



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 08 DECEMBER 2020

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 37 of 2020

Sitting of Tuesday 08 December 2020

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**NOTICE OF PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS – PRESS ARTICLES**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, recently, some Press articles have been making reference to difficulties being allegedly faced by hon. Members in regard to the manner in which notices of Parliamentary Questions are being received by the Clerk and the way same are being treated prior to same finding the order in which they appear on the notice of question on the Parliamentary Sitting day for reply within the time set for Question Time by the Standing Orders. The overall resulting impression is that the times available to the Members are being limited on purpose. I wish to remind the House that, whilst the procedure of giving notice to PQs stands governed by Standing Order 24, the internal arrangement at the Clerk's Office is purely an administrative matter.

Moreover, I wish to inform the House that the matter had been thrashed out by both Whips of the House at some point in time. However, since it appears that hon. Members have issues with the way the whole exercise is being carried out, I invite the Whips to meet the Clerk in her Office to thrash out the issue anew.

I thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

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

- (i) The Landlord and Tenant(Amendment) Bill (No. XX of 2020),
- (ii) The Central Electricity Board (Amendment) Bill (No. XXI of 2020); and
- (iii) The Electricity (Amendment) Bill (No. XXII of 2020).

B. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

The Gambling Regulatory Authority Appeal Committee (Decisions of Administrators and Racing Stewards) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 293 of 2020)

C. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

- (a) The Central Water Authority (Dry Season) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 287 of 2020)
- (b) The Central Water Authority (Dry Season) (No. 2) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 288 of 2020)

D. Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives

The Annual Report 2018-2019 of the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council.

E. Attorney General

Ministry Of Agro-Industry and Food Security

The Cane (Specifications of Varieties) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 289 of 2020)

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 5) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 290 of 2020)

- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 31) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 291 of 2020)
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 32) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 292 of 2020)

G. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Morris Legacy Fund for the year ended 30 June 2020.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

BO'VALON MALL - ADSU OFFICERS - SECURITY

(No. B/979) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the controlled delivery of drugs operation carried out by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit in the Beau Vallon Mall, on 24 November 2020, wherein Ms D. R., Woman Police Constable, lost her life, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if all required basic measures had been undertaken to ensure the security of the officers who participated therein.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to PQs B/979, B/980, B/984, B/986, and B/989 together as they all relate to the same subject matter regarding the tragic circumstances in which the late and regretted Woman Police Constable D. R. lost her life while on duty on Tuesday, 24 November, 2020 at Bo'Valon Mall located at Beau Vallon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, let me reiterate my Government's and my deep sadness at the passing away of an exemplary, duty-bound and courageous Woman Police Officer who was killed in the heat of an unflinching war against drug trafficking and drug traffickers in the interest of our country, and our people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reiterate the sympathies which I went to personally convey to the bereaved family. I also sympathize with the Police Force and urge upon them not only to cherish her memory but, above all, to be inspired by her heroism in the fight against crime and for the maintenance and preservation of law and order.

On the same day, I visited Police Constable G. B. A. who was admitted to hospital as a result of injury sustained in the course of the operation and I wish to seize this opportunity to commend the bravery and determination of the Officer in the fight against drug trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would wish to re-affirm my commitment and determination as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and that of my Government that there would be no retreat and no surrender in our patriotic and relentless war against drug traffickers and drug networks of all shapes and shades.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, the information being requested for in these five questions taken together relates to the following -

- (i) measures taken to ensure the security of participating Police Officers;
- (ii) provision of weapons and protective equipment, and the frequency of renewal of such equipment;
- (iii) number of vehicles utilised for the operation;
- (iv) training of Officers of ADSU, and
- (v) the time when the operation was planned and the persons aware of the pre-planning and the persons in charge of the operation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since there is an ongoing Police inquiry into the Bo'Valon Mall case, certain aspects of that case cannot be disclosed.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the drug operation conducted at Bo'Valon Mall on Tuesday 24 November 2020 at about 16.30 hours was not a 'controlled delivery operation' but a 'covert operation', demanding high-level secrecy, which was carried out with a view to intercepting some suspected persons involved in drug dealings and trafficking.

A covert operation comprising a team of 15 Police Officers, including late Woman Police Constable D. R. from Southern Division ADSU, was mounted to intercept and arrest the suspects.

Four Police vehicles were used for the operation under the charge of an Inspector of Police and under the supervision of the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Southern Division ADSU.

With regard to security of Officers and the provision of weapons and protective equipment, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the following measures were taken for the security of the Police Officers who participated in the drug operation -

- (a) a team of 15 officers were selected for the duty. All were fit for duty and they were mentally prepared to undertake such tasks;
- (b) a proper briefing was carried out by the Officer-in-Charge of the operation, whereby every individual/team's role was clearly spelt out;
- (c) two commanders were each armed;
- (d) the other Officers were in possession of other protective equipment as appropriate for that operation;

- (e) the team was equipped with multimedia radios which were used to ensure constant communication, to exercise proper command and control and follow-up actions;
- (f) prior to the operation, the ADSU team involved therein had familiarised itself with the area of operation, and
- (g) all vehicles used in the operation were properly checked and were roadworthy.

Furthermore, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that ADSU Officers are issued with bulletproof jackets, protective safety helmets and other equipment for their personal safety whenever they are involved in operations. The use of these equipment is based on the risk assessment of the ground commander responsible for the operation.

I am also informed that the ADSU is provided with the necessary state-of-the-art equipment to enhance the operational capabilities of the Unit in its fight against the drug scourge. However, for security reasons, information pertaining to these equipment cannot be made public.

The equipment are renewed as and when required depending on the robustness, frequency of use and normal wear and tear.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the services from ADSU Rose Belle were readily available for deployment at short notice as well as the services of Special Supporting Unit, Special Mobile Force (Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport), Commandos (*Groupement d'Interventions de la Police Mauricienne (GIPM)*) & Marine Commandos (MARCOS), Police Dog Unit and Police Helicopter Squadron through Police Information and Operations Room (PIOR). Moreover, the Police have adequate resources which are deployed depending on the nature and requirements of the operation.

With regard to training provided to Officers of the ADSU, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since 2018 to date, Officers from the ADSU have followed training locally in various fields such as controlled delivery operations, intelligence gathering and surveillance operations, including covert ones.

Furthermore, some 67 Police Officers posted to the ADSU have also attended overseas training/workshop/seminars on drug related matters.

During her posting at ADSU, Woman Police Constable D.R. had attended four training courses locally, including one in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding planning and preparation of Police operations, only the Officers to be involved therein, and strictly on a NEED TO KNOW basis, are appropriately briefed in strict observance of timing, and no details or specifics thereof can be communicated to any Officer who does not need to know. This is a golden principle as well as a *sine qua non* ingredient for such operations. The ADSU operation under reference being a covert one, only a limited number of staff was aware of it at the initial stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government is fully committed and will remain steadfast in the fight against the drug scourge and this tragic case will make us more determined in combatting drug trafficking. An enquiry has started on 24 November 2020 and, as stated earlier, it will not be appropriate for me to reveal certain information which would cause prejudice to the inquiry.

Dr. Gungapersand: Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me also to pay tribute to Constable D.R. for her heroism. My question is: in spite of all the security measures mentioned by the Prime Minister, how come the suspects were intercepted only at Phoenix, while putting at risk the lives of so many people on the way?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it will, of course, be for the enquiry to determine all the aspects relating to the operation that was carried out by ADSU and will look into all the details pertaining to what the hon. Member has raised.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, at paragraph 11.1.7 of the Report stated, and I quote –

“The Commission hears with dismay of the absence of essential tools to enable the officers to perform and to bring results.”

So, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he is in presence of any request from the Commissioner of Police to provide more fund to better equip ADSU, to meet the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just answered that the Commissioner of Police, himself, has informed me that they have adequate resources to carry out such kind of operation. They are provided with equipment, and, in fact, it is this Government which has continuously increased the budget of the Police, and especially the budget of ADSU, in order to increase their capacity in terms of equipment and human resources to fight the drug scourge.

Ms Anquetil: Le Premier ministre peut-il informer la Chambre si l'État envisage d'honorer à titre posthume la policière D. R., décédée dans des circonstances tragiques, pour son courage et son dévouement pour le pays?

The Prime Minister: A decision will be taken in due course, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

Mr Nagalingum: Can the hon. Prime Minister state whether any compensation has been paid to the family? And it would be advisable that same should have been done immediately.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the questions do not relate to compensation, but I can say from memory that whatever money has to be paid to the next of kin or to the heirs of a deceased Officer will, of course, be paid.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether late WPC Raghoo sent several letters to DCP Bhojoo requesting to be transferred to regular Police Force, and if yes, why was her request refused? And also, why was she called on duty even though she was on leave? Is there any shortage of ADSU Officers at Rose Belle Post?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been no written request on behalf of late WPC 625 Raghoo to be transferred from ADSU. With regard to leave, I am informed that she had applied for 21 days of vacation to be spent from 24 November, but she was called for that operation. I am informed that it is also a practice that, whenever certain Officers who have been working on a specific case, are even on leave, they can be called, and that is how, in this case, she was called to form part of the team. I must say this is not the first time because we can all, I think, remember the case of another Officer who had passed away in the course of an operation that was carried out in 1987; the case of former Sergeant Ollee. He was also on leave at that time; but he was called and he formed part of the team which carried out the search at the place of Mr K. This is what I have been told. This is a practice and, as I have mentioned, it dates back to at least 1987.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his answer, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned a 'covert operation' and not a 'controlled delivery operation'. Can the Prime Minister explain the difference?

The Prime Minister: All the questions have been put with regard to controlled delivery. I must say, a controlled delivery operation is carried out by ADSU Officers after the interception of drug consignments for the purpose of identifying drug traffickers and dismantling drug nexuses. And during the controlled delivery operation, the drug consignments are either kept intact or dummy is allowed to replace them so that we can proceed with the operation under Police supervision till the final recipient is identified. A controlled delivery operation is also authorised, I must point out, by section 55 of the Dangerous Drugs Act of 2000.

On the other hand, during a covert drug operation, which is normally based on intelligence, undercover Police Officers are placed at strategic locations to keep watch over suspicious persons involved in drug transactions, and, thereafter, intercept them whilst they are committing the offence, and this is the very case we are considering about. It was a covert operation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the number of persons arrested so far connected to this tragedy and whether searches were conducted at the premises of the accused, and whether any drug or drug related items were found? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the Commissioner of Police that five persons have been arrested so far. The ADSU had carried out a search in the dwelling of Mr H. H. where substances suspected to be drugs and items related to drug dealings have been found and secured. Provisional charges of drug dealing and holding equipment for the purpose of using it for the unlawful production of drugs, in breach of sections 33 (a), 47(5) (a) and 48 of the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000 have been lodged against Mr H. H. An apartment alleged to be co-rented by Mr B. D. J. C. and Mr J. W. V. has also been searched and items related to drug dealings have been found unsecured.

