotte juste avant a fait brièvement référence à la propriété intellectuelle mais sans rentrer dans les détails, sans développer le sujet. On peut lire à la section 5(c) qu'une des principales fonctions de ce nouveau *Council* est la suivante, *I quote* –

“To create strategic links between research and development, intellectual property in the specific area of emerging technologies in the private sector.”

Mais comment vouloir promouvoir les technologies émergentes à travers l'innovation et la propriété intellectuelle alors que la propriété intellectuelle, au niveau local, n'est pas protégée et reconnue sur le plan international. Je m'explique, oui, nous avons le *Patent Act* de 1975, l'*Industrial Designs and Trade Marks Act* de 2002, le *Copyright Act* de 2014 mais dans le *Mauritius National Export Strategy 2017-2021*, qui a été développé avec l'assistance du *International Trade Centre*, il est dit clairement aux pages 41 à 51 sous le titre *Market Entry Issues*. *I quote* -

“IP (Intellectual Property) protection mechanisms are weak, exposing the private sector to brand dilution and theft.

Mauritius is not signatory to the Madrid System, which provides a mechanism for businesses (through virtue of their country being a signatory) to register, manage and protect their marks worldwide across 92 contracting parties. The new IP Bill contains provisions for the accession of Mauritius to three of the main WIPO administered Treaties, namely the Madrid Protocol, The Hague Agreement and the

Patent Cooperation Treaty. Following adoption of the Bill by the National Assembly (tentatively scheduled for first quarter of 2017), Government plans to initiate action to accede to these treaties. Accession to the Madrid System would provide a convenient way for Mauritian firms to gain trademark protection in many countries simultaneously, rather than having to register their brand in each market separately. There is an urgent need to initiate a discussion on this important topic and seek a solution.

Additionally, IP registered in Mauritius is not recognized outside of Mauritius because the country has not merged its database with that of the World Intellectual Property Organization”

Donc, nous avons eu la note la plus sévère dans ce secteur qui est de l'innovation et pourtant, j'ai entendu le ministre dire qu'il souhaite *lay the Foundation for the Industry 5.0* mais nous savons que le *Intellectual Property Bill* aussi appelé le *Industrial Property Bill* qui a été voté en 2019 et qui devait mettre en place les nécessaires pour l'enregistrement des propriétés intellectuelles pour conseiller, pour aussi juger à travers d'un tribunal n'a jamais été promulgué, donc, n'est pas appliqué aujourd'hui.

Ajouter à cela, comme le dit le *National Export Strategy* lorsque nous avons rejoint cet organisation mondiale de la propriété intellectuelle, contrairement aux autres pays adhérents, nous n'avons donc pas entamé le processus de digitalisation de la documentation, autrement dit du *data base* relatif à la propriété intellectuelle auprès de l'organisation, ce qui a pour conséquence, que la propriété intellectuelle à Maurice n'est pas protégée et reconnue au niveau internationale. Et, là, M. le président, il est important de comprendre que la propriété intellectuelle est un fonds de commerce. Les compagnies empruntent de l'argent à partir de leur propriété intellectuelle.

It becomes a tangible asset to their business. Being able to recognise an Innovation Intellectual Property is what makes Google its value, Microsoft its value, Apple its billion dollars market value and companies can buy other ones only to possess their intellectual property. So, if this Government is serious about promoting emerging technologies, creating strategic links between research and development and intellectual property in the area of emerging technologies or to facilitate start-up and assist researchers to launch and grow successful businesses, employing emerging technologies in the private sector, it should start

by telling us how this will be done without the Intellectual Property of the private sector being protected at the international level.

Comment est-ce-que le gouvernement va inciter à l'innovation et promouvoir les technologies émergentes avec ce *Council* alors que les données sur la propriété intellectuelle n'ont pas été digitalisées et harmonisées avec celles de l'organisation mondiale de la propriété intellectuelle et donc, pas reconnues et protégées internationalement. Etant donné la situation économique qui prévaut dans le pays, M. le président, chaque roupie dépensée avec l'argent des contribuables, devrait être sciemment pensée et intelligemment investie.

Et comme je le disais dans mon discours sur le Budget, l'efficiance devrait être le maître mot pour faire face aux crises écologiques et économiques afin d'atteindre les résultats voulus, les objectifs voulus avec le moins de ressources possibles et cela s'applique donc également ici aussi. Oui, nous sommes pour la promotion des nouvelles technologies, pour les technologies innovantes, pour les technologies vertes qui permettent de faire des économies, de créer des emplois, de protéger nos ressources naturelles qui sont limitées mais nous sommes contre le gaspillage de l'argent des contribuables à travers la création d'une nouvelle institution dont les responsabilités pouvaient être attribuées à d'autres institutions déjà existantes.

Merci!

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I give the floor to the next orator, hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(5.29p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the very outset, allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation for presenting such an important Bill on such an important date. Today, 30 June, we are celebrating the Social Media Day. Social Media which used to be a platform for communication, information but has now turned into more of a platform for propaganda and a platform for fake profile and disinformation. In the same vein, today we are also celebrating the International Day of Parliamentarism, also known as World Parliament Day and the focus today is mainly on the youth in Parliament.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a young Member in this august Assembly, I should say that we are here to learn from our seniors, we are here to get inspired. So, I wish to thank both sides of the House for their inspiration and for their support as well. However, we as

parliamentarians, as young Members, I maintain that we are here also to inspire the youth outside. We have the duty to show them that it is a noble duty to be here and to promote politics. It is a noble duty to be a politician. What is further more important also is that we should not mislead the population. In our speeches, we should talk about facts. And talking about facts, I have been listening to few Members on the other side of the House and I could hear some Members mentioning about waste of resources, *effets d'annonce*. But I would like to get on track and to put it on record that we should get the information correctly and we should also very importantly, listen to the Minister during his speech.

The hon. Member on the other side, hon. Armanse, mentioned that there was no consultation done prior to this Bill. However, during his speech, the hon. Minister mentioned that there was consultation with the Mauritius IT Industry Association, the MITIA and also the OTAM, Outsourcing Association of Mauritius who are favourable for this Bill. Furthermore, he also mentioned about the similarity between the MRIC and also this Bill. And the hon. previous Member just mentioned that there is no objective in this Bill.

However, I went to get the MRIC and tried to compare it. The objectives are clear. For the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill, we have clearly stated four objects of the Council and there were also six objects for the MRIC which are completely different. So, I think the duty of both Councils is different. So, we should not mislead the population in saying that, yes it is yet another Council with the same function because the objective is absolutely different. The objective of this Emerging Technologies Council Bill that we are coming forward is to advise the Government on the formulation of National Policies and strategies in emerging technologies, to promote the application of emerging technologies, advise the Government, advise on the establishment and sustainability, facilitate, coordinate and implementation of readymade emerging while the one for the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Act clearly says: promote and coordinate, foster research, encourage the development, enhance private sector participation, promote commercial utilisation of the results of research and development.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to be clear in whatever we are saying here, because the population outside is listening to us and they will be gathering whatever we are saying, so we should not come here and mislead the House. Initially, when this Bill has been proposed to the House, I sincerely thought there would not be any debate from the other side, no criticism, but I appreciate that some Members of the other side did say that they are favourable for this Bill because let me tell you that Mauritius is not the only country moving

forward with this challenging time with such kind of Bills and I will recall the House that on 09 June, *le Sénat en Amérique* has voted for such kind of a Bill and I will tell you, there is a post on Washington Post, where it says clearly, I quote –

“Lawmakers adopted the U.S Innovation and Competition Act on a rare bipartisan, 68-32 vote that signalled lawmakers from both parties are willing to work together.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear we are here to bring something new, innovative for the youth of this country. So, there should not have been any debate or anything that is criticism but I do understand that it is so easy to find faults in others but it might be very much more difficult to do better.

I would like in the same breath to also seize this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation as well as the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for the launching of the very first Nano satellite last week and as mentioned by the Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, Simonetta Di Pippo, I quote –

“History made again. MIR-Sat1 successfully at Space Station. Congratulations to Mauritius for its great effort and step forward towards a stronger national space economy.”

History made again! Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to open *une petite parenthèse*, yesterday the hon. Member on the other side, hon. Dr. Boolell, said something very important which I think for us youngsters, it did ring a bell. Let me quote –

“Let me tell this House that nothing is permanent. You are here today and gone tomorrow.”

And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, whether it is for one mandate or two or even more, we have to make this temporary moment in our life meaningful, both for us and our nation and as they, out there, would judge us. The population would say, what were you doing there? Were you there just to criticise or did you bring something innovative, did you bring something new? So, let us be careful not to fall into the trap of slackness because our people will judge us with what legacy we leave here and Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius, being known to be a high-end tech driven economy, having the huge potential to tap and continue to demonstrate regional and global leadership in the fields of applied science and technology, we are all set to challenge big economies and big countries as well.

The world is making great stride in the field of technology and these efforts are paying back in most sectors of the economy. Today, we are witnessing progress being made using emerging technologies solutions; autonomous driving, drone delivery, telemedicine, virtual labs, real time monitoring of critical information using IOT devices or sensors, crop yield monitoring, just to name a few of them. I understand that such technologies may be applied across all sectors of the economy for best results. This Bill is a great initiative that envisages promoting high quality and industry integrated research in the areas of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, block chain robotics, internet of things, FinTech and Big data, etc., for strengthening and upgrading our national technological architecture.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to establish, as a small island, it is very important that we establish ourselves as leaders in emerging technologies so that we continue to grow as a high income and inclusive economy. The hon. Prime Minister, in his forward to the Digital Mauritius 2030 Report, clearly mentions why we need to master emerging technologies and how can we become the drivers of social economic growth. As clearly articulated in the Digital Mauritius 2030 Report, we need emerging technologies which are expected to strengthen our digital transformation process.