In regard to two other suspects, Mr J. D. C. A. K. and Mr W. A. M., there were no incriminating articles found at their premises. However, I believe that they have also been

arrested in connection with the case and I believe they too would probably have been provisionally charged.

Mr Speaker: Hon. X. L. Duval!

Mr X. L. Duval: In his former reply, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned the so-called unrelenting fight against drugs. He also mentioned some time ago that Mauritius was thinking of adopting the Portugal method and model. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister where have we reached with changing the model of our fight to the Portugal model?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would ask the hon. Member to come with a specific question with regard to how we are going to treat offenders.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister mentioned a list of security measures; my question was on basic measures. Was there an ambulance on a stand-by mode in case something untoward happens?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of this, but I think this question will probably be answered in the course of the enquiry as to whether there was an ambulance that was needed, and whether it is normal, in the course of operations, Police operations for ADSU to have ambulance to be parked there. I leave it for the judgement of people to appreciate whether this question is really meant to be that we need to have an ambulance all the time at a place when ADSU is carrying out an operation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: *Je vous remercie, M. le président.* Given the nature of the work, could the hon. Prime Minister inform the House if consideration will be given to increase the risk allowance of Rs1,300 granted to ADSU Officers?

The Prime Minister: Well, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, if it had been a question about the allowance that is provided to the Officers I would, of course, have had all the details and I would have provided them to the House. Now, this is a totally different question which is not really related directly to those questions that have been asked.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Prime Minister in a position to provide the names of the lawyers, counsels who have assisted the accused so far?

The Prime Minister: I think this has been publicised in the Press. I think we all know who are the lawyers who are appearing. But I must say there is one accused in this case, Mr H.H., and I think we all know his proximity with certain politicians, and I will not...

(Interruptions)

Well, I will tell you his proximity with the Mohamed Chambers! This is what you want to know?

(Interruptions)

That is his proximity!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden, do not set the House on fire!

The Prime Minister: In fact, he...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Be careful of what you are saying in the House.

The Prime Minister: In fact, we all know he is a diehard of the Labour Party.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Earlier on, the Prime Minister stated that his Government has been increasing the budget to combat drug trafficking in this country. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister why is it that the budget allocated to combat drugs has been decreased from Rs287 m. to Rs253 m.?

The Prime Minister: Well...

Mr Lobine: It is in the Estimates.

The Prime Minister: This is not my information. I shall need to check this information and I shall, of course, get back to the House.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait indiquer à la Chambre s'il envisage une couverture d'assurance aux officiers de police ? Merci.

The Prime Minister: I shall have to find out, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unfortunately, the question was related to insurance. Of course, I shall be in a position to reply, and I shall find out.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether the persons arrested have previous drug related convictions?

The Prime Minister: I think it will not be appropriate for me to provide this information as those persons are now subject to an enquiry, and they have been arrested. I cannot say what is going to happen later, but, in the event that they are prosecuted, of course, if they have been involved in previous cases, that will be before the Court and that will be taken into consideration in case of sentencing. But I do not think it will be appropriate for me to provide that information because that information also can prejudice the interests of anyone who is going to appear and to defend himself before the Court.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether it is true that more policemen are attached to VIPSU than ADSU?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet! Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, probably, if I can say, I have not heard such a stupid question for quite some time.

(Interruptions)

Maybe for the information of the hon. Member, the region of Beau Vallon falls under the jurisdiction of the Southern Division. The number of Police Officers posted in the concerned Division is 765.

An hon. Member: *Ala to gagner!*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is not even listening; he is talking! He asked a question and he is chatting! So, he does not even care about listening to my answer! Let me repeat again, probably he will listen to...

Mr Abbas Mamode: I have a point of order.

The Prime Minister: What point of order?

Mr Abbas Mamode: If I may humbly ask the Prime Minister to remove the word 'stupid'.

The Prime Minister: I call it a stupid question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Continue!

The Prime Minister: In fact, I am surprised at such an intelligent hon. Member putting such a stupid question, but anyway! So, I repeat again, and this time the hon. Member is listening. There are 765 Police Officers who are posted at the Southern Division. I do not have the figure for all ADSU, because this is only one Division. So, there are, of course, many more than that, but I can provide the information later on.

Ms Bérenger: Following Press reports of barristers being brutalised when going to assist suspects in the same case at Rose Belle Police Station in the evening of 24 November, can the Prime Minister state whether an enquiry has been initiated, the progress thereof, and any steps taken by the Government to ensure that the constitutional right of an accused party to legal representation is not obstructed by the Police itself? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I do not go by Press reports. I go according to what the Police have informed me, and I can say that I have been informed that one counsel, who is represented by another counsel, has made a complaint to the Police that he has allegedly been assaulted. This is what I have. But, of course, each person has the right to retain the services of a counsel, to be assisted by counsel while giving his statement; and while appearing in Court. This is the fundamental principle of our democratic fabric. The Constitution does give protection to that, and, of course, we, as a Government, will do everything to see to it that the letter of the Constitution, that the right of every person is observed.

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned clearly there is a difference between covert operation and controlled delivery. Surely, covert operation poses

more risks. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether he is aware that different specialised units of the Police Force such as the GIPM, the Helicopter Squadron or others were on standby, should an operation go unexpectedly with, as we have seen, fatalities? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Well, I do not agree with the hon. Member that the controlled delivery operation is less risky than a covert operation. Not at all! They are as risky depending, of course, on the circumstances and depending on the case and the way the operation unfolds. I have replied and I do not want to repeat what I have said. There were other units which, we can say, were on standby. If they were required, they would have been called and they would have been supporting the Officers who were involved in this operation.

DRUGS - CONTROLLED DELIVERY OPERATION

(No. B/980) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the controlled delivery of drugs operation carried out by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit in the Bo'Valon Mall, on 24 November 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of –

- (a) officers who participated therein, indicating if they were equipped with guns and protective gears, and
- (b) vehicles involved in connection therewith.

(Vide reply to PQ B/979)

ADSU – TRAINING & EQUIPMENT

(No. B/984) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Officers of the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police –

- (a) details of the training/s provided thereto over the past two years, including to Ms D. R., Woman Police Constable, who lost her life in the course of the controlled delivery of drugs operation of 24 November 2020, and

- (b) information as to the equipment provided thereto, indicating the frequency of renewal thereof.

(Vide reply to PQ B/979)

DRUGS - CONTROLLED DELIVERY OPERATION

(No. B/986) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the controlled delivery of drugs operation carried out by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit in the Bo'Valon Mall, on 24 November 2020, wherein Ms D. R., Woman Police Constable, lost her life, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number of officers who participated therein;
- (b) number of vehicles used in connection therewith, and
- (c) other resources mobilized therefor.

(Vide reply to PQ B/979)

DRUGS - CONTROLLED DELIVERY OPERATION

(No. B/989) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) 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 controlled delivery of drugs operation carried out by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit in the Bo'Valon Mall on 24 November 2020, wherein Ms D. R., Woman Police Constable, lost her life, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to when was the said operation planned, indicating –

- (a) who was in charge thereof, and
- (b) the number of –
 - (i) Officers who participated therein, indicating if any one of them was in possession of a firearm;
 - (ii) vehicles involved therein, and
 - (iii) persons who were aware of the pre-planning stage thereof.

(Vide reply to PQ B/979)

Mr Speaker: Time over! Questions to Ministers! Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

COVID-19 VACCINE - PROCUREMENT

(No. B/992) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVAX Facility, he will give a list of the manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccines concerned therewith, indicating the number of doses thereof to be procured by Mauritius and the expected delivery date/s thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this yet another question on COVID-19 vaccine and I hope that my reply will give a clear explanation on all the various steps involved in the development and procurement of a safe COVID-19 vaccine.

As stated in my earlier replies in this very House, Mauritius will stand guided by the World Health Organisation advice when it comes to the procurement of a safe vaccine and, as of now, no such advice has been tendered yet.

I am informed that there are currently more than 100 COVID-19 vaccine candidates and, at this point in time, I will stress on candidates meaning that we still have to wait before ascertaining that one of them is safe and efficient for use.

Since April this year, WHO is working in collaboration with scientists, businesses and global health organisations through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, to speed up the pandemic response.

Further, when a safe and effective vaccine is found, COVAX, which is led by WHO, by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), will accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines to guarantee a fair and equitable access and distribution of these vaccines to protect people all over the world.

Currently, the full list of CEPI supported candidate vaccines is as follows-

- (i) Inovio developed by the USA which has gone through phases I and II;
- (ii) Moderna which has reached phase III;
- (iii) CureVac which is still at phase I;

- (iv) Candidate vaccine developed by Institut Pasteur, which is still at pre-clinical stage;
- (v) Candidate vaccine developed by Astra Zeneca and University of Oxford which has reached phase III;
- (vi) Candidate vaccine developed by University of Hong Kong and China which is at pre-clinical stage;
- (vii) NOVAVAX vaccine which has gone through phases I and II;
- (viii) Candidate vaccine by Clover Biopharmaceuticals which is at Phase I, and
- (ix) Candidate vaccine developed by University of Queensland which is at phase I.

I am also informed that, as of now, the widely publicised candidate vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNtech does not form part of the COVAX facility. However, discussions between WHO and Pfizer are underway for its inclusion on the list.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 09 October 2020, my Ministry has signed a Commitment Agreement with GAVI Alliance to secure doses for 20% of our population irrespective of the number of doses required. A payment of USD Eight Hundred and Eleven thousand and Five Hundred and Twenty (811,520) has also been effected to GAVI Alliance in October 2020 and November 2020 to confirm the participation of Mauritius in the COVAX facility.

On 16 November 2020, in accordance with the terms of the Commitment Agreement signed with GAVI Alliance, my Ministry has also made a bank guarantee of US Dollar Four Million, Five Hundred and Thirty Nine Thousand and Four Hundred and Forty (4,539,440) in favour of GAVI Alliance to cover the remaining cost of the vaccines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although much progress has been made in the development of a safe and efficient vaccine, we cannot confirm that such a vaccine already exists. As far as we know, the vaccine might even be among the available candidates, but we cannot be sure of this fact as long as all the relative scientific data is not available and verified.