I strongly believe that the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill will play a strong, vibrant and historical role in popularising science and technology, which in broad terms, we now call it STEM, education in school and promote techno-entrepreneurship among our youth in colleges, universities and work places.

In Mauritius, we have already embarked on the journey of emerging technologies; artificial intelligence is being employed in manufacturing, block chain is being adopted in the new Land Administration Valuation and Information Management System as mentioned by the hon. Minister himself, LAVIMS, and I am told also that the Bagatelle Dam employs IOT devices for its day to day operations to measure the water level in real time as well as to monitor cracks in the walls of the dam and here, I would like to say congratulations and to salute the team of innovators who did something fantastic during the COVID-19. They invented the ventilator here in Mauritius and I think this should be set on record that we did it. So, Mauritius is moving forward, we have brilliant minds. The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill is coming at the right time to address the shortcomings in existing legislations with regard to new and emerging technologies. The Council will push forward projects making use of these technologies in a view to delivering quality and efficiency for a sustainable economy in the very long term and for the benefits of our fellow citizens.

Given the new and dynamic nature of emerging technologies, we must agree that the capacity building stands out as a major challenge. Our Universities, the National Computer Board and other private institutions are already doing a tremendous job to build-up the necessary resources and the field of emerging technologies to prepare them to develop solutions of the future for our country. The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council will have a determinant role in reviewing courses in our curriculum to adapt to the contemporary industry demand. As my colleague, the hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation rightly said, it is high time to set up a high calibre institute like the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council so as to scrutinise our technology horizon and assist the country to drive its economy forward for the benefits of our citizen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude we are not the only country, as I mentioned it, to present an Emerging Technologies Council Bill. Countries like Canada, America are working towards same. Where the 21st century will increasingly be defined by economic competition rooted in technological advances, leaders in adopting emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology and next-generation telecommunications and those who shape the use of such technologies will garner economic and political strength for decades.

As information and communications technologies have matured and increasingly mediate large swap of social, political and economic activities, it is incumbent on democratic Governments to address the ways in which these technologies have helped to shape the democratic values, consumer protection and social cohesions. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, to confront new challenges to our market driven economic system and to ensure our continued leadership in technology and innovation, this Bill comes at the right time.

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mrs J. Tour, you have the floor!

(5:42 p.m.)

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Before I begin my speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, please allow me to rebut the hon. Member who spoke before me, hon. Armance, who stated that in the appointment of the Council, there will be political appointment and that we should appoint experts. Maybe the hon. Member did not read Section 7(h) of the Bill which mentions four technology experts will be appointed or

Section 7 2(c), where it is mentioned that no member shall be actively engaged in politics. As usual, Mr Speaker, Sir, no constructive proposal but only petty politics.

M. le président, il y a trois semaines de cela, nous avons présenté à la population le budget 2021-2022, qui a comme objectif de faire de notre nation une île Maurice plus inclusive, renforcer notre résilience et mieux nous préparer à la relance. Je suis heureuse cet après-midi de pouvoir amener ma contribution à ce nouveau projet de loi, *The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill*, qui, dans la même philosophie articule les efforts de redressement du gouvernement pour sortir de la crise sanitaire et mieux nous préparer à acquérir les compétences requises pour s'adapter à la nouvelle vague des technologies de pointe et d'utiliser les technologies nouvelles et émergentes pour contribuer au développement socio-économique du pays dans le cadre de la vision 2030 du gouvernement.

M. le président, selon le Rapport 2021 sur la Technologie et l'Innovation de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le Commerce et le Développement, je cite –

« Les gouvernements ont un rôle essentiel à jouer pour ouvrir la voie aux technologies, notamment en créant un environnement qui leur soit favorable et en veillant à ce que les bénéfices qui en découlent soient partagés par tous. »

Et là, M. le président, je tiens à saluer le courage et la détermination de notre collègue, le ministre des TIC, l'honorable Deepak Balgobin, qui, doté d'un esprit perspicace, est venu de l'avant avec un tel projet de loi pour la mise en place d'un conseil qui aura pour but de faciliter la mise en œuvre des solutions technologiques émergentes à Maurice pour dynamiser l'économie, alors que nous faisons face à une situation inédite imposée par les conséquences de la pandémie.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is now a fact that Mauritius has taken important decisions and put in place the necessary and adequate structures for the development of new technologies and communication. Statistics show that more than 700 ICT companies presently operate on the island in a wide range of industries, including Software and Multimedia Development, Call Centre Operation, Business Process Outsourcing, IT Enabled Services, Training, Hardware Assembling and Cell Networking, Disaster Recovery, and other support services.

Mauritius is a cyber-island and this piece of legislation will do even more to put us forward. Before I go any further in my intervention on this Bill, allow me Mr Speaker, Sir, to also congratulate the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, who, with the unflinching support of the Prime Minister has launched the first Mauritian

Nanosatellite MIR-SAT1 on 03 June this year at NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Miami, Florida.

Mr Speaker, Sir, like all youngsters of my time, I am passionate about new technologies. It is a field that is certainly complex, but very exciting. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, technologies is inevitable in our everyday lives. Without technology, in this time, in the world, life would be difficult. We have all recently witnessed the predicament that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon us and again it is technology that has bonded us all. Technology currently brings together tools to promote development use and information exchange, as its main objective is making tasks easier and solving the problems of mankind. It is now assisting our children to pursue their education. When technology progresses and makes our life even more convenient, we must stress how beneficial it is to our lives. Can one imagine life today without technology? It has been a fundamental vector to help us adapt to our new normal.

C'est en effet, M. le président, la raison pour laquelle j'accueille avec beaucoup de satisfaction ce texte de loi dont les deux objectifs affichés sont –

1. de prévoir la création du *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council*, et
2. de promouvoir une recherche de haute qualité dans les technologies émergentes.

Ces deux objectifs clairs et précis démontrent, si besoin est, que ce gouvernement *means business and will leave no stone unturned* pour permettre aux jeunes Mauriciens d'atteindre l'excellence dans les domaines des technologies et de la communication, d'autant plus que le secteur des technologies et de l'information et des communications est un important moteur de croissance pour Maurice. Il représente 5,6% du produit intérieur brut (PIB) et emploie actuellement plus de 20,000 professionnels, d'où l'importance est le soutien nécessaire qu'il faut accorder à ce secteur.

En effet, M. le président, au début de mon intervention, j'ai évoqué le lancement dans l'espace du premier satellite Mauricien conçu entièrement par les génies de la *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council* après y avoir travaillé pendant deux ans. Certes, dira-t-on, que c'est un nano satellite, mais la conquête des étoiles a déjà commencé pour les mauriciens. « *That's one small step for man and a giant leap for mankind* », avait prononcé Neil Armstrong le 21 juillet 1969, alors que l'astronaute américain posait les pieds sur la lune. L'Histoire retiendra donc, M. le président, que c'est ce gouvernement, sous le leadership de

Pravind Kumar Jugnauth comme Premier ministre qui a permis le premier pas de Maurice dans la conquête des étoiles.

Avec ce texte de loi, M. le président, notamment avec la création du *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill* qui sera composé des professionnels du secteur et dont les objectifs sont clairement définis à la section 4 du texte de loi, il va sans dire que ce sont des nouvelles opportunités pour les jeunes Mauriciens qui veulent développer leur talent dans ce secteur très dynamique.

On a parlé de l'excellence dans le sport. Désormais, ce gouvernement met la barre haute dans le secteur des technologies et de la communication en visant l'excellence dans les technologies émergentes. C'est aussi la preuve, M. le président, qu'avec ce texte de loi, ce gouvernement veut œuvrer pour l'inclusion sociale des jeunes professionnels par le biais de la formation au numérique qui est désormais considéré comme un secteur porteur en terme de nouveaux emplois mais aussi en terme d'efficience. Sans aucun doute, l'Université de Maurice et aussi d'autres écoles de formation seront mises à contribution dans la mise en place de nouveaux cours sur les opportunités liées au développement du marché, des données numériques massives et de l'intelligence artificielle, afin de préparer nos jeunes pour les nouveaux métiers de l'ère numérique et de la transformation numérique.

M. le président, les technologies au service de l'économie c'est aussi un des objectifs que veut atteindre ce texte de loi. Une des responsabilités de ce conseil, une fois qu'il sera mis en place, sera de *facilitate and coordinate the implementation of ready-made emerging technologies solutions in Mauritius to boost the national economy*. Il est important de mettre en exergue ce point en particulier comment les technologies ont changé les données et ont même aidé à sauver des vies dans certains pays africains à la pointe de la technologie. Je vais emboîter le pas de mon collègue l'honorable Balgobin en citant le Rwanda - qui a été cité par plusieurs forums internationaux - qui a utilisé les drones pour la distribution du sang dans les hôpitaux dans les endroits reculés.

Et, à Maurice, je citerai l'exemple du ministère des Terres et du Logement qui utilise les nouvelles technologies pour l'utilisation plus judicieuse des terres disponibles pour le développement et les investissements. En effet, les systèmes informatiques au sein du *Land Administration, Valuation And Information System (LAVIMS)* offrent des moyens améliorés pour l'acquisition, le stockage, le traitement et la récupération des données. L'information

foncière est une condition essentielle à la prise de décision en matière d'investissement et de développement, et de gestion des terres.

La technologie est désormais partout, que ce soit dans la gestion des terres, les finances, des affaires, la pêche, l'agriculture, le textile, le transport, l'élevage, la construction et dans les PME, entre autres. Même les enfants sont exposés aux nouvelles technologies avant même qu'ils prennent le chemin de l'école. C'est vous dire comment ce texte de loi, la création du *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council*, va influencer positivement la vie des Mauriciens. C'est aussi une évidence que si nous voulons que Maurice soit toujours un leader dans ce domaine en Afrique et dans la région, nous devons agir le plus efficacement possible, *adapt or perish*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I fully support this Bill and I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha, you have the floor.

(5.52 pm.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on this Bill.

In fact, we all agree that the future of Mauritius lies in the way we master emerging technologies, because we are a country where the most valuable resource is our human capital. So, the better and the faster we are able to master technology, the better it is. If we go around the world today, Mr Speaker, Sir, in 10 years, in about 2030, 85% of jobs that are going to be on the market in 2030 do not exist today.

This is what is going to happen tomorrow, Mr Speaker, Sir. The digital world is fast. The question is how fast Mauritius can adapt and what would be the pace of change to be able to master the emerging technologies. I have listened to most of the speeches and everybody has been talking about AI, about Fintech, about data processing; we all agree on this, the opportunities are there. The question is: are we prepared to be able to make the most out of it?

My first question is: the pace at which we are making today Digital Mauritius, whether we have plans, whether we have a master plan, a coordinated national master plan, whether we have timeframes and whether we have the resources, the resolve and the drive? The impression we are getting is that with the setting up of this institution, the Council, we are setting up the driver of modern Mauritius, that is, a Digital Mauritius of tomorrow. This is

the question. And we have been told that in the Budget, the estimates do not provide for much.

My colleague, hon. Armance, mentioned the duplication as regards to the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council. I am adding another issue on this, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is the role of the National Computer Board. And when you go on the role of the National Computer Board with regards to what we want to do with the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council but most of the objectives, most of the responsibilities, most of the, I would say, roles are the same.

Now let me just say – because I would like to move on to other things – what has been said on the website of the National Computer Board on 29 June 2021. The NCB has recently redefined its strategies to respond more effectively to new national aspirations in view of the multifaceted challenges emerging in the wake of globalisation in the field of ICT. This is what the National Computer Board says –

“Our vision is to be the key enabler in transforming Mauritius into a Cyber-island and the regional ICT hub.

“Our mission is to e-power people, businesses and the public sector by developing and promoting ICT and ICT related services in Mauritius.”

And this is on the website a few days back.

So, my question to the Minister is: what is the role of the NCB, what is the role of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and what is the role of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council?

What we need, Mr Speaker, Sir, is, in fact, the drive. Now, what is the pace at which we are making Mauritius Digital Mauritius? Let us take the EDMS system which we have been trying to implement, desperately – I took about, I think, 18 months – with the help of the Government of Estonia; that was in the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

What is the pace of the e-health system that we could have? We all know the problem that you have somebody going to a dispensary in the morning, going to the hospital in the evening and there is no correlation between the 2 visits, we do not know what happened in the morning and we do not know what happened in the evening. Why have we not been able to implement the e-health system which is extremely important for a country like Mauritius, that is, to have the medical history of a patient wherever that patient goes to?

We had the human resources data system in the public sector; we lost about Rs400 m. and the system not been implemented so far, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, my question is how to drive this? We agree on the emerging technologies; it is a good thing that we should be able to master it. The question is: what do we need, Mr Speaker, Sir? We need a road map and a driver to make things happen and we should be ambitious. I said at the beginning of my speech on the Budget Speech that there should be a paradigm shift and we should be bold. Being bold, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to transform the economy of Mauritius with Digital Mauritius by the development of a technology-driven economy, Mr Speaker, Sir. I still believe that more must be done to accelerate this process and we will need to complement these with additional initiatives in the field of Fintech, agritech, healthcare and we are talking about industry 4.0.

Now, we have had plans in the past; we have had, in several areas, the different institutions. I think we should bring all these plans into one and to focus and have one master plan with a driver of digital Mauritius. I said our first resource, Mr Speaker, Sir, is human resource. My question is: do we have the experts today to be able to venture into the emerging technologies world? We do not have them. So, we should open up. I heard the Prime Minister said so in his speech, we should open up; we have a good relationship with India.

We started in 2000, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Cyber City of Ébène, where we had 50 *arpents* of sugarcane fields. My friends on the other side of the House mentioned Rwanda. Let me say one thing. In 1994, there was a genocide in Rwanda with 1.2 billion people who passed away. In 2000, we are starting our Cyber City; Rwanda was on its knees; a poor, devastated country by a genocide. Today, we are saying that we are taking the example of Rwanda. Rwanda should be taking example on Mauritius because they came to Mauritius, in fact, to learn from us in a number of sectors.

I remember at one meeting where some of my colleagues on the other side of the House were there and I said if drugs are coming in the port why do we not use drones for the port surveillance? So, the application is there. The question is we are setting up institutions, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not institutions that will solve the problem. The problem is we should be able to master the technology, bring people from abroad – I remember Minister Mahajan when he came for the inauguration of the Cyber City in 2001-2002 and he said: ‘if you need, I will send you planes of experts to be able to set up the ICT industry’. So, if we want to be in

this game and if we want to be victorious in the years and in the months to come, why can we not, for example, go to the Big 4: the Google, Apple, Amazon, Facebook and tell them that we can give them all the incentives they want to be able to set a regional centre in Mauritius for Africa.

We should be bold, Mr Speaker, Sir! We should have the courage to have a number of projects which could act as a catalyst to more profound changes in the structure of our economy, because we know that – I also said so – we are at the end of a cycle; sugar; textile; tourism. And this is one sector where in making Mauritius the Digital Mauritius, we can be able to have a pillar which can help for the prosperity and the creation of jobs. We do not have the expertise; we have to adapt our education system to be able to have the expertise that we need in the emerging sectors, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Then, there is something else; we need to have the synergy between the private sector and the public sector. Because the Government can give all facilities, can give all the incentives but the drive, the impetus for the transformation of the modern economy can only come for those, that is, the captains of industry, from the private sector. So, to be able to make Mauritius a performing, transformed economy we need to have the synergy between the public and the private sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the time is now for a paradigm shift in the way we think and we plan strategic, profound structural changes in our economy. We can move only at the pace at which our public sector moves. All my colleagues on the other side, when you are a Minister, you know this. You can move only at the pace of your establishment. So, it is high time now that we have an establishment and governance which will give us the possibility for transformation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, such a transformation journey would only require a strong leadership at the top, dedicated to develop its actions around socioeconomic benefits for the citizens and not simply taking isolated measures, creating a council and setting up another institution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I end up, I have a request to make to the hon. Minister and to the Minister of Labour. We have more than 20,000 people working in the ICT industry which is a very good thing. And we know that these people work on irregular hours, their work conditions are new, totally new, they have shifts, they have problems of overtime, they have a problem of time difference because often we are relating to the United States, to Canada, to Europe and the other countries and for the 20,000 people of that sector there are no NRB

recommendations regarding salaries, conditions of work and this has lasted for the last 15 years.

So, I am making a request to the Minister to make that sector attractive because young people want to enter that sector. They want to be into the BPO, they want to be into the outsourcing, they want to be in the emerging sectors economy but they should be paid and they should be given the right working conditions. So, I am making an appeal to the Minister and the Minister of Labour so that we ask the National Remuneration Board to sit and to listen to the companies which are here - Accenture is here, big companies are here, local companies are here - so that they can sit together with Government and we have the NRB, the tripartite system so that we can have the working conditions, the basic salary, that is, the minimum salary in that sector because we want that sector to prosper and we want to have more and more young people to be able to enter that sector and win the battle of the emerging technologies.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dhaliah, you have the floor.

(6:05 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to take the floor to debate on this vital piece of legislation, that is, the Emerging Technologies Council Bill in this august Assembly.

At the very outset, I wish to say that I am of the opinion that we should have the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council to have the focus and the required resources to meet the objective. Having different Government entities merging together will not provide the required focus and hopefully, by the end of my speech with the arguments I am going to put forward, the population and even Members of the Opposition will be convinced that this should be the case.

And my first argument, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that earlier this year itself, the Government introduced the Institute of Technical Education and Technology Bill which is all about inclusiveness by creating new opportunities for our youth and enabling them to participate and contribute more effectively in the construction of a better society for one and all where Mauritians of all walks of life can prosper and live in peace and harmony.

I wish to avail of this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, for the commendable job he has done in presenting this Bill, which I consider to be a landmark legislation to modernise the Republic of Mauritius through technology and innovation.

This Government has a clear mandate under the visionary leadership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister, to modernise the country. The Prime Minister had pledged to the nation that he would transform the economy into an economy in the league of high-income countries driven by technology and innovation and bringing higher levels of growth, equality and shared prosperity. This was spelt out at paragraph 6 of the Government Programme 2020-2024. Furthermore, at paragraph 8 of the Government Programme, we had, I quote –

“Government will further invest in and promote cutting edge technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, robotics, blockchain and Internet of Things, as our country embraces the dictates of the fourth industrial revolution.”

The Prime Minister is very much alive of the need to keep pace with emerging technologies to better face the challenges of the 21st century. We can neither stop technological emergence nor can we afford to stay complacent in the wake of emerging technologies and their challenges. This is the primary reason for this Government to come up with this Bill to provide for the appropriate legal and institutional framework to deal with the issues associated with emerging technologies.

The current Bill we are debating on today will pave the way for the setting up of the Emerging Technologies Council. In addition to the provision of technical know-how to our youth that was requested by some Members of the Opposition, this Council will act as a major driver and a platform to promote innovation, through the application of those technologies and examples have been mentioned again before, Artificial Intelligence, Nano technology and health technologies.