As regards the last part of the question, concerning an expected date of delivery, it will be inopportune, at this point in time, as no vaccine has yet been validated. The question does not arise as long as a safe and efficient vaccine is not duly endorsed by the WHO.

I wish to remind the House that the validation process can only be completed after a thorough evaluation of all necessary scientific data pertaining to each specific candidate vaccine and, as at now, the totality of these scientific data is still not available.

Mauritius has, however, already taken the necessary steps for the purchase of such a vaccine as soon as it becomes available.

Currently, countries around the world are purchasing candidate vaccines which are not yet endorsed by WHO. This is the only way for some of them to address the chaotic situation prevailing in their respective countries where new cases and new casualties are escalating day by day. As of now, Mauritius is not in such a situation.

I wish to remind the House that our country remains COVID safe with no local circulation of the virus and we will continue to apply strict sanitary measures to intercept all imported cases in quarantine. There is, therefore, absolutely no necessity, at this stage, for us to impose a candidate vaccine, which is yet to be approved, on our population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would, once more, like to take this opportunity to reassure the House and the population in general that my Ministry is taking all the necessary steps to ensure that Mauritius receives the COVID-19 vaccine and not a candidate vaccine, as soon as same becomes available.

We should act promptly but without any haste.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I have a few questions. The first question I would like to ask the Minister: we join the COVAX facility which as everybody knows is a facility set up by the WHO for low income countries, for poor countries. Mauritius is not a low-income country; it is a high-income country. Therefore, why did we join the COVAX facility instead of going like so many other high-income countries directly to the manufacturers to reserve any future approved vaccines? Why only the COVAX facility which only deals anyway with 20% of the population and meant for poor countries?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, so far I have not any documentation that the COVAX facility is for poor countries, as at now, more than 187 countries...

(Interruptions)

I believe the hon. Member must understand that to get a vaccine, it is better that we have it on one platform. That is the best way how we can secure vaccines and it is not that each and

every country has to rush to see the vaccines from the different laboratories developing their vaccine. That would be again another chaotic situation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, you don't have the floor.

Mr X.L. Duval: Mr Speaker, this is a very stupid answer. Mr Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Minister that, from his own list, only two vaccines are in stage III - Moderna and Astra Zeneca and University of Oxford. These vaccines are on the list of the COVAX.

Now given the huge economic price that this country is paying, and the Minister of Finance will agree, will the hon. Minister tell this House how many vaccines are likely to be made available to this country once the Moderna vaccine is approved by WHO which is expected to be mid-January. How many of these vaccines and for what percentage of the population can Mauritius expect from the Moderna and the Astra Zeneca vaccines which are in stage III and are likely to be the first vaccines to become available through this COVAX facility for poor countries?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I think I have already given the answer to whatever the hon. Member is asking. 20% population means 20%, it's more than 260 people to be vaccinated. This is the answer. I think the question is again...

(Interruptions)

260,000.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the ongoing works or discussions with the WHO with regard to a duly efficient and registered COVID-19 vaccine?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, for a duly efficient and registered vaccine, works have been initiated to address two specific issues so as to avoid limits or delays in accessing the COVID-19 vaccine which are distributed under the COVAX. The first issue pertains to the product liability risk. I think the hon. Member should understand that a vaccine has a liability risk and countries have been namely asked to establish a compensation mechanism to compensate individuals who might suffer from serious adverse effects associated with the vaccine. And secondly, countries have also been asked to determine under what provisions their National Medicines Regulatory Authorities can issue exemption for certain labeling

requirements for the COVID-19 vaccines that would be distributed under the COVAX. So, these two issues have to be addressed before undertaking any vaccine that we would wish to have in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can my friend, the hon. Minister of Health confirm whether his Ministry has already earmarked funds as part of a preparedness plan for the rest of the 80% of the population should we need vaccines for them in the future and not use the Emergency Procurement System whereby these will be provided by jewelers and hardware shops?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the procurement of the rest of the population in case the vaccine is available, work is ongoing with the Ministry of Finance and, obviously, once the vaccine is available, I will come forward to give the different procurement steps that would be undertaken by my Ministry and the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr X.L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we have one or two which are very important questions, vaccination against the worse health crisis that this country has faced, Mr Speaker, Sir. Give us a few questions, please. I just have two questions if you don't mind. Many farsighted countries, not like us, have ordered many more vaccines than they need in case some of them are not authorized eventually by WHO, will the hon. Minister speak to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister to see that we open, like many other countries, diplomatic negotiations with these countries, UK, Canada, USA, Europe so that any surplus vaccines – this is a serious question – that these countries will eventually have, can be given to Mauritius, even sold to Mauritius?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe the hon. Member has a chaos in his mind to understand when we should rush for the vaccine. I will just repeat it again, countries around the world are purchasing candidate vaccines. He should understand what is a candidate vaccine, these are potential vaccine manufacturers and yet they have not been endorsed by WHO. Why those countries are doing so, it is because they are in a chaotic situation where cases daily are rising. Mauritius is not in this situation. Mauritius is COVID safe, we should not rush into engaging ourselves with any countries about purchasing a vaccine. First, let us be guided by the WHO.

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

You don't have the floor.

Mr X.L. Duval: I have one last question. I am going to say a very stupid thing. The only way - the Minister might try to understand - that our borders can ever be opened and our economy back to normal is when the population is vaccinated. So, it is absolutely important to get the whole population vaccinated so that our borders can be opened. I hope it is not such a stupid thing to understand that it is so important to open our borders and the only way to do so is through vaccination. Therefore, I am asking the hon. Minister again to find out how many vaccines will come to Mauritius, when and it is hoped in January. Moderna's vaccine is approved by WHO and when the other vaccines are approved, any countries that have excess approved vaccines – God, it is absolutely difficult to understand - can be sold, or sent or given to Mauritius. This is the only way that the borders can be opened.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, there is a lot of stupidity in what the hon. Member is saying.

Mr Speaker: That would be the end.

(Interruptions)

Please, nobody has the floor!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Listen, hon. Minister and hon. Xavier Duval, this is the last time I hear about 'stupid' and 'stupidity'.

(Interruptions)

You don't have the floor, keep quiet. Keep quiet! Be patient!

Mr Bérenger: He started it!

Mr Speaker: Be patient!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past the hon. Member has again raised this question about vaccine purchase. Again, at one time, he has informed the House that the Government has to pre-order a vaccine. Let us put it clear, how can we pre-order a vaccine when a vaccine has not been validated? How do we do so? Mr Speaker, Sir, when the

vaccine has not been yet validated, it is still on the stage of trial. The hon. Member would like to engage the Government into procuring a vaccine. We know what may happen at a later stage. Imagine a case where those vaccines that have been in the different process of trial and you have severe side effects. Now, what that hon. Member would come to say: “Why the Government has come?” I would not use the word again.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/996 has been withdrawn. Next question!

PACK & BLISTER - VENTILATORS - PURCHASE

(No. B/993) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the 50 ventilators purchased from Pack and Blister, he will state if same have now been commissioned and are operational and, if so, indicate the public health institutions wherein same have been installed.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I would like to reply to PQs B/993 and B/1020 concurrently.

I have already replied to a similar question set to me on 10 November, 2020. Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to provide a clear and explicit answer to these PQs, it is essential to situate the context in which these 50 ventilators were ordered and procured.

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, WHO and the international health agencies placed Mauritius as a high risk country with more than 80,000 COVID-19 infections, more than 1,000 severe cases over 22,000 hospital admissions and forecast that we would need 80 ventilators operating at one go at any given time with more than 830 deaths.

Given the alarming forecasts, my Ministry, in the context of its preparedness plan, conducted an inventory of all ventilators in our health institutions, which could be mobilized to address the impending situation. Following consultations between the Director General Health Services and the Consultants, it was decided that we still need more ventilators so as to be fully prepared to face the threat.

The House will concur that the international situation back in March 2020 was such that normal procurement procedures would have been lengthy and time-consuming. We did not have time at our disposal. Adding to the element of time, we had to manage with disrupted air and maritime traffic worldwide. Countries were at war in securing medical supplies and equipment. The rule of the highest bidder prevailed and we all remember the

episodes where medical consignments shifted hands on the very tarmac of international airports.

Already manufactured ventilators were a rare commodity on the global market. Several producing countries imposed export bans on medical equipment and supplies. Due to the mismatch between demand and supply, prices rocketed.

Faced with these numerous challenges, we had to act promptly and boldly in the best interests of our population. It was decided to have recourse to emergency procurement as per section 21 of the Public Procurement Act and as backed by Directive 44 of the Public Procurement Office.

This procurement exercise was indeed meant to address a matter of extreme urgency and in this case, it was done to safeguard lives ...

Mr Speaker: Point of order!

Mr X.L. Duval: On a point of order, it is not my question. My question is very short and very clear. I don't want to know all these *blablabla*. How many of the 50 ventilators purchased are operational and if so, at which public health institution? That is the question.

Dr. Jagutpal: Similarly, we had to upgrade our pool of ventilators in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. I am informed that local suppliers were initially approached for the supply of the needed ventilators. They were informed of the amount required, the specifications and the time frame for delivery. Among the local suppliers who responded, one could not respect the time frame for delivery, another company did not meet the specifications, and finally one company ticked all the boxes but could deliver only 10 such ventilators which we immediately purchased. Had the company been in a position to supply the whole batch of ventilators, we would not have moved for a foreign supplier.

I am informed that the AERO DUO ventilators procured from Pack and Blister complied with all the required specifications set by and verified by the technical team of my Ministry.

The 50 ventilators purchased from Pack and Blister were received on 31 July 2020 after all custom formalities were cleared. The installation of all the ventilators together with the accessories falls under the responsibility of the technicians from ALPRESS, the manufacturing company in Turkey.

In order to commission the 50 ventilators AERO DUO made in Turkey, procured from Pack and Blister, two engineers from ALPRESS, the manufacturer of the 50 ventilators, arrived in Mauritius on 12 November 2020 and were scheduled to leave on 18 November 2020 for the commissioning of the ventilators.

On 13 November 2020, upon being tested negative for COVID-19, the two engineers proceeded to the New Souillac Hospital, under strict sanitary control, to configure and commission the ventilators.

On 18 November 2020, the two engineers effected another site visit with the users as well as one surgical technologist and one biomedical engineer and informed that they would adjust the configurations as proposed by the users.