M. le président, l'*Emerging Technologies Council* a pour but d'agir comme un centre d'excellence pour assurer la promotion, le développement et conduire vers l'adoption des technologies émergentes à Maurice en vue de relancer l'économie nationale. On a entendu plusieurs fois que Maurice a lancé avec succès son premier satellite MIR-SAT1. Oui, c'est un événement technologique et d'innovation historique dans le parcours de transformation numérique de ce gouvernement. Le MIR-SAT1 aidera à développer les connaissances sur la

technologie des satellites et sur la façon de recueillir et de traiter efficacement les données terrestres et océaniques de l'espace.

Mais, M. le président, ce projet est une étape pour aider Maurice à mettre en place sa propre infrastructure spatiale pour s'attaquer aux problèmes de priorité nationale identifiés par le gouvernement. Et cela va de la surveillance des océans et de la gestion optimale des ressources océaniques comme la lutte contre l'épuisement des poissons dans la zone économique exclusive Mauricienne à l'atténuation des catastrophes naturelles. Il s'agit d'une mission historique pour Maurice et sert de modèle pour d'autres petits états insulaires. Cette mission pionnière est le début de grandes choses à venir et nous sommes impatients de voir les capacités et l'infrastructure spatiale du pays se développer dans les années à venir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, among a myriad of benefits that it provides, satellite data can be used to monitor crop conditions for better agricultural productivity. Mauritius should look into technology and innovation solutions to monitor crops more efficiently to counter increasing challenges stemming from climate change. Food security is increasingly at risk due to climate change, in the equatorial tropics every increase of the temperature by one degree centigrade can result in a 10% drop in crop yields.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 28 May 2021, Mauritius completed a two-month online workshop on the application of a crop monitoring system using satellite data. The crop monitoring tool could be used to help Mauritius achieve its target of becoming self-sufficient. It can provide additional solutions by investigating in other types of crops that could be grown locally. This would subsequently help in curtailing our dependence on imports of foodstuffs and accordingly aid to reduce our balance of trade deficit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, here I would like to share the example of how a Japanese financial research and technology start-up has developed a product that estimates economic growth in real time by using satellite images of night time lights based on algorithms that examine changes in the intensity of illumination together with a range of published statistics which include industrial production and trade. The Tokyo-based company can accurately forecast changes in Gross Domestic Product.

This product has proved to be more accurate than the conventional surveys that economists compile 6 weeks before growth statistics are released. There is no doubt that the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council would move in this direction and eventually assist in the setting up of a similar start-up in Mauritius. The services produced could be sold to

investors who rely on official quarterly GDP figures that are released weeks after the end of each quarter. These figures are widely used by the institutional investors such as pension and hedge funds as inputs for their asset allocation models.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when looking at the public sector at international level, government agencies around the world are embracing emerging technologies and innovative best practices to promote transformational changes that make public services more efficient, cost-effective, secure and transparent. Many are experimenting with Distributed Ledger Technologies (DLT) and Automated Decision Making Systems (ADMS) with the hope that these technologies will increase or renew trust in government in its procedures and processes as well as in other public institutions at large. ADMS and DLT are increasingly being employed to provide a vast array of government services such as –

- (a) profiling taxpayers;
- (b) allocating treatments for patients in a public health system
- (c) sorting the unemployed and disbursing welfare benefits;
- (d) automatically identifying vulnerable children;
- (e) detecting welfare fraud;
- (f) determining the authenticity of emergency services calls, and even
- (g) deliver verdicts in criminal justice systems.

However, the pace at which Distributed Ledger Technologies and Artificial Intelligence Systems like ADMS are changing society, leaves policymakers with little time or space to clearly articulate the conditions for a successful society driven by these technologies, hence the creation of this Emerging Technologies Council so as to have the focus. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, public administrations are already using Automated Decision Making Systems for different purposes and it is in our lives. These include border control, crime prevention and welfare management. The use of ADMS in the United States, especially in the state of New York has been well documented by research and advocacy groups such as the AI Now Institute, which has found evidence of ADMS at every level of government. Examples range from ADMS in individual departments such as the Fire Department of New York to the Department of Education, whose school assignment algorithm is used to match eighth-graders to high schools based on preference, test scores and other criteria.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the use of ADMS is gaining momentum in Europe as well. A sampling of the findings from research and advocacy group, Algorithm Watch shows a similar pattern of ADMS starting to be deployed at all levels of government. In France, automated processing of traffic offence generates around €1 billion annually for the French government. Local authorities in England have started using ADMS to help determine how much money should be spent on each person, depending on their individual needs known as a personal budget. Around 40 town halls across England currently use the system, which has allocated personal budget exceeding €4 billion. In the same vein, the German city of Mannheim, Intelligent Video Surveillance Project uses cameras, program with motion pattern, recognition to call first responders to a potential incident.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a number of public administrations are already using Distributed Ledger Technologies across a range of public services at varying speeds. One of the most cited applications of DLT in public services pertains to that of identity management and digital citizenship. Mr Speaker, Sir, while governments have a key role in offering improved public services, they also bear the responsibility of safeguarding citizens from the potentially harmful consequences of emerging technologies and that was again the subject of a lot of debates earlier on. A major challenge for policymakers lies in distinguishing hype from reality and making sense of competing narratives around each technology and its impacts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the one hand policymakers must become savvier about emerging technologies in order to leverage on the wide range of opportunities that it offers to improve public services. On the other hand, they must master the technicalities of such technologies to be able to regulate them and concurrently educate and sensitise citizens on the precautionary measures that need to be adopted to protect themselves from potentially harmful consequences. Hence another argument for the establishment of an Emerging Technologies Council, which would effectively create an ecosystem to address all such issues emanating from the use of innovative technologies.

The continually evolving technological landscapes will enable the Council to act as a catalyst in shaping a smart, digital architecture in the country. It will also empower the youths to adopt emerging technologies and make of Mauritius a smart island.

Yes, AI powered technologies, Mr Speaker, Sir, will provide Government with the necessary tools to enhance efficiency. It can potentially eliminate human error as it will automate repetitive tasks and is materially less time consuming.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now I will dwell on one aspect of this Bill. As per clause 4 of this Bill, the Council will be responsible to advise Government on the formulation of national policies and strategies pertaining to emerging technologies with the focus on their adoption, use, development, harnessing, value, and wealth creation, research and innovation and capacity building. It would also facilitate and coordinate the implementation of ready-made emerging technologies solutions in Mauritius with a view to boost the national economy. The Council will also be responsible to promote application of emerging technologies in line with Government's national economic and social objectives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, the adoption of emerging technologies has become a norm, and the shift towards such new technologies will benefit the society at large. In this respect, the establishment of a centre of excellence was needed more than ever. The use of emerging technologies provides a myriad of opportunities and benefits. The setting up of the Emerging Technologies Council will assist public and private sector organisations in embracing the opportunities that emerging technologies have to offer while ensuring that the potential challenges and risks are adequately addressed.

With the disruptions that the world has witnessed recently amidst lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more pressing than ever to find means and ways to ensure business continuity. The adoption of emerging technologies will undoubtedly address disruptions given that it relies to an extent on automation and less on human intervention. I would therefore firmly encourage both public and private sector organisations to innovate and adopt emerging technologies to improve service delivery, enhance productivity and ensure business continuity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the best preparation for tomorrow is to do today's work well so that when an opportunity knocks you will be able to open the door. If a door does not exist, build a door. This Bill will, in fact, build and open the door for emerging technologies by providing the necessary legal and institutional framework. It will pave the way for the safe adoption of emerging technologies that will address the daunting challenges facing the Republic of Mauritius.

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.

(6.23 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am extremely pleased of the opportunity to debate and provide my insights on the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill.

The Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, comes at an opportune moment, which I will qualify as a silver lining, on the darks clouds of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is presently hovering over our country and causing untold tragedy worldwide.

I would, therefore, like to thank my colleague, hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation for this bold initiative and his audacity to present such a Bill, which offers a ray of hope, as we brace to recover and reconstruct our country, having been hit by two waves of this unprecedented pandemic.

I have absolutely no doubt that the future of our country will be driven by the accelerated adoption of emerging technologies.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to quote Indian Author Sukant Ratnakar, who stated –

“Our future success is directly proportional to our ability to understand, adopt and integrate new technology into our work.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, my intervention in the context of the presentation of this Bill in the National Assembly, is also an opportunity for me to pay tribute to the unbending determination of the hon. Prime Minister for his leadership and vision, who has, with unwavering resolve, steered Government’s action in the right direction.

There is no better proof of the Prime Minister’s commitment to champion the adoption of emerging technologies, when just a few days after he sworn in January 2017, he called for the setting up of an innovative internet based Citizen Support Portal at the Prime Minister’s Office. The objective was to improve the quality of life of our citizens by the timely resolution of complaints lodged by the latter on a 24/7 basis over a cutting-edge digital platform.

May I also recall that, in 2015, a Ministry dedicated to the subject matter of innovation, was created for the first time in history, and was then led by hon. Pravind Jugnauth. From there on, tremendous progress was made in shaping Mauritius into an innovation-led country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, undoubtedly, emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, 3D Printing, Blockchain and digital payments are reshaping our lives as

never before. If we, therefore, do not adapt to technological innovations and cling to old business models, then, we shall become the victims of technological disruption.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that we have seen uninterrupted public service delivery during the confinement period, be it this year or last year.

To ensure continuity in public service delivery, many key Government operations were driven by innovative technologies. For instance, the use of collaborative digital platforms to enable work from home, video conferencing, issue Work Access Permits on mobile phones as well as the intense use of the Government Web portal of the Citizen Support Unit to resolve complaints of the citizens in a timely and efficient manner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during that period, we have also seen the ingenuity of SMEs and the business community as a whole, to embrace E-Commerce platforms as a durable alternative.