In view of the adjustments requested by the said users, the two engineers extended their duration of stay until 21 November 2020. Ten ventilators were successfully configured. The configuration thus took more time than initially planned. In view of the heavy work commitment, the two experts could not extend their stay further.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that 10 ventilators have been calibrated by the Turkish Engineers and the machines are now being assessed for continuous ventilation testing process so as to comply with the EUA and FDA protocols of testing. This is a crucial step so as to ascertain that the ventilators maintain the same level of performance even after one week of continuous ventilation.

My Ministry has liaised with the manufacturer to secure dates for the completion of the calibration and commissioning exercise. Thereafter, the ventilators would be installed for use.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot deny that there has been a delay in the commissioning of the ventilators. Thankfully, given our efficient management of the COVID-19 situation,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, should I continue?

Mr Speaker: It is up to you.

Dr. Jagutpal: I repeat again ...

Mr Speaker: Order! Do you need the answer to continue?

Dr. Jagutpal: I repeat again, thankfully, given our efficient management of the COVID-19 situation, we have not been in a dire situation warranting extensive use of those equipment. My Ministry will, of course, pursue its endeavour to commission the equipment in the briefest of delays. In case of any fault in the procured equipment, we will revert back to the supplier, after consultation with the Public Procurement Office.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, hundreds of millions of rupees have been pre-spent on a pre-order of these 50 ventilators. Five months after arriving in Mauritius, none of these ventilators have been commissioned and are operational. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether all the money, the hundreds of millions of rupees have already been prepaid to Pack and Blister?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will reply this question, firstly to address - likewise in 2009 - the SARS epidemic. The Government at that time triggered the emergency procurement process to procure Oseltamivir, Tamiflu tablets in the context of its preparedness strategy. Even if most of the medication procured in millions of rupees have gone to waste, those medications have not been used, they have all expired at that point of time, we had to make it. Similarly, the apparatus are here, the buyer technicians have given their approval. Now, let the experts come again to get all the equipment commissioned. Mr Speaker, Sir, the commissioning of equipment will not be done for one but for all the ventilators at the same time.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Merci M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous confirmer si les cinq consultants responsables des hôpitaux régionaux et l'ingénieur biomédical du ministère ont refusé que ces respirateurs soient mis en service en raison d'importants manquements notés ? Par exemple, il n'y a pas un système d'alarme qui se déclenche lorsque le niveau d'oxygène baisse. Donc, il faut qu'il y ait quelqu'un en permanence à côté du respirateur pour suivre l'évolution du respirateur.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the apparatus configuration has not been done, how can the doctors and the consultants already given their advice and their opinions? I think it is not at this time, but once all the different steps in installing the apparatus will be done, at that moment the consultant should give their advice.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the Ministry insisted that the engineers commissioned at least one ventilator before leaving?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the commissioning process is a lengthy process, involving installation of accessories, configuration of various electronic monitoring devices and their respective calibration, to commission one ventilator, the supplier might impose that all other ventilators are operational and have no issues. So it is good that we commission all the ventilators at the same time.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance, be mindful! Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: I want to know from the hon. Minister why is he defending a supplier who has not been able to commission and deliver in time and already pocketed Rs500 m.? Doesn't he think that public funds require him to sue them and their representatives and all those people who colluded to give Pack and Blisters this contract of Rs500 m?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, the hon. Member is not giving - Pack & Blister. The ventilators that have been purchased, each ventilator has cost the Government Rs1,650,000. In fact, the ventilators that we have purchased from the local supplier is Rs1,650,000 while those purchased from Pack & Blister is Rs1,450,000 and the total will be around Rs80 m. and not what the Member stated, Rs500 m.

Now secondly, the ventilators have reached Mauritius in July. The international context is such that we had to make preparedness and we had the best deal and this is the only ventilators available on the international market.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: That's why we procured under emergency procurement. Hon. Minister, since you have failed miserably in managing the whole issue, will you consider to step down as...

(Interruptions)

Will you consider to step down as Minister of Health?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: This is a very deplorable question from this. It's not concerning...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir,...

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: there is.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

(Interruptions)

Give me the chance.

Dr. Jagutpal: Shameful from the part of the hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe all procurement exercises are done by technicians, by officers in the Ministry and they have done that for the interest of the population. Such a question arises that the Ministry has failed to manage the Covid situation, it's, I think, the only person around the world to tell so.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, be careful! You don't have the floor, you can't speak! You have finished, Minister?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Hon. X. L. Duval, last supplementary if you have one.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Mr Speaker. I will join my colleague. The hon. Minister of Health has failed to procure vaccines and failed to procure decent ventilators to protect the population, will he resign now?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Maybe the hon. Member has a chaotic mind. I think he badly needs advice to be treated.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**METRO EXPRESS LTD – SALE OF TICKETS & ADVERTISING – 01 JANUARY
2020-30 SEPTEMBER 2020**

(No. B/994) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro Express Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to, over the period 01 January to 30 September 2020, the –

- (a) quantum of revenue generated from –
 - (i) the sale of tickets, and
 - (ii) advertising;
- (b) number of paid passenger trips effected, and
- (c) accumulated losses incurred.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Metro Express Ltd. started its commercial operations on the 10 February 2020.

To date, MEL has effected more than 2.26 million passenger trips since the start of its commercial operations.

As we know, the world economy is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic on the same level as some major industry sectors and international transport operators which have witnessed a decrease in their operation. In France, for example, the famous *Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer* has announced a massive predicted loss of 5 billion euros for the year 2020. Likewise, in the UK, Transport for London and Crossrail projects are facing similar funding challenges. In Germany, the rail operators, namely Deutsche Bahn, which is a State-owned company, has reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged it into its worst ever financial crisis.

Sir, with regard to part (a)(i) of the question, I wish to inform the House that revenue generated by MEL comprises of fare revenue, that is, from the sale of tickets presently. It will generate non-fare revenue mainly through advertising.

For the period 01 January 2020 to 30 September 2020, revenue generated amounted to Rs54,054,186 which included subsidy obtainable for students, senior citizens and disabled persons.

With regard to part (a)(ii) of the question, I am informed that Metro Express Ltd. signed a 5-year contract with Alliance Media in August 2020, for the latter to manage and operate the MEL advertising business. Alliance Media will commercialise potential advertising spaces on premises of MEL in order to generate non-fare revenue with a minimum guaranteed payment every year. Alliance Media started the commercialisation of existing advertising spaces as from the 01 November 2020 and the first payment is expected towards the end of January 2021.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Sir, I am informed that the number of paid passenger trips for the period 01 January 2020 to September 2020 was Rs2,143,783, including the students, senior citizens and people with disabilities.

With regard to part (c) of the question, MEL is expected to be financially sustainable when it will be in full operation from Curepipe to Port Louis where more than 50,000 passenger trips are expected daily.

During the first two months of operation, that is, from January 2020 to February 2020, from Rose Hill to Port Louis, the daily ridership was above 17,000 passengers.

Unfortunately, during the lockdown period, there was no ridership. After the lockdown period, ridership declined drastically by more than 50%. However, MEL has informed that its ridership is gradually picking up. Presently, the ridership is around 10,000 passengers per day.

As regards non-fare revenue derived from advertising which was expected during the second quarter of 2020, that is, from October to December 2020 also suffered the effect of COVID-19 pandemic, hence leading to accumulated losses estimated at around MUR 23.6m. Had the Metro Express been fully operational and with no impact of COVID-19 pandemic, these accumulated losses would have been drastically minimised.

The financial sustainability of MEL, Sir, can only be assessed as from the day of full operation of the 26km rail network from Curepipe to Port Louis. One must keep in mind the economic, environmental and social impacts of this facility on the economy, which is bringing sustainable development, less carbon emission, reduced travel time and reduced

pressure on our roads with associated increased property value and community redevelopment.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a few questions. Mr Speaker, Sir, in March 2017, his predecessor mentioned; in fact, informed the House that the average daily ridership would amount, would you believe, to 160,000 persons per day.

Now, even before the pandemic, it seems hardly a tenth of that has been achieved by Metro Express. Can the Minister tell us why?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, I just said in my answer that when the whole project will be completed, phase II of the project will be completed, we, now are expecting the number of commuters amounting to 50,000 per day. From when we started phase I, beginning of this year, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, we had the figure of 17,000 passengers per day which had been drastically reduced after the lockdown and the COVID-19 effect.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't understand - I hope the Minister realises what he is saying. He is saying 50,000 per day whereas his predecessor told us a 160,000 per day, that is, less than a third of what was forecasted. This is in the PNQ. You can pick it up from here.

Mr Speaker, this is what the hon. Minister before him said on 24 October. He said – “Mr Speaker, revenues equivalent to - in the first full year of operation”, this is where we are, first full year of operation, “revenue is expected to be Rs622 m.” and now, you are telling us it's only Rs52m. or Rs54m. for the first 9 months.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is going to be a financial disaster for the Government and the company is unable to...

Mr Speaker: No, no...

Mr X. L. Duval: ...is going to be unable...

Mr Speaker: The question was full, complete. Answer!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just answered. For us to be able to assess the financial sustainability of MEL, we should assess it from the day of full operation when phase II will have been completed, when the whole project will have been completed. This is why we are expecting, Mr Speaker, Sir, that after the full operation of the 26 kilometres Rail Network from Curepipe to Port Louis, we will increase substantially ridership and the project will be a viable project.

Mr Speaker: Next supplementary!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, these figures differ substantially; two thirds less than his predecessor gave to this august House. So, I think he should look at what is happening and understand the situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear, in my view, that the Metro Express has been badly conceived and is not appealing to the public. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has ordered a survey of passengers, a survey of Mauritians living along that route to see why they are not using the Metro Express, because as his colleague just said before, Mauritius had been so successful that we don't have COVID here, yet it is a disaster at the Metro Express level?

Mr Ganoo: The strong words that are being used by the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, are his own words. I would, of course, deny that the Metro Express project is a disaster to come. As I said, we have had the difficulties of this year, COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we are fully confident that, in the coming years, when the whole project will be set on place, the ridership will increase and the project will be a viable one.

Mr Bhagwan: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the first supplementary. The Minister has made mention of community redevelopment, if I am not mistaken. Can he inform the House whether while completing the first phase - I will take as an example, the football ground of Maingard, La Confiance, which has been used by Metro Express since the beginning of the project, a football ground where public money of nearly Rs25 m. were spent and it is there like a construction yard. Can the Minister inform the House whether provision has been made for the redevelopment promised by the former Minister for that football ground which is used by Metro Express actually at Cité Barkly, Maingard?

Mr Ganoo: Although this question is not relevant to the main question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will answer the hon. Member to inform him that we are aware of the community developments that we had promised *dans le sillage de ce projet*. So, the hon. Member can rest assured, I myself, some weeks ago, went to Cité Barkly. I had a meeting with the people from the Church and the inhabitants of the region and we looked into the projects that have to be undertaken. We have taken some time, as we all know, because of COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir, but the hon. Member can rest assured that the developments promised in the periphery of the Metro Express project will be addressed.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, when I look around, there is still a huge amount of traffic between Port Louis and Rose Hill, huge amount

of traffic, the buses are full, how can he explain that all this is happening, traffic is clogged up, buses are full, people are not using Metro Express? This is why I reiterate my question whether he will agree to a passenger survey to see what is the issue and how matters can be resolved before it is too late?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are monitoring the situation. The hon. Member can rest assured we are all aware in Government and at MEL of the heavy investment that has been made and the implication of such investment. We are monitoring the situation and the hon. Member can rest assured that MEL is constantly, relentlessly thinking about new ways to attract ridership. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a long process and we are confident that in the coming years, with all the initiatives that MEL will be taking, we will improve the ridership of MEL.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE – CO2 EMISSION

(No. B/995) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Nationally Determined Contribution submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as part of the Paris Agreement in 2015, he will state the progress thereof concerning the attainment of the set target for CO2 emission for the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, en réponse à la PQ B/539 de l'honorable membre il y a quelques séances de cela, j'avais soumis une liste des différentes mesures d'adaptation et de mitigation mises en place depuis 2015 dans différents secteurs notamment l'énergie, le transport, l'agriculture, la santé, le *solid waste management* et l'industrie parmi d'autres. De plus, suivant les questions additionnelles de l'honorable membre, une liste de mesures d'adaptation implémentées ainsi que celles en cours d'implémentation ces dernières années par les institutions concernées a aussi été soumise.

M. le président, conformément au *United Nations Environment Programme Emission Gap Report 2019*, Maurice émet moins de 0,01 % des émissions mondiales de gaz à effet de serre et les secteurs les plus émetteurs à Maurice sont l'énergie, c'est-à-dire la production d'électricité, qui a contribué à 42,4 % des émissions totales de gaz à effet de serre, suivi du secteur des déchets qui a contribué à 22,9 % et du secteur des transports qui a contribué à la

hauteur de 19,6 % respectivement. Par le biais de ses prévisions pour les contributions déterminées au niveau national, soumises au *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* en 2015, Maurice s'est engagée à réduire ses émissions de gaz à effet de serre de 30 % d'ici 2030, à condition d'avoir le soutien technique et financier international. En effet, le soutien international est crucial pour que Maurice puisse transiter vers un développement à faible émission de carbone en utilisant davantage les sources d'énergie renouvelable et en s'adaptant aux impacts négatifs du changement climatique.

M. le président, si l'on se fie au *Business as Usual* scenario fait dans le *2015 Intended Nationally Determined Contribution*, les émissions totales de gaz à effet de serre pour Maurice devraient atteindre quelques 7 millions de tonnes d'équivalents de dioxyde de carbone en 2030. Sur cette base, *selon le Business as Usual scenario*, les émissions de gaz à effet de serre estimées pour 2019 étaient d'environ 5,61 millions de tonnes d'équivalents de dioxyde de carbone. Toutefois, selon les indicateurs économiques et sociaux publiés par *Statistics Mauritius* en juillet 2020, la quantité provisoire de gaz à effet de serre émise s'élevait à 5,78 millions de tonnes d'équivalents de dioxyde de carbone. Le montant provisoire des émissions de gaz à effet de serre émises en 2019 a affiché une augmentation de 170,000 tonnes par rapport à l'*Intended Nationally Determined Contribution Business as Usual scenario* pour les raisons suivantes -

- i) une diminution de l'électricité produite à partir de la bagasse de 509,8 gigawatt heures en 2015 à 437,1 gigawatt heures en 2019 en raison d'une diminution de la superficie cultivée en canne à sucre;
- ii) une augmentation de l'électricité produite à partir de sources non renouvelables, qui est passée de 1181,7 gigawatt heures en 2015 à 1259,5 gigawatt heures en 2019;
- iii) une augmentation de la consommation d'énergie du secteur des transports, qui est passée de 50,7 % en 2015 à 54,6 % en 2019;
- iv) une augmentation de la quantité de déchets solides éliminés à Mare Chicose, qui est passée de 448 milliers de tonnes en 2015 à 543 milliers de tonnes en 2019.

D'autre part, selon *Statistics Mauritius*, l'électricité produite à partir d'énergies renouvelables était de 20,3 pour cent en 2014. Ce chiffre est en croissance et en 2019 il a

atteint 21,7%. Une augmentation de l'électricité produite à partir d'énergies renouvelables a été observée comme suit -

- (i) en ce qui concerne l'hydro de 121,9 gigawattheures en 2015 à 124,5 gigawattheures en 2019;
- (ii) en ce qui concerne le gaz d'enfouissement de 20,4 gigawattheures en 2015 à 22,6 gigawattheures en 2019;
- (iii) production à base du Photovoltaïque de 23,8 gigawattheures en 2015 à 127,7 gigawattheures en 2019.

M. le président, notre gouvernement a tout mis en œuvre pour atténuer nos émissions et respecter notre engagement à l'égard du *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Afin d'accroître la part de l'énergie renouvelable locale, le gouvernement a fixé un objectif révisé de 40% d'énergie renouvelable d'ici 2030. Afin d'accroître cette part, de nombreuses mesures ont été annoncées dans le budget de 2020/2021, comme suit -

- a) l'installation d'une centrale solaire photovoltaïque flottante de 2 mégawatts au réservoir de Tamarind Falls;
- b) l'augmentation de la capacité de la centrale solaire photovoltaïque d'Henrietta de 2 à 10 mégawatts;
- c) l'installation de 1,000 panneaux solaires sur les maisons des familles à faible revenu;
- d) *Commissioning* d'un système de stockage d'énergie par batterie de 15 mégawatts.

En outre, la *Central Electricity Board* introduira un *Medium-Scale Distributed Generation Scheme*, pour un maximum de 10 mégawatts, afin de permettre aux bénéficiaires de produire de l'électricité pour leur propre consommation et de vendre l'excédent à la *Central Electricity Board*; et l'installation de 25 mégawatts de *Rooftop Solar Photovoltaic Scheme* pour répondre aux besoins des bâtiments publics et résidentiels.

Mr Speaker: No conversation!

Mr Ramano: En outre, le *Central Electricity Board Renewable Energy Scheme for Religious Bodies* sera étendu aux organisations non gouvernementales et aux organismes caritatifs.

Les initiatives fiscales visant à réduire le niveau des émissions de dioxyde de carbone (CO₂) dans le pays comprennent une approche fiscale différenciée en faveur des véhicules hybrides et électriques incluant les autobus; une subvention sur les autobus électriques; des *incentives* pour les bornes de recharge des véhicules électriques; des *incentives* pour les équipements solaires photovoltaïques et les revenus exonérés par lesquels les intérêts des particuliers et des sociétés sur les *debentures* ou *bonds* émis par une société pour financer des projets d'énergie renouvelable peuvent être déduits du revenu net.

En ce qui concerne le secteur des déchets, le méthane est le principal gaz d'enfouissement et c'est un gaz à effet de serre très puissant. Depuis 2011, les gaz d'enfouissement sont brûlés dans un *landfill gas-to-energy plant* pour la production d'électricité. Depuis 2011, plus de 160 gigawatt d'heures d'électricité ont été produits à partir du gaz d'enfouissement et injectés dans le réseau.

En outre, pour décarboner l'industrie du transport, le gouvernement met en œuvre des mesures dans le cadre de l'*Avoid-Shift Improve approach*. Une mesure audacieuse, entre autres, dans le cadre de cette approche est le projet Metro Express, qui est un mode de transport public alternatif avec des approches écologiquement durables. Alimenté uniquement par l'électricité, le métro léger cherche à modifier l'utilisation des véhicules privés, ce qui contribuerait à réduire les émissions de carbone.

On m'informe aussi que les émissions de carbone, tout au long de la phase 2 du projet Metro Express, c'est-à-dire de Quatre Bornes à Curepipe, devraient diminuer d'au moins 5%. En outre, le ministère des transports terrestres et du *Light Rail* travaille actuellement sur un projet de piste cyclable intégrée dans certaines zones clés de l'île. Par ailleurs, ce même ministère a mis en place le *Park and Ride schemes* à Ebene...

Mr Speaker: Chief Whip and hon. Ganoo and hon. Minister of Finance, no conversation! Carry on!

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je disais que ce même ministère a mis en place le *Park and Ride schemes* à Ebène, St Pierre, La Vigie, Quatre Bornes, Vacoas, dans la région de Riche Terre, Montebello et Coromandel. Il a aussi relocalisé les parkings de longue durée à Port Louis vers sa périphérie afin de pouvoir disposer gratuitement d'un parking de courte durée.

Outre ces mesures, le gouvernement a introduit divers cadres juridiques et institutionnels pour réduire le niveau des émissions de dioxyde de carbone dans le pays.

M. Le président, conformément à l'Accord de Paris et aux décisions de la COP21, les Parties dont les contributions déterminées au niveau national ont une échéance allant jusqu'à 2030 doivent communiquer ou mettre à jour d'ici 2020 leurs contributions au Secrétariat de la *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* et ce, tous les cinq ans. La période officielle de mise en œuvre des contributions déterminées au niveau national commence en 2021. Étant donné que le délai pour l'île Maurice est jusqu'en 2030, la Contribution Nationale Déterminée doit être revue.

Maurice a obtenu un financement de l'ordre de 200 000 euros du gouvernement français par l'intermédiaire de l'Agence Française de Développement, afin de contribuer, entre autres, à l'évaluation des mesures d'atténuation et d'adaptation dans les secteurs clés identifiés dans les Contributions Nationales Déterminées actuelles et identifier les lacunes et les besoins. En outre, 300 000 USD ont été obtenus auprès du *United Nations Development Programme Country Office*, dans le cadre du projet *Climate Promise*, afin de compléter l'aide du gouvernement français pour le processus de révision. Le soutien de la PNUD sera principalement axé sur la sensibilisation et le renforcement des capacités afin de garantir une approche participative pleinement inclusive.

Mon ministère s'est déjà engagé dans le processus d'examen depuis août de cette année et un rapport sur le processus d'examen devrait être terminé en mai 2021 pour être présenté à la *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* avant la 26^e Réunion de la Conférence des Parties au *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (COP 26).

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you! Very long answer indeed. I hope I will have time to canvass; I have two questions to ask the hon. Minister. Clearly...