Indeed, Sections 4 and 5 of the Bill provides clear directions of the role of the Council in formulating Government policies, advising, promoting and facilitating the adoption of emerging technologies in our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the global front, Mauritius has made a remarkable leap on the Global Innovation Index ranking by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in 2020 with an uptick of 80 (eighty-second) position in 2018 to 50 (fifty-second) in 2020, thus propelling our country in the prime position in Sub Saharan Africa.

This performance along with the steady progress made in the field of technology since the past two decades bears the indelible imprint of the vision of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth who laid the foundation stone for building of the ICT sector as a strong pillar of the economy.

Indeed, during that period, we have seen, amongst many other achievements, the setting up of the first Cyber City with its two iconic Cyber Towers and many smart buildings in Ebène. Today, more than 20,000 of youth are employed in the ICT Sector in this bustling city.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to elaborate on three main perspectives as to why the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill will fill a void, which will allow us construct a prosperous social economic landscape.

It is important to rethink and implement a fresh policy orientation into gearing up our country to make emerging technologies a strong engine of economic growth and development, in the era of the fourth industrial revolution.

While the progress made in the field of emerging technologies has been remarkable, there is a need to develop strong legal and institutional framework, to sustain and improve on such achievements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the disruptive effects of COVID-19, the sector is one of the very few which is expected to record a notable positive growth rate this year. There is, indeed, a great potential that emerging technologies can become one of the key economic sectors that have knock-on effects on other sectors of our economy and society.

In fact, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the global market for emerging technologies is presently estimated at 350 billion US Dollars and is expected to reach 3.2 trillion US Dollars by 2025.

If only, Mr Speaker, Sir, our country could tap in from a very small fraction of this huge global market, then, the emerging technologies sector is poised to become one of the key pillars of our economy and cushion our country from other ailing sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, high value-added export services such as High-End Data centre operations, Cloud Computing, Financial Technologies such as Blockchain and Crypto Currency, 3D printing of spare parts for high-tech industries, High-tech Medical Services, Artificial Intelligence based services such as in logistics, travel and tourism sectors are key areas where Mauritius may gain a competitive advantage in this region of the world.

The Council will, therefore, be a key institution in harnessing and mobilising the critical success factors, and with the optimum use of those emerging technologies, position our country as an export oriented high-tech destination.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second dimension in bringing the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill is a driving force of emerging technologies in shaping our country in embracing a digital economy and society. The pervasive adoption of Emerging technologies across all sectors of our economy and society is a *sine qua non* condition for bringing the much-needed structural changes to reconstruct our country and reinforce our economy. Obviously, this will require a collaborative approach between the public and private sector. I am pleased to note that Section 5(e) of the Act provides such platform for building synergies, including start-ups and SMEs. For example, the Council could recommend strategies and schemes for the adoption of robotics in our manufacturing sector to cater for the scarcity of foreign labour which would be impacted by strict border control.

Mr Speaker, Sir, similarly smart agricultural best practices based on innovative technologies, such as computer controlled greenhouse, will contribute to boost crop production while optimising on land use and scarce labour resources. We have also seen a sharp acceleration of digital platforms worldwide for e-commerce. And the transitioning to a fully digital payment ecosystem such as mobile digital payments and digital currencies to help accelerate economic activities, reduce inequalities and empower the more vulnerable groups of our society. For example, in 2020, the Grameen Foundation successfully disbursed COVID-19 financial support as digital vouchers to more than 3500 women in the Philippines, used for groceries and medical packages via an innovative mobile app. Such a model, when replicated in our country, can better serve and empower those who are more vulnerable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the harnessing of emerging technologies can also have a great impact in building a sustainable and green environment to energy efficient technologies for accelerating the production of renewable energy to combat global climate change which affects the Small Islands Developing States like ours the most. This is in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. As American technologist and science fiction writer Ramez Naam said, and I quote –

“Technology is vital. We have to have development in new technology if we are going to solve these environmental problems without throwing humanity back in poverty.”

In addition, GeoSpatial Innovations such as a One Map project in Singapore which brings along both private and public stakeholders in the deployment of drones and GPS networks, allow for a more holistic coordinated and anticipative approach in dealing with natural calamities such as floods as well as in other critical situation requiring urgent actions to save lives and properties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now I come to the third dimension that I would like to put forward in support of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill is on the transformative impact of emerging technologies on Government operations and public service delivery.

Indeed, the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy driven by my Ministry advocates a whole of Government’s approach to Government service delivery through ten implementation pillars. Two implementation pillars, the first one being digital transformation and the second one is on innovation and acceleration will be positively impacted when the Bill is enacted and comes into effect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, mindful of the potential of innovative technologies improving Government service delivery, in improving transparency and accountability and in the promotion of the zero paper Government initiative. Budget 2020-2021 has upon the proposal made by my Ministry, announced the Sandbox Framework. The objectives of the framework is to precisely demonstrate pilot projects the potential of innovative and emerging technologies in improving service delivery across the public service. In this context, the Public Procurement Act was amended last year to allow for such innovative approach towards accelerating the uptake of emerging technologies in Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has already initiated two projects under the Sandbox Framework which are –

- (i) an artificial intelligence based chat box for the Human Resource Management Manual. and
- (ii) a digital collaborative platform and document management system for the scheme of service unit of my Ministry.

The harnessing of innovative technology such as Electronic Document Management System using digital signatures is also high on the agenda of my Ministry. The idea is to bring forward the concept of a zero paper Government. Such innovation will also contribute to accelerate the adoption of the Work from Home Policy that has been developed by my Ministry. Once the pilot project is successful, this innovative solution will be scaled up across ministries and departments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to inform that at the level of my Ministry, we are relentlessly taking bold and decisive steps in order to make a giant leap in the transformation journey in the public service by leveraging on emerging technologies.

Let me conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, by wishing all the very best for this very important legislation which will surely contribute in the reconstruction and recovery phase, build a new socio economic model of development and propel our country to renewed prosperity and progress which will undoubtedly be driven by emerging technologies.

Thank you all for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(6.41 p.m.)

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to thank all hon. Members from both sides of the House for their contribution to the debate on this extremely important Bill. The information and knowledge economy can only be fuelled and propelled ahead in a structured and effective manner through the full churning and adoption of all emerging technologies.

Over and above, our vision to make Mauritius a digital island *par excellence*, we should remain focused on making the country smarter in the true sense of the word. Emerging technologies by themselves do not provide economies the pathway for improving the quality of life, creating jobs and enhancing the delivery of services. It all depends on the extent to which these technologies are embraced and put to gainful use. This requires the necessary framework, including institutional set up, the expertise, the foresight and joining the abstract to the concrete.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by my colleague, hon. Mrs Tour in the Technology and Innovation Report 2021 by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, urges all nations to prepare for a period of deep and rapid technological change. The United Nations is encouraging all countries to pursue science, technology and innovation policies appropriate to their development stage and economic, social and environmental conditions. Countries are encouraged to devise and establish different strategies and mechanism to ensure innovation across the economies.

Decision-makers are confronting increasingly complex and dynamic technology ecosystems with an abundance of diverse options from which to choose and this new Bill will pave the way to architect the digital ecosystem. The proper harnessing of emerging technologies requires a permanent think tank as well as an operational arm to translate vision and ideas into actions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the creation of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council respond to this need - that of charting the way to make the most of every new technology. It would not be a surprise if tomorrow yet new technologies come up. With a view to constantly scanning the technological environment and to find ways and means to perceive their potentials for our economy, the Council will be the requisite tool. With the rapid changes to technology as well as industry value chains, it has become essential to identify promising emerging technologies that can better respond to external disruptive forces and be used to launch new businesses or improve current businesses.

We do not want our country to be on the sideway of the present jaw-dropping emerging technologies and those to come yet. Hence, this Bill will also address the challenges being faced due to constant technology change. There is no doubt that consumer technology advances at a pace that it is hard for IT decision-makers to follow. During my intervention earlier today, I spelt out the orientation already taken by my Ministry on the innovation front. The adoption of emerging technologies has already started. To manage the overwhelming options of technology offerings an ecosystem thinking, mindset must be instilled to promote holistic thinking to unthread one technology from another. We must now learn how to adapt to these changes and make wise technology investment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new normal has moved away from isolated technology to ecosystem that integrates devices, applications, analytics and Cloud. However, a more aggressive approach is required in the discernment of opportunities that new technologies could offer, specially the creation of new area of activities to consolidate the already important economic pillar that ICT is.

It is no secret to anybody how resilient the ICT sector has been and still is, in the face of the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic. To make our country a smarter and yet more service-oriented one, the setting up of an appropriate mechanism is not an option but it is a must. Very few believed in the potential of the ICT sector when the first pillars were being established. Yet today, the sector has to be reckoned with. Similarly, the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council will yet be another important milestone in our journey to make our Republic a high-income digital one.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to respond to some comments made earlier by hon. Armanee. He mentioned in his speech that there has been no consultation done for this Bill even though I mentioned that consultations were done and what were the outcomes of those consultations. Let me tell the hon. Member that in Mauritius we have two institutions, two organisations or associations that are reckoned for the Industry. One is OTAM, which is the Outsourcing Association of Mauritius and the other one is MITIA, which is the Mauritius IT Industry Association and I do not know where and how he can say that there has been no consultation.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me read the emails received from these institutions, telling us a very good vision to shape the emerging technologies agenda for Mauritius - not to read the whole email because he will say I am praising myself or praising this Bill - and signed by

the President of Outsourcing Association of Mauritius which is an official association regrouping the industry of the ICT sector. The second one, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Mauritius IT Industry Association and it says that we are fully supportive of the measures proposed in the Bill and signed by the President of the association. So, I fail to understand where, how and why the hon. Member comes and says that there has been no consultation.