Mr Speaker: You do not have to worry. There are four supplementary questions.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay. Thank you! What the Minister has just said seems to tally with what international agencies seem to predict for Mauritius like the World Atlas Data which has stated on its website that the rate of increase of CO₂ emission is not on the decline as we have committed to the UNFCCC, but it is actually increasing at a rate of 3.32% per year, gradually increasing every year, average. So, clearly the target that we have promised at international level will not be met, will be the exact opposite. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether this will have any repercussions on the international aid that he, himself, has just

mentioned in his reply we expect to get from international agencies, in so far as mitigation and adaptation are concerned?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je viens de mentionner que les aides qui sont prévues par l'Agence Française de Développement, il y a aussi l'aide qui est prévue par le *United Nations Development Program Country Office*. Ces deux enveloppes d'aide sont principalement pour qu'on puisse soumettre notre *nationally determined contributions* d'ici mai 2021.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes.

Mr Ramano: Oui, M. le président. Comme je l'ai mentionné dans ma réponse, c'est vrai que le processus pour qu'on puisse diminuer notre émission de carbone d'ici 2030 est un processus qui est long, c'est un processus qui ne va pas se faire du jour au lendemain mais je pense que nous sommes quand même sur la bonne voie. J'ai énuméré aussi des réponses qui fait que notre dépendance sur l'émission de carbone, j'ai mentionné le fait aussi que notre diminution d'électricité produite à base de bagasse de 509,8 gigawatt heure en 2015 à 437,1 gigawatt heure, la raison principale c'est principalement en ce qui concerne la diminution d'une superficie qu'on cultivait en cannes à sucre. Il y a aussi, M. président, du fait qu'il y a une certaine augmentation d'électricité produite à partir de sources non renouvelables mais quand même je dois dire, M. le président, qu'il faut bien reconnaître que l'effort qui est entrepris par différents secteurs de l'économie mauricienne va dans la bonne voie.

Permettez-moi de citer que ces mesures ont une portée transversale. Cela concerne plusieurs ministères, plusieurs départements de l'économie mauricienne. Je citerai, par exemple, le *Energy and Public Utilities*, le *Land Transport*, le *Continental Shelf*, les différents *fiscal incentives* qui sont prévus par le ministère des Finances. Il y a le ministère de l'Industrie qui est en train de travailler avec les petites et moyennes entreprises, avec la responsabilité élargie des producteurs pour voir comment leurs responsabilités soient faites d'une façon très écologique et il y a aussi le *Solid Waste Division* qui dépense sous mon ministère avec la nécessité d'aller de l'avant, de passer d'une économie linéaire à une économie circulaire. Il y a aussi le *Ministry of Blue Economy* avec pas mal des mesures qui sont entreprises actuellement, M. le président. Aussi le ministère de l'Agro-Industrie, même au niveau du ministère du tourisme, il y a une sensibilisation qui est faite actuellement pour diminuer notre émission de carbone. Oui, M. le président, c'est un processus long mais nous

sommes confiants. Avec l'implication de tous ces départements, nous sommes confiants de pouvoir respecter nos engagements d'ici 2030.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes. The question is about whether the target will be met? Clearly, it is not going to be met, it is going to be far overshoot and the Minister is trying to *noyer le poisson*.

Mr Speaker: Do not make comments! Put your question!

(Interruptions)

Quiet, quiet!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Be patient!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Since the Minister has mentioned, it is a crosscutting issue and energy is one of them. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has taken cognizance of Mauritius Renewable Energy (MARENA) work which has produced the Renewable Energy Strategic Plan 2018-2023. If not implemented this is going to be worse; being given that the Chairman of that Committee now is Mr Danen Beemadoo, which I understand is his good friend and electoral agent for 2014-2019 election.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je pense que c'est encore une fois la démagogie qui semble prendre le dessus de l'autre côté de la Chambre.

M. le président, selon les documents qui m'ont été fournis par le *Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, the Institutional and Legal Framework, Government has promulgated the MARENA* en 2015 et principalement *for the establishment of the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency*. Il y a aussi le *Utility Regulatory Authority* qui a été set up en 2016 pour réguler *Utility Services* en ce qui concerne l'électricité, l'eau et aussi le wastewater. Et il y a eu pas mal de mesures de mitigation. Permettez-moi de citer quelques-unes de ces mesures. Il y a la formulation du *renewable energy roadmap* de 2030 et qui a été produite en 2019 *for the electricity sector which is geared towards enabling the optimum production of energy from renewable resources. The formulation of renewable energy management master plan, the development of first renewable energy strategic plan 2018-2023 by MARENA which provides the key stone reference for execution of critical national policy and goals*.

Et le gouvernement a aussi *set up* les *targets* que je viens de mentionner en ce qui concerne les 35% of *renewable energy production* 2025 et 40% d'ici 2030 et aussi 10%

energy efficiency from the non residential and public sector buildings 2020 et 35% réduction de consommation d'énergie pour le transport d'ici 2025.

M. le président, il y aussi le *low carbon development strategy and Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions* le NAMA pour la République de Maurice et je dois dire, M. le président, il y aussi l'implémentation d'un projet *accelerating transformational shift to a low carbon economy for the Republic of Mauritius*.

Mr Speaker: Next supplementary! Last one! So I will suspend the sitting for one hour.

At 1.10 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.15 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated.

ANNOUNCEMENT

QUESTION TIME - INAPPROPRIATE WORDS - RULING

Hon. Members, during the course of Question Time this morning, the word 'stupid', 'stupidity' has been uttered by Members of both sides of the House, namely the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and hon. Xavier Luc Duval. I consider that the use of such words were not appropriate. I, therefore, kindly invite the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, hon. Xavier Luc Duval to withdraw the said words.

The Prime Minister: I withdraw.

Mr X. L. Duval: I withdraw, but I do not see the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr Speaker: Yes, yes! The Minister is defaulting; I will take care of him.

An hon. Member: He will take care of himself. He has withdrawn himself.

Mr Speaker: Yes, that's it. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

UTILITIES SECTOR – AMENDMENTS

(No. B/996) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the utilities sector, he will state if consideration will be given for proposed amendments to be

introduced in the Assembly in relation to the existing legislation pertaining thereto with a view to empowering the Utility Regulatory Authority to exercise its regulatory functions.

(Withdrawn)

ROSE BELLE GREEN ENERGY CO. LTD – PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/997) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to Rose Belle Green Energy Co. Ltd, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the quantum of funds invested by the Central Electricity Board therein, indicating the projects implemented as at to date.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Electricity Board that Rose Belle Green Energy Co. Ltd was incorporated in 2019 following a partnership between Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board and the Central Electricity Board for the setting up of a 15 megawatt solar PV farm project.

I am further informed that the Central Electricity Board has invested an amount of Rs400,000 in this venture. The services of consulting firm, Verde, were resorted to on 07 March 2019 by the Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board for the formulation of the feasibility study together with a business plan and a financial model. As at date, I am informed that Verde has submitted a financial business plan for discussion and approval by CEB and Rose Belle Sugar Estate.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. I have checked the Registrar of Companies yesterday's website, and I see there that one of the Director of this company is Mr Mootoosamy Naidoo, still as at yesterday, which is Mr Seety Naidoo, the person who has had to resign as Chairman of the CEB in the light of the St Louis Gate several months ago. Can I ask the hon. Minister to explain this state of affairs, please?

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Member repeat the last part of his question?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister to explain to the House this state of affairs, how come Mr Seety Naidoo who is no longer the Chairman of CEB for several months now because of the St Louis Gate is still a Director of this company?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have this information with me. I can confirm the information that has been given to the House by the hon. Member and if this is

the case, I will ask the Central Electricity Board to do the needful but I do not have that information, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I can table it to facilitate matters for the hon. Minister.

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, hon. Member.

Mr Osman Mahomed: My second question to the hon. Minister is, in this company, Rose Belle Green Energy Co. Ltd, it is the CEB that is shareholder and not the CEB Green Company Ltd which is the competent arm of the CEB insofar as renewable energy is concerned. So, can I, again, ask the hon. Minister this state of affairs because Rose Belle Company Ltd was set up in 2019, three years after the CEB Green Energy Co. Ltd. Does it not tantamount to an issue of governance?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information that I have is that an MoU was signed between the Central Electricity Board and the Rose Belle Sugar Estate as far back as October 2018 and it was after that, that is on 23 May 2019, that that special purpose company, in the name of Rose Belle Green Energy was incorporated. I understand that at that time it was on the recommendation of a Ministerial Committee that that joint venture was done.

Mr Osman Mahomed: The nature and business of the Rose Belle Green Company Ltd is Electricity Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution as more fully it can be read from the paper that I am going to table. Was this company licensed with the Utility Regulatory Authority?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, no, I do not have that information in my possession.

UTILITY REGULATORY AUTHORITY - CHAIRPERSON & COMMISSIONERS

(No. B/998) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Utility Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the names of the Chairperson and Commissioners thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) qualifications held;
- (b) terms and conditions of employment, and

- (c) monthly pay package drawn since the date of appointment to date.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 8 of the Utility Regulatory Authority Act 2004 provides for the Board of the Authority to comprise a Chairperson and three Commissioners. The appointment of the Chairperson and the Commissioners is made on the advice of the Prime Minister given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The qualifications to be held by the members of the URA Board are provided at section 10 of the URA Act 2004. Mr Speaker, Sir,

- (a) Mr Philip Ah-Chuen was appointed Chairperson of the URA Board for a term of five years on 15 May 2018. He is the holder of a BTech and an MSc in Industrial Administration. He is also fellow of the Mauritian Institute of Management and the Mauritius Institute of Directors;
- (b) Mr Rampiar Luchmun-Roy was appointed as commissioner for a term of four years on 19 September 2016 and is a fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants of UK;
- (c) Mr Sadatmanund Narain was appointed as Commissioner for a term of five years on 26 February 2020 and he holds a bachelor in Electrical Engineering and a post graduate diploma in Electrical Power System Engineering. He is a member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers of UK and a Chartered Engineer of the Council of Professional Engineers of UK. He is a registered Professional Engineer of Mauritius, and
- (d) Mrs Jenny Peggi Sivambal Mootealoo was appointed as Commissioner for a term of five years on 26 February 2020. She is a Barrister-at-law and holds a Master in Public Law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am informed that the Chairperson of the Board of the URA, that is, the Utility Regulatory Authority draws a monthly fee of Rs110,000 while the Commissioners are paid a monthly fee of Rs60,000.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. One Commissioner, in particular, Mrs Peggi Sevambial Mootealoo, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether she is, in fact, Ms Jenny Mootealoo which according to the law, and I am going to cite the Utility Regulatory Authority Act, section 10(4)(d) –

“Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, no person shall be appointed as Chairperson or Commissioner when she or he is involved in politics”.

And we know that Mrs Jenny Mootealoo was involved in politics up until 2019 General Elections in *Movement Libérateur*. Can I ask the hon. Minister to confirm whether she is one and the same person and if this is not in contradiction with the Utility Regulatory Authority Act?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will refer the hon. Member to the same section, first of all to section 10(1) with regard to qualification of Chairperson and Commissioners and I state –

“The Chairperson and Commissioners shall be persons of high moral and professional integrity, having the relevant qualifications, expertise and experience in either law, economics, business, finance, accountancy or engineering.”

Mrs Mootealoo is definitely a person of high moral and professional integrity and she holds, I mean, qualification and experience in law. Then, I will refer the hon. Member to the same section, that is, section 10(4) which he mentioned –

“Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, no person shall be appointed as Chairperson or Commissioner or continue to hold office as Chairperson or Commissioner where he is actively (...)”

You missed that part hon. Member.

“(...) involved in politics”.

Mrs Mootealoo, definitely is involved in politics but she was not actively involved in politics.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Well, I have evidence in my hands showing photographs of her.

Mr Speaker: No. If you are going to quote from Press articles and all these.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Is that right?

Mr Speaker: Move to your next supplementary if you have any.

Mr Osman Mahomed: So, I have photographs of her being actively involved in politics up until 2019. So, how can someone, my question ...

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, we agree to disagree on photographs. Anybody can take a picture with anybody involved in politics.

Mr Osman Mahomed: It is on the website of hon. Ivan Collendavelloo.

“Ensam tou possib nou vini caré caré”

There she is, her photo is on the ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next supplementary!

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, are you not going to accept this as evidence that she is actively involved in politics?

Mr Speaker: No never! No! I have already ruled.

So, before I move to the next question.

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, I have more questions.

Mr Speaker: Do you have another question?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I do.

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, today the Central Electricity Board (Amendment) Bill is being brought to the House and in there, section 20 of the Acts state that –

“Tariff will be filed with the Authority”

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not even debated on that piece of legislation, therefore, he cannot put a question anticipating what is going to happen.

Mr Speaker: So, before I move to the next question, let me ask hon. Dr. Jagutpal, who is now present, to withdraw the words he used during Question Time.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I withdraw the word.

An hon. Member: *Ki* word?

Dr. Jagutpal: ‘Stupid’.

An hon. Member: *Avant dire toi to fini withdraw.*

Mr Speaker: The words were as follows –

“Stupidity” and “stupid”

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman! Next question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: I have supplementaries only. I have no more questions. You mean supplementaries?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I could not gather what you said.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask...?

Mr Speaker: No, no! No supplementary; that was your last question. So, next question!

CAMP-CAROL, GRAND’BAIE – STORM WATER DRAIN

(No. B/999) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of drains at Camp-Carol in Grand’ Baie by the National Development Unit, he will state the reasons for the stalling of the works being carried out in relation thereto.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question. The need for a storm water drain at Camp-Carol, Grand’Baie was initiated in August 2016 and consists of around 1.4 kilometres of drain, including associated works, such as road re-profiling and provision of grittings.

Given the complexity of the project, Desai & Associates Ltd was appointed as consultant. The design was reviewed and scope of works updated by the latter. Works started on site on June 2017. Unfortunately, we have had to face unjustified protest against the project. Obviously, that was instigated the usual ‘*baton dans la roue*’. After months of negotiation, the construction works were finally underway. Further delays were met due to the movement of CWA and Telecom Services.

As at date, 60% of works has been completed. At this point, yes, the project is at a stall as the contractor requested an increase in the contract rates according to the prevailing

rates which were higher than the contract rates. Subsequently, various meetings were held with the contractor with a view to proceed with works at the earliest.

The request of the contractor was assessed in view of the provision of the contract and since the contract did not provide for any change in rates, the request of the contractor could not be entertained and the National Development Unit therefore is still in discussion with the contractor. The situation has been brought to my attention by my hon. colleague PPS, Dr. Ramdhany, who has been following on this issue with the various stakeholders since December 2019. Unfortunately, in-between we have had the COVID lockdown.

My Ministry together with the PPS are looking for the best solution. The needful is being done for a new contractor and a new consultant to be appointed for the completion of the remaining work if discussion with the current contractor should fail. Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. So, we do not know when the work will resume. Now, can we know how much has already been paid to the previous contractor?

Mr Hurreeram: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, the total amount of the project is Rs27 m. and as at date, as I just said, 60% of the work has been completed and Rs10 m. has been paid.

Dr. Gungapersad: Hon. Minister, will the additional work by the other contractor involve additional cost to the initial cost that was earmarked for that project?

Mr Hurreeram: This is why in my reply I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a rate for this contract that was given in Grand' Baie. There is a cost project and we do not intent to pay one cent more regarding this project, otherwise we would have agreed to pay to the same contractor. We are sticking to the estimate that has been done by my Ministry. Discussion is on that the same contractor completes the job and should that fail, we will proceed with a new contractor.

Dr. Gungapersad: Let's hope that the 40% remaining work is completed soon.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Gungapersad: M. le président, je pense que le ministre à qui cette question est adressée n'a plus le droit moral d'être dans l'hémicycle. As if...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Come on! Hon. Member, do not comment, put your question straightforward!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Gungapersad: Je ne veux pas adresser aucune question à ce ministre.

(Interruptions)

STC - FUEL - QUALITY TESTS

(No. B/1000) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the recent tests and investigations carried out into damages caused to several vehicles allegedly due to the quality of fuel imported by the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if same have now been completed and, if so, table copy of the results thereof.

(Withdrawn)

An hon. Member: *Pa envi poz kestion, aller !*

Mr Speaker: Quiet from this side! So, whose turn is it, the next question!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Gungapersad: B/1001!

Mr Speaker: So, the Minister of Environment! Be quick! Chief Whip, what are you doing here?

(Interruptions)

So, let’s move to the next question!

Mr Assirvaden: B/1002!

SOLFERINO & SAINT PAUL - CREMATION GROUNDS

(No. B/1002) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the renovated cremation grounds at Solferino and Saint Paul, in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix, he will state when same will be operational.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the cremation ground at Solferino, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that there were two wooden pyres at Solferino, one of which was covered.

In view of the implementation of the Incinerator Project thereat, the uncovered pyre had been pulled down to provide space for the construction of the incinerator building.

I am also informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that since the construction of the incinerator building has started on 30 January 2019, there has been no demand for traditional cremation at Solferino.

Moreover, the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix has also made arrangements for traditional cremation and also incineration to be done at Phoenix and Trois Mamelles for the inhabitants of Solferino.

With regard to the incinerator set up at Solferino, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that the incinerator equipment has already been installed thereat and we are awaiting for its testing and commissioning. The incinerator equipment has been acquired under the Indian Line of Credit through the Exim Bank of India by my Ministry and, as I mentioned before, there is a total of 16 incinerator equipment which have been procured for the various sites across Mauritius.

However, due to COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the borders back in March 2020, the technical team from the supplier was unable to come to Mauritius for the testing and commissioning exercise, following its first visit in Mauritius in January 2020. With the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, now the technical team, comprising of two technicians, has arrived on Saturday 28 November 2020.

Presently, the technicians are undergoing quarantine at Palmar Veranda Hotel and upon successful completion of the quarantine they would start the testing and commissioning exercise. It is expected that the incinerator would be operational by February 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to the cremation ground at Saint Paul, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that the existing wooden pyres, both covered and uncovered, have been pulled down in view of the implementation of the incinerator project which also included the construction of a new covered wooden pyre. The construction of both the incinerator building and the covered wooden pyre has been completed. There are some

minor additional works to be done so as to make the covered wooden pyre operational, which will take about two weeks or so.

As regards the incinerator set up at Saint Paul, again, installation has been completed. We are awaiting for its testing and commissioning exercise by the technical team from India, as I have just mentioned. In the meantime, the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix has made arrangement for traditional cremation and also incineration to be done at Phoenix and Trois Mamelles. Additionally, traditional crematorium facilities at Reservoir Road, Camp Fouquereaux can also be used by the inhabitants of Saint Paul.

Mr Ameer Meea: The hon. Minister mentioned in his reply about the incinerator building and equipment and also that 16 incinerators have been placed across the island. Can I ask the hon. Minister who is the contractor and the company that has installed the incinerators?

Dr. Husnoo: As I mentioned, it was from the Line of Credit from India. So, the Indian contractor is Kanta Electricals from India. As for the local contractor, I don't have the exact name, I think it is Steam House; *M. Lafraisière qui est en charge*.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In view of this current project, can the hon. Minister give us a due date for the pyre which was supposed to be inaugurated for Vallée des Prêtres also as the inhabitants there are facing loads of inconvenience when there are two funerals at the same time, so they have to go to Riche Terre. So, could you just give us a due date for Vallée des Prêtres as well?

Dr. Husnoo: I just mentioned, I mean for Vallée des Prêtres or Sipailles Brulée, I think you are talking about, the work is going on. As I said, the engineers would be out of quarantine hopefully if everything goes all right by next week and they will start the work by next week.

Mr Speaker: Before I move to the next question, I have to inform the House that the document laid down by hon. Osman Mahomed with regard to PQ B/997, cannot be tabled for two reasons -

1. it is not a certified copy,
2. it contains itself a disclaimer.

Thank you for your attention. Next question!

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT - CEB - CLAIMS

(No. B/1003) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Metro Express Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the amount of money owed by Metro Express Ltd. thereto in terms of works carried out in connection therewith.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in its 2030 vision, the Government of Mauritius has stated its intention to provide a world class sustainable public transport solution in the form of a bi-directional light rail transit system powered solely by electricity, with the main objective of decongesting traffic and to serve commuters residing within the conurbation of Port Louis and Plaine Wilhems.

The electrical usage by Metro Express Project consists of two distinct components namely -

1. a 22 kV supply to Traction Power Substations, in order to power the light rail vehicles running on the LRT networks, and
2. a 400V supply to passenger stations to power the various systems and services, for example, ticket machines, lighting, elevators, lifts and cameras.