(Interruptions)

Most probably he has not done his homework.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the second point, he mentioned that with regard to the appointments in the Council and I refer here to Section 7 of the Bill and rightly my colleague, hon. Mrs Tour, mentioned this. He said - and I have taken note - that we hope there is no political appointment in this Council. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill makes provision in Section 7 (2) (c) that -

“No person shall be qualified to be a member - and that will become a law - where he is otherwise actively engaged in Politics.”

So, how can he say that there will be political appointments? It is not true what he said. Secondly, he said that we have to appoint experts and not *copains* and so on. Experts! But again, he did not do his research because Section 7 (1) (h) of the Bill says -

“The Council shall consist of four technology experts.”

But technology experts are technology experts, Mr Speaker, Sir. Not all of us would be very *à l’aise* and convenient and understand these technologies. Let the experts do their jobs.

So, I do not agree with what the hon. Whip of the Opposition said on these two points. And I go forward. He said he cannot understand why in the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Strategy, in 2018, it is mentioned that we have done the strategy and then nothing has been heard from then, what has happened, it is lost etc. But then again, he has not done his research because the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Strategy was worked out and it was also canvassed and disseminated in the Press and everywhere else. Business Magazine talks about the whole setting-up of the report of the Mauritius Artificial

Intelligence Strategy. Then, we have Press articles in *Le Défi*, in *L'Express* and he said we have never heard about it.

So, I invite the hon. Member to come and I will give him the copies, come and read and what does it say about the strategy and the way forward, because he mentioned two things; he mentioned the report was done and it was left in a drawer and then nothing has moved from there but then the main recommendation of the Report, you know what, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the creation of the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council but this is what we are doing today. This is what we are doing today but again, to come back to why it is called Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and not Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council, he did not listen to what I have said and he is sitting next to me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister continue his speech! If not, I will suspend!

Mr Balgobin: In the Budget Speech 2018-2019, it was announced following the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Report, that a Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council will be set up but then, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we had discussions, when we had consultations with different stakeholders, we said recommendations were coming that we should not only focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), let us focus on all the various emerging technologies as I mentioned earlier, block chain, IOT etc. So, this is why the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council has become the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and he is asking the question - where is the Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council? The Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council is here! We have begun the mandate and make it more interesting for the future. And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, one last thing he mentioned, I will not go too much on him because he might, you know, feel...

He said, and that one was a bit sad from his part, he said Mauritius is far behind and he said that it is a Government failure in the digital Mauritius, this is what he said. But then, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wonder in which country does he live? Because, let me give you official figures –

- Mauritius is ranked 13th in the world on the Ease of Doing Business of the World Bank;
- Mauritius is 14th in the world in the ITU Global Cyberspace Index;
- Mauritius is 52nd in the world in the Global Innovation Index;

- Mauritius is 52nd again in the world, in the Global Competitive Report of the World Economic Forum, and
- Mauritius is 60th in the world on the e-Government Development Index of the United Nations.

But then, all what I said just now, Mauritius is ranked 1st in Africa in all the Indices I have just said and then, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are the first in Africa and hon. Armand is saying Government has failed in the digital Mauritius, I do not understand! I am sorry, I do not understand!

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Ms J. Bérenger spoke about intellectual property, yes, interesting! And then, she said the intellectual property has not moved, we have not progressed, and it has been slacked, it was in the drawer etc. but then, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was trying to understand the point made by hon. Ms J. Bérenger, intellectual property is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and do you know since November 2019 till most recently, who was in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and she is saying that it has not moved at all, it was left in the drawer, the law is not ...

Mr Speaker, Sir, from all that time, now we have a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, my colleague, Alan Ganoo is doing a fantastic job in his Ministry but for all that time, what happened to the intellectual property? I leave it to the appreciation of all Members of the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Nandcoomar Bodha, I should say I am a bit sad to hear his comments. Two points that he put emphasis on, first one he has said that the Electronic Document Management System that he was trying to implement in his Ministry took a lot of time. Mr Speaker, Sir, all of us here, colleague Ministers, we take the ownership and responsibility of our Ministry. But, he was the Minister for more than one year and a half, if that project did not go on track as it should; we have given them experts from Estonia, world leading in this field, to complete the project. If the project has taken time there but then we have to blame the Minister at that time because he has not done his follow-up so that the project is still going on.

The most important and interesting thing, he said and it is a nice suggestion I should say, we need to have drones that overlook the port, the shipping and you know all these things, that is nice, but then, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not, on this side of the House you

talk a language, and when you go on the other side of the House, you speak the contrary because doing the drones at the shipping and so on, who was the Chairperson of the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd, his very good friend, Dr. Lallchand, his Senior Adviser. He could have given those suggestions to come up with drones to overlook the shipping industry, the port and so on. Then, the focus was on dividends and was not on the drones and how to make the port work out well.

Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I have said enough on what colleagues on the other side have mentioned. On our side, Mr Speaker, Sir, the adoption of emerging technologies is such an interesting journey; it is a very important journey that creates growth avenues and opportunities in an exponential manner. Success breeds more successes, we are confident that successful cases will push organisations, be it in private or in public, to explore more areas of potential efficiencies with business excellence and innovation as the core of their thinking and here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the colleagues of my Ministry who have been working on this Bill and with these few words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

Merci.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

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

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill (No. VIII of 2021) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair, the Deputy Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill (No. VIII of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE OPTICAL COUNCIL BILL

(NO. IV OF 2021)

Order for Second Reading read.

(7.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the Optical Council Bill (No. IV of 2021) be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Optical Council Bill being put to debates in this august Assembly today aims at better regulating the profession of Opticians in Mauritius. It is proposed to set up a Council, having the mandate to regulate and control the profession of Opticians, to register, and promote the advancement of Opticians.

I will start by explaining how the professional practice of Optics evolved in our country. We have to go back to our colonial past to find the first traces of optical practices on Mauritian soil, just after the Second World War. I am, indeed, informed that one of the first practices was operated by a war veteran who learned the intricacies of optical practice while serving in the armed forces of the British Empire. It's only in the late fifties and early sixties that several university-trained Ophthalmic Opticians started to operate in Mauritius. They were then holders of Bachelor of Science degrees in Ophthalmic Optics and went for higher professional qualifications, thus enabling them to practise in the UK or South Africa.

Back then, in 1962, the Opticians' Registration Act was passed and this piece of legislation recognised and regulated the profession. The Act recognises the following professionals in the Optical field –

1. the Ophthalmic Optician means a person who evaluates visual acuity and prescribes, fits and supplies optical appliances for remedial purposes and uses such equipment and medications as necessary;
2. whereas the *Opticien-lunetier* means a person who evaluates visual acuity and prescribes, fits and supplies optical appliances for remedial purposes in respect of persons above the age of 16, but does not use any medication except for the fitting of contact lenses;
3. the Ophthalmologist means a medical practitioner who holds a recognised post graduate qualification in Ophthalmology;

4. the Dispensing Optician means a person who fits and supplies optical appliances in accordance with a prescription from an ophthalmic optician, an *Opticien-lunetier* or an Ophthalmologist, and
5. an Optician means a dispensing Optician, an Ophthalmic Optician or an *Opticien-lunetier*.

Their respective duties are duly spelt out in the Act and it clearly describes what optical appliances are, that is, any appliances designated to correct, remedy or relieve a defect of sight. The Act also states that only registered opticians may examine patients' eyesight and/or supply optical appliances to members of the public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the purposes of the Opticians Registration Act, there is an Opticians Registration Board which examines applications for registration in respect of the different categories of opticians mentioned earlier. The current Opticians Registration Board is chaired by the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry, with members of the Director General Health Services, 2 Ophthalmologists and 3 Opticians, including a dispensing optician, an ophthalmic optician and an *Opticien-lunetier*. The last three members are appointed after consultation with the Association of Opticians Mauritius.

The initial Act was amended in 1985 to, amongst others, give the Board and the Police the mandate to perform as the enforcement authorities.

As years went by, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the professional practice of optics has known considerable changes. Young professionals who graduated from Universities other than in France and UK came back to the country. The Optical Registration Board today, has to deal with applicants trained in various institutions around the world.

It has become imperative that equal chance be provided to all young professionals trained in the profession of Opticians. The aim is to harmonise the practice of optics in Mauritius, whereby all duly trained professionals are at the same level playing field, whenever they postulate for practice in Mauritius. As is the case in other allied health domains, the setting up of a Council, capable of conducting fair examinations will serve the purpose.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is also high time to adopt a different approach so as to maintain standards and protect the public in optical matters. Once more, the Council will be in a position to regulate the profession, enabling the public to seek redress whenever needed and also do away with all forms of illegal practice.

The Council will also be responsible for the exercise and maintenance of discipline in the profession. It will also establish a Code of Practice and monitoring compliance to the Code. The Council we are proposing to set up, through this Bill, will also have the mandate to promote continuous education and training. The Council shall approve, organise or cause to be organised, training programmes, courses, lectures, seminars or conferences for the profession of opticians.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the main functions of the Optical Council will be to register opticians practising in Mauritius. The registered opticians shall be citizens or residents of Mauritius and hold appropriate qualifications and experience. Their registration shall be in accordance with clause 18 of the Bill. Non-citizens will be granted temporary registration, as stipulated in clause 19 of the Bill. The Council will not later by end of February, each year, submit a list of all opticians registered for that year, including foreign opticians and visiting opticians temporarily registered for that year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in order to ensure that the practice of Optics in Mauritius is maintained at acceptable standards, the Council will, as mentioned earlier, also be able to approve the conduct of examinations for the registration of opticians.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Council shall be chaired by an elected member among its Optician members, working in the Private and Public Sectors, as detailed –

- 3 Opticians from the Public Sector of not less than 7 years' experience in Mauritius;
- 5 Opticians from the Private sector with as many years of experience in Mauritius;
- 1 Optician from the Optical Association of Mauritius;
- 1 representative of my Ministry, 1 representative from the Attorney General's Office and one from the Prime Minister's Office, and
- And 3 members, who are not opticians to be appointed by the Minister.

The rationale in going for such a composition is to allow for a sound dose of expertise in the Council regulating this sector. It is important to have lay members in the Council for they will ensure the required balance to best serve the interests of the public in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Optical Council will be vested with powers allowing it to investigate into complaints of professional misconduct or negligence against an Optician.

Whenever it is established that there is clear evidence of negligence or misconduct, the Council will be entitled to institute disciplinary proceedings before a Disciplinary Tribunal. The Disciplinary Tribunal shall comprise a President, as well as two appointed members, none of them shall be a member of the Council. The Tribunal is not mandated to make any recommendation regarding the form of disciplinary measure to be applied. It will be up to the Council to, depending on the gravity of the offences to –

- administer a reprimand or severe reprimand;
- suspend an Optician from local or foreign practice for a period of not more than 2 years;
- or even deregister an optician, whether local or foreign.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, such measures are not solely meant to be punitive but they are particularly aimed at ensuring that the public's rights are safeguarded in case of professional abuse.

The Optical Council Bill also establishes a set of offences, again aimed at protecting the public against any form of malpractice. Thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, those convicted of any offence will be liable, to a fine not exceeding 10 thousand Rupees and to imprisonment for a term of not more than 12 months. The same penalties shall apply to any person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with any requirement lawfully imposed by the Council.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am confident that the setting up of an Optical Council will not only benefit trained and duly registered professionals but it will also offer additional protection to the general public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move, at Committee Stage, for the amendments as circulated on 30 June 2021, in lieu and stead of the Committee Stage amendments circulated on 29 June 2021.

With this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I commend this Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Mr Maudhoo seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Dr. Aumeer!

(7.18 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. For decades ophthalmic opticians, dispensing opticians, optometrists and *opticien-lunetier* have provided a much valued service to the Mauritian public who rightly understood and appreciated such services.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the repealment of the Optician Registration Act 1962 and further amended in 1985 is long overdue since the art of healthcare and medicine is constantly evolving and, therefore, any profession must keep in line to the demands and expectations of the consumers as well as its regulating body.

The prevalence of visual impairment has increased worldwide, including Mauritius, particularly due to high incidence and prevalence of non-communicable diseases among which diabetes is the highest. No one disputes the fact that we have a staggering high incidence of diabetic eye related problems. This Bill, I hope, will undoubtedly help that optical services to consumers by opticians is strictly regulated.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 3 types of professionals are involved in the delivery of eye and vision care, namely optometrist, dispensing opticians and opticians in the broad sense of it, optometrist and ophthalmologist. My understanding is that we have approximately 70 opticians roughly registered with nearly 80 outlets in operation in the country. However, I do note that in the elaboration of this Bill, specific mention has been made as to the definition of the optician, particularly encompassing dispensing optician, ophthalmic optician, foreign optician, visiting optician, optometrist and *opticien-lunetier*. It is, therefore, worth noting that each of these 3 specific groups of professionals has their own responsibility but they are interdependent in their specialities to the patient.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now make specific comments with regard to certain sections of the Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the functions of the Bill at section 5 have been clearly outlined and subsection (h) mention is made about the conduct of an examination before registering opticians. This is a new prerequisite for registration of opticians while before in the previous law, it was specific for dispensing optician to be registered as *opticien-lunetier*. This is a big shift in the registration of opticians. Therefore, the way the registration is going to happen now it appears to me it is going to follow the same route that newly graduated doctors in medicine had to endure. However, there are many important issues that need answers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first query is that do all newly graduated opticians, irrespective of their training institution have to undergo this exam, particularly if they have already worked in the country where they graduated and registered thereby? I do note that section 18 subsection (c) is to be removed as per amendment to be brought at Committee Stage.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a glance at the Fourth Schedule does mention exemption of those being recognised by the General Optical Council of UK. However, there is no mention about those of *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur en Optique-Lunetier* the BTS OL in France, which is delivered by the French authorities and the sole recognition of qualification to practise the optical profession in France. I wish the Minister could give us some explanation as to why the *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur Opticien-Lunetier* is not on schedule four, while until now it was part of it – as he just mentioned a few minutes ago – of the Board of registration in the previous Act which is chaired by the Senior Executive of his Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which institution or examiners will conduct such exam and whether it will be done by Mauritian professionals who are experts in the field or by foreign examiners? Some information is needed regarding same. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and if it is done by foreign examiners, will they ensure that the exam questions reflect the eye conditions prevalent in Mauritius rather than the broad based eye condition worldwide or sometimes specific to the country of practice and origin of those particular examiners. There is a very well-known saying in the practice of medicine which I am sure you well know: “common things are common”. What we have common here should not really be common in other parts of the world. The Minister is surely aware of the undertones I am referring to. We had so much of these problems when he himself, having been the Chairman of the Medical Council, encountered the difficulties of foreign examiners setting papers for our local graduates.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, graduates from other institutions than from the United Kingdom and France do make application and many in these cases are definitely eligible to practice in Mauritius. However, I here refer to Mauritians who have completed either a Bachelor Degree or an Accredited Diploma in countries like Belgium, Ukraine, India, Malaysia and awaiting registration for years. I do note in his speech he was mentioning that he is bringing the Optical Council Bill as a sense of fairness for those particular graduates and I commend him for doing that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are, at least, two cases as I just mentioned who are awaiting registration since nearly four years and are graduates who hold Bachelor in Optometry Degree from Indian Universities recognised by the University Grants Commission of India and yet denied so far. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one has to be fair to the applicants. I am on the same wavelength as you but action needs to be seen taken and such issues must be taken care promptly. Either they need upgrading of their qualifications or add-ons or it is just because of chumocracy. Chumocracy is a word which means for those who need better definition, a ruling elite made up of people of the same social background who went to the same school and universities and know each other socially.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, chumocracy should not prevail at all costs, justice delayed is justice denied and I hope the setting up of this Optical Council will correct these flaws in registration. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, opticians working in the public sector is more than welcome. I understand from the Bill that we will be having, at least, three opticians from the public sector. If we look at the budgetary estimates, there is only two posts earmarked. Where does the third one come from? And I hope the hon. Minister will have some explanations as to that. Having more opticians working in the public sector is welcome but it should not go through its implementation, the possible setting of outlets which will jeopardize the retail optical sector, a proper framework of same must be discussed with the Optical Association of Mauritius to avoid unfair competitive interest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now come to the composition of the Council with regard to Section 7. Altogether, 15 persons will form the Council among which nine opticians are to be eligible, that is, three from the public sector, five from the private sector, and one from the Optical Association who is obviously a Ministerial Appointee. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you were to look at the definition of 'optician' in the Bill, clearly this encompasses three different types of professionals; optometrist, *opticien-lunetier*, dispensing ophthalmic optician and surely if we were to have these nine people among the 15 on the Council, there must be fair representation of each category of optician there. Unfortunately, there is no mention as to the number of each category of optician that would make the nine opticians in the Council. I am strongly of the view that amendments must be made as to the number of each category of optician that needs to be on the Council.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, though the eligibility of opticians, private or public to sit on the Council may depend on them being elected by their peers, I am of the opinion that be it dispensing ophthalmic, optometrist or *opticien-lunetier*, the professional of each type can

canvass and vote for their related category of professional activities so that there is fair and no other representation of one particular category at the expense of others. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, similarly the one optician that would be nominated, that will be from the Optical Association of Mauritius and appointed by the Minister must be clarified as to which category he emanates from.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am now coming to the nomination of Registrar. Section 12 deals with the nomination of Registrar at subsection one. Clarification is needed as to whether the optician fulfilling the necessary criteria for the post of registrar must not be an elected member of the nine opticians sitting on the Council. There is nothing in the Bill that prevents any elected member or sitting member of the Council as optician to be named as a Registrar and if that were to be the case, that member, optician, were it from the Council will have no right to vote as per the Bill itself and therefore will be left with 14 people having the powers to vote and surely you can understand what that means if it is a 7 to 7 at par. So, clarification is needed. The Registrar should not be part of an optician sitting on the Council, *de facto* being a registered optician.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the powers of the Minister to give directions of a general character to the Council must be specific. I here refer to subsection 16 and I suggest that the issue of general character be clearly defined to avoid abuse of authority, favouritism, vindication or discrimination against any member, particularly when it comes to registration of optician. And as a friend of yours, I do not want you to be labelled autocratic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the onus of being registered as an optician lies with the applicant proving that his qualifications are recognised by the regulatory body of the country where he has obtained his degree which, *inter alia*, would have entitled him to practice in that country. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fundamental question that arises is that the Council must also provide a list of those regulatory bodies that are acceptable by the Council and countries where these studies were conducted. This is of utmost importance particularly for new students contemplating a career as optician. The hon. Minister, once again I mention, is well aware in his previous role as Chairman of Medical Council of the highly confusing and conflicting issues that arose in the past with regard to approved medical schools and countries of certification. I hope the Minister makes amends to this very important issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in line with budget 2021-2022, encouraging foreign professionals to come to Mauritius and work, the temporary registration of foreign opticians

is a very sensible issue since it does have a direct impact on the profession of Mauritian opticians and their business. Section 19 subsection 1(a), (b), (f) goes to some extent to protect the interest of the local practitioners. However, there is no mention in the proposed Bill as to instances to seek redress if these conditions were not to be respected by foreign opticians and disciplinary actions would be envisaged.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while I take cognizance that Section 7 subsection 2 is to be deleted at Committee Stage, I am of the firm opinion there should be a separate clause whereby the business of optometry is not fully exploited by unscrupulous foreign opticians as a backdoor to be in partnership with certain dealers in the optical field and open private business. This potential loophole needs to be tightened in the interest of the local opticians.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, the whole business of optometry is directly linked with the profession service and it has to be tightly regulated so that wholesale dealers, pharmacists, importers, be under strict guidelines to prevent any retail services - and this is where it hurts - if they do indulge into retail services to consumers, particularly contact lenses and poor quality sunglasses among others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is also growing concern that persons with no formal qualifications in optics and visual sciences have taken upon themselves to open shops and to serve the unsuspecting public optical appliances such as spectacles, sunglasses and contact lenses while providing a poor and dangerous service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one is too aware of the importation and selling of contact lenses by non-professionals in the field of eye and vision care, which has led, in certain cases, to serious complications of corneal ulceration and unfortunate blindness in very young people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the retail business of opticians in general need to be well regulated so that rogue dealers do not run a parallel business, and the Bill must provide for the protection of the population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have had the opportunity to talk to a few professionals in this particular field recently and one common thing that was brought up was ophthalmologists conducting consultations within the premises of optical outlets, which is not well perceived by some; I mean some. Needless to say that some of them are business partners in the optical company.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure this is a very sensible issue. However, many leading countries do not tolerate this cohabitation, and the Bill must make provision for us in Mauritius as to whether this will be acceptable or not. Similarly, as was the case of doctors in medicine consulting in pharmacies and eventually the Medical Council Act had to be amended, this practice has subsequently been prohibited.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I wholeheartedly hope that my concerns that I have raised and my suggestions are given due consideration. If I have taken time to discuss the Bill today, it is because I truly believe that this is a very positive step taken by the hon. Minister to regulate the profession of ophthalmic optician. But, at the same time, with no personal intention of gaining political mileage, there is a need to make certain amendments to make this Bill responsive to the expectations of both the professionals involved and the consumers since its foremost goal is to protect the population.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 09 July 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

Mr Ganoo seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Adjournment matters! Hon. Osman Mahomed!

MATTERS RAISED

(7:36 p.m.)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 1 - VACCINATION VENUE - ICC

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage tonight. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on 27 June, I wrote to the hon.

Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the various problems that people of my Constituency, namely in Vallée Pitot, Tranquebar and Ward IV, are facing to have their first doses of anti-COVID vaccine at the Plaine Verte Youth Centre. I am sure my colleague, the hon. Uteem and the hon. Dr. Aumeer must have had similar complaints. Thankfully, my request has been positively acceded at the Ministry of Health and Wellness, which think that the most appropriate venue for this is the Islamic Cultural Centre because of the available indoor space there and the parking facilities. My request to the hon. Avinash Teeluck tonight is to request the Board of the ICC to favourably accept the request of the Ministry of Health and Wellness for this exercise.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have received a request from the Ministry of Health and Wellness in that respect and we are looking into it. We shall keep the hon. Member informed. But rest assured that matters are being taken on an urgent basis.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Uteem!

(7:38 p.m.)

SIGNAL MOUNTAIN - HEALTH TRACK - CLOSURE

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Merci, M. le président. Je voudrais soulever un point qui concerne le ministère de l'Environnement, de la Gestion des Déchets solides et du Changement climatique et cela a trait au parcours de santé à la Montagne des Signaux. Cela fait déjà 3 ans, depuis janvier 2018, que le parcours de santé est fermé au motif qu'il y a de forts risques de chutes de pierres. Trois ans aussi que l'aire de stationnement qui s'y trouve soit fermée. Or, ce gouvernement, 3 ans plus tard, n'a toujours pas fait les travaux nécessaires pour s'assurer que le parcours soit de nouveau accessible. Mais étant donné qu'il n'y a pas eu de chutes de pierres malgré les grosses averses depuis plus de 3 ans, et étant donné le problème de stationnement occasionné par la fermeture de l'aire de stationnement, je fais un appel à l'honorable ministre de l'Environnement pour reconsidérer la décision de fermer le parcours de santé à la Montagne des Signaux et de rouvrir l'aire de stationnement qui s'y trouve au plus vite.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, please!

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, nous sommes au courant de la situation. Au niveau du ministère de l'Environnement, nous travaillons conjointement avec le *National Disaster Committee*, parce que la question d'effondrement a une dimension, une implication beaucoup plus large. Donc, nous sommes conscients de la situation. Nous suivons la situation de très près, en collaboration avec le *National Disaster Committee*. Une fois que les rapports techniques seront soumis et seront à la satisfaction de toutes les parties, nous prendrons la décision qui s'impose.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(7:40 p.m.)

GOODLANDS - DOMAINE DU MOULIN - CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My humble request is addressed to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management. I wish to draw your attention to the children's playground found at Domaine du Moulin in Goodlands, which is in a real state of neglect and decrepitude. Hon. Minister, the toilets are a real eyesore; the swings, the slides, the seesaw and other games are falling apart as they are rusted, broken and hanging loosely. They pose a serious danger. I kindly request you to do the needful so that we can have a proper playground for these kids.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnood): I will discuss with the local authorities and with the Chairman, and we will try to sort it out.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mrs Tour!

(7:40 p.m.)

CITE LA CURE - DAY CARE CENTRE

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président de séance. Ma requête s'adresse au vice-Premier ministre, ministre des Collectivités locales et de la Gestion des Catastrophes et des Risques, l'honorable Dr. Husnoo, concernant un *Day Care Centre* qui se trouve dans le lotissement de la NHDC à Cité la Cure. Ce centre est fermé depuis plusieurs années et les habitants réclament la réouverture de ce centre, le convertissant en un centre multi-complexe, afin qu'ils puissent pratiquer des activités sportives et sociales. Merci de bien vouloir prendre cette demande en considération.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for having given me advance notice about this question. I made an enquiry about the centre. It belongs to the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity; we will have to coordinate with them and to see how we can sort it out and open it for use by the inhabitants in the area.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dhunoo!

(7:41 p.m.)

CUREPIPE - ST HÉLÈNE CHURCH - MÉTRO EXPRESS WORKS – TRAFFIC JAM

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse à l'honorable ministre Ganoo. Nous avons reçu une requête de la part de l'église Ste. Hélène à travers le maire de Curepipe, M. Hans Marguerite. Avec les travaux du métro à Curepipe, la route A 10 qui passe devant l'église est très utilisée par les automobilistes, et cela cause beaucoup de problèmes. Pour les paroissiens qui vont à l'église pour la messe les lundis, mercredis, samedis et dimanches, cela cause un problème d'accès, car nous n'avons pas de boîtes jaunes devant l'entrée de l'église et cela cause des embouteillages énormes. Je demanderais à l'honorable ministre Ganoo s'il peut demander au TRMSU de mettre des boîtes jaunes à l'entrée et aussi à la sortie de l'église pour remédier à ce problème.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, please!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member

for having raised this matter, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I will certainly get in touch with the TMRSU and convey the request of the hon. Member. Of course, the needful will be done if the situation allows it. The hon. Member can rest assured that tomorrow the needful will be done from my end.

The Deputy Speaker: Restez assuré. Hon. Ms Anquetil!

(7:43 p.m.)

CAMP SAVANE BRIDGE – LIGHTINGS & ROAD SIGNS

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal) : M. le président, ma requête s'adresse au ministre des Infrastructures nationales et du Développement communautaire. Les travaux de construction du pont à Camp La Savane ont été complétés, cependant les lampadaires et le panneau indiquant le poids des véhicules autorisés à circuler n'ont pas été encore installés et aussi les travaux d'embellissement sous le pont sont en suspens. Je fais un présent appel au ministre afin que le nécessaire soit fait dans les meilleurs délais.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue. As she said herself, the bridge has been completed. We now have a very dynamic and young MP, hon. Ashley Ittoo, looking after that Constituency No. 16. So, he is in full control together with the PPS, hon. Bablee and very soon things are going to be in place. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I think he is in the Constituency. Hon. Woochit!

(7.44 p.m.)

JOGGING TRACK, TRIOLET - CONSTRUCTION

Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My humble request is addressed to the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development and it concerns a 2-km jogging track which is under construction at the bypass Triolet.

Can the hon. Minister consider relocating the jogging track on the opposite side of the road because, due to the wind breeze, the carbon monoxide that comes from the exhaust pipes

of the vehicles come directly on the jogging track. Secondly, the jogging track itself is one metre width. So, can the hon. Minister consider widening the jogging track from one metre to two metres? The intervention of the hon. Minister would be much appreciated. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are vehicles coming both ways, so, the carbon dioxide – it's not an aquarium that we are building. Regarding the size of the track, this has been built by the engineer and the expert; we are going according to what the consultant and the expert have recommended. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(7.45 p.m.)

WARD IV & VALLEE PITOT - WATER SUPPLY

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my queries are addressed to the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, and if the message could be passed to him by one of his colleagues. There have been recent interruptions of water supply in one particular region of Port Louis, namely Ward IV, and over the last 36 hours there has been no backup service for these inhabitants.

May I request the hon. Minister to see to it, and as to the reasons why there are regular interruptions of water supply in these areas, particularly at Ward IV and Vallée Pitot. The information I have gathered, so far, points out to shortcoming of personnel operating the vanes at the reservoir. I do not want to elaborate on the reasons that have been given to me, but may I request the hon. Minister to look into it, that such repetitive shortcomings do not occur for the welfare of the people living there.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Ramano will take it? Okay, Minister Ganoo!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will convey the request made by the hon. Member to the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

No more matters to be heard? So, have a good evening!

At 7.47 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 9 July 2021 at 3.00 p.m.