With regard to power supply for the Phase 1 of the Metro Express Project that is from Port Louis to Rose Hill, Metro Express Limited has applied for power connections for the 6 TSS that is Traction Power Substations and 7 Passenger Stations from the Central Electricity Board. In order to supply power to the TSS and the Passenger Stations, civil works and other associated works including laying of cables, testing and commissioning from the CEB network to its metering facilities had to be carried out by the Central Electricity Board. All the works have been completed and all the 6 TSS and 7 Passenger Stations have been commissioned and put in operation. The total cost of the works, as claimed by the CEB, has already been affected by Metro Express Limited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are two claims amounting to Rs49.4 m. which are outstanding in respect of the erection of a new tower and an underground works at Camp Chapelon and the displacement of underground cables at Ebène to allow for works at the Ebène Recreational Park. Needful is being done at the level of my Ministry, CEB, MEL and the contractor for the settlement of same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that the CEB and other utility providers have readily provided their collaboration towards the successful implementation of this National Metro Express Project.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, si j'ai bien compris c'est R 49 millions qui est dû du Métro Express au CEB?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, exactly !

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, mes renseignements me disent que l'ardoise du Métro Express au CEB s'élève ou s'est élevé, juste avant que le ministre ne réponde, à R 350 millions d'argent dû du Métro Express Ltd au CEB. Est-ce que le ministre peut confirmer cela?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the information that I have been provided with. I repeat what I said earlier in my main reply that I have been informed that there are two claims amounting to Rs49.4 m. which are outstanding, and those two claims are in respect to the erection of a new tower and underground works at Camp Chapelon and the other claim is with regard to the displacement of underground cables at Ebène in order to allow works at the Ebène Recreational Park.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, je voudrais savoir du ministre, puisqu'il y a une ardoise du Métro Express Ltd au CEB, est-ce que le CEB va continuer à entreprendre des travaux sur la Phase II, Métro Express II pour Metro Express alors qu'il y a déjà autour de R 350 millions qui est toujours dû ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, these are not the figures that I have. I have repeated myself and I am going to do that again, the claims that are due by MEL to CEB amounts to Rs49.4 m. and I stated in the last part of my reply that CEB will collaborate fully with regard to the implementation of this national Metro Express Project.

Mr Speaker: I will now allow Dr. Gungapersad to put PQ B/1001.

POINTE AUX CANNONIERS BEACH - FELLING OF TREES & REMOVAL OF SAND PROJECT

(No. B/1001) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Pointe aux Cannoniers Beach, he will state if any project for the

felling of trees and removal of sand thereat has recently been approved and, if so, table the documents relating thereto.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je vous remercie de me donner la possibilité de répondre à la question, je tiens aussi à présenter mes excuses pour mon retard dû à ma participation à une vidéo conférence sur la biodiversité pour les îles de l’océan Indien.

M. le président, je tiens à informer l’Assemblée que le *Forestry Service* qui relève du ministère de l’Agro-industrie et de la Sécurité alimentaire, est l’autorité désignée pour accorder l’autorisation d’abattre des arbres, tandis que le ministère du Logement et des Terres est l’autorité désignée pour délivrer un permis d’enlèvement et de transport de sable.

Le *Forestry Service* m’a informé qu’aucune demande n’a été reçue pour l’abattage de filaos sur la plage de Pointe aux Cannoniers. Le ministère du Logement et des Terres a également confirmé qu’aucune demande d’enlèvement de sable à Pointe aux Cannoniers n’a été reçue récemment.

M. le président, on m’informe également qu’à la suite d’une plainte déposée par le *National Coast Guard* à la Police de L’Environnement le 17 octobre 2020 concernant des travaux d’excavation de sable sur la plage de Pointe aux Cannoniers, une visite conjointe des lieux a été effectuée par des officiers de mon ministère, ceux du ministère du Logement et des Terres, le *Forestry Service* et le conseil de district de Rivière du Rempart le 30 octobre 2020. Il a été observé que trois arbres de filaos avaient été abattus sans autorisation du *Forestry Service* et que les travaux d’enlèvement de sable ont été effectués en vue d’une construction qui serait en cours. On a également observé que le site concernait un pas géométriques, loué par le ministère du Logement et des Terres.

On nous a informé aussi, M. le président, qu’un *Building and Land Use Permit* a été délivré à un parti privé par le conseil de district de Rivière du Rempart en avril 2018 pour la construction d’un immeuble à deux étages. Le permis a toutefois expiré, étant donné qu’aucun travail de construction n’a été réalisé dans le délai de deux ans à compter de la date du permis, conformément à la Condition 4 du *Building and Land Use Permit*.

De plus, je crois comprendre que le conseil de district de Rivière du Rempart a signifié un avis au promoteur pour le nettoyage du site pour des travaux sans un *Building and Land Use Permit* valide. Mon ministère a renvoyé l’affaire au *Forestry Service* et au ministère du Logement et des Terres pour enquête et mesures nécessaires, à leur fin.

Dr. Gungapersad: I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. I also made a visit on the same site on 19 October where I noted - I will not argue about the number of trees that have been felled or chopped but on one side where we are talking about protection of environment, on the other hand such disasters are taking place. I am tabling these. On the other hand, we have to be careful. We have to walk the talk, hon. Minister.

Mr Ramano: Oui, je suis tout à fait d'accord avec l'honorable membre. S'il y a eu des contrevenants, que chacun assume ses responsabilités, y compris la partie qui a entrepris des travaux sans le permis nécessaire des différentes autorités.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you for doing the follow-up.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden!

CEB - PV INSTALLATION FOR RESIDENTIAL PURPOSE

(No. B/1004) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to PV Installation for Residential Purpose, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the –

- (a) maximum allowed capacity in terms of kilowatt, and
- (b) number of cases, if any, wherein the maximum allowed capacity has been exceeded prior to the issue of clearances from the Central Electricity Board therefor.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the Central Electricity Board that currently neither the Electricity Act nor its regulations set a limit on the capacity in terms of kilowatt for an Electricity Generating Station whether for private or public purposes that a person intends to install.

The Electricity Act provides that where a person other than an undertaker intends to supply electricity not exceeding 2 megawatt, he shall apply to the Board in such form and manner as the Board may approve for the purpose of entering into a connection agreement with the Board.

Accordingly, the Central Electricity Board had launched several schemes, targeting different customer categories in respect of electricity generating stations, including PV installations.

With the support of the UNDP, the Central Electricity Board has developed an established appropriate grid codes to implement the schemes. A set of codes is applicable to Small Scale Distributed Generation (SSDG) and to Medium Scale Distributed Generation (MSDG) in respect of renewable energy technologies, not exceeding 50 kilowatts for SSDG and capacity exceeding 50 kilowatts for MSDG.

Residential PV Installations normally fall within the SSDG category. However, a residential customer in the Central Electricity Board, domestic customer category can also apply for PV Installation of MSDG capacity, provided the terms and conditions of the scheme are satisfied prior to commissioning of the installation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Central Electricity Board that, under the SSDG scheme, there are four cases where the allowable capacities were exceeded. However, in all the cases, the terms and conditions of the relevant scheme have been satisfied. I am also informed that, irrespective of whether the PV Installation is for residential or non-residential purposes under the MSDG, there are no cases where the allowable capacity of the PV Installation of procurers whether small or medium size have been exceeded.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, nous savons tous de par les communiqués du *CEB* que le maximum permissible pour le résidentiel, donc les *smalls* et les *mediums* sont dans le ordre de 5 kilowatt. Dans la liste que le ministre a entre ses mains, quatre résidences, qui ont dépassé ou sans autorisation, il y a une installation à Vacoas où 30 kilowatts ont été alloués sur une résidence et le ministre sait très bien de quoi je parle. Comment est-ce possible que toutes les résidences sont permises d'installer 5 kilowatts et cette résidence a eu 30 kilowatts sans l'autorisation du *CEB* au préalable. Cette résidence se trouve à Angus Road, à Vacoas. Est-ce que le ministre peut du moins, pour ne pas de *cover-up*, dire est-ce que l'installation a eu le *green light* du *CEB* avant l'installation ou après l'installation?

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, c'est ça le plus gros problème des membres de l'Opposition. Sans vérifier les informations, ils viennent au Parlement, ils font des accusations gratuites, ils jettent de la boue sur les personnes du gouvernement et de surcroît, ce qu'il veut montrer à la population, c'est ce qu'il est en train de dire concerne le Premier

ministre. M. le président, je confirme à la Chambre que, dans le cas du Premier ministre, toutes les procédures ont été suivies à la lettre et c'est avec l'autorisation du *CEB* que le Premier ministre, aujourd'hui, opère sous le *MSDG scheme*.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, la correspondance au sein du *CEB* fait foi. Le ministre ne répond pas à la question. Est-ce que le ministre...

Mr Lesjongard: Je réponds à la question.

Mr Assirvaden: Est-ce que le ministre peut confirmer que toutes les résidences à l'île Maurice n'ont eu que 5 kilowatts et la résidence, puisque il a fait effet de ça, la résidence du Premier ministre à Angus Road a eu 30 kilowatts. Est-ce que c'est permissible? Est-ce que c'est d'après la loi? D'après les renseignements et les communiqués du *CEB*, ce n'est pas légal.

Mr Lesjongard: Il ne faut pas que l'honorable membre pousse le bouchon trop loin, M le président. Le Premier ministre a le droit comme tous les autres consommateurs, de par la loi en vigueur - s'il va consommer plus que les 5 kilowatts - de faire une demande en bonne et due forme au *CEB* et si la demande est approuvée, comme tous les autres consommateurs, il a le droit de bouger de la *SSDG* à la *MSDG*. Maintenant, ce qui est important et ce que l'honorable membre ne dit pas, en se faisant le Premier ministre fait les *tax payers* économiser dans ce sens-là et je vais dire pourquoi. Par ce que, en installant un *PV Installation* où il produit sa propre électricité, il a baissé sa consommation par beaucoup et il faut le savoir que quand quelqu'un occupe le poste de Premier ministre, c'est l'État qui paye pour sa consommation d'électricité. En se faisant, il a fait de l'économie des *tax payers* de ce pays, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question, next question!

Mr Assirvaden: One last one, Mr Speaker, Sir, *une dernière. Mais, M. le président...*

Mr Speaker: Don't repeat yourself. New question, fresh question!

Mr Assirvaden: *New question on this issue?* M. le président, puisque le ministre a cité le nom du Premier ministre, est-ce que le ministre, pour la transparence, peut éclairer la Chambre, quel est le tarif accordé à la résidence du Premier ministre en ce qui concerne ces panneaux photovoltaïques parce que je précise qu'il y a eu 148 panneaux photovoltaïques installés sur la résidence?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the tariff is in the public domain, that's the first thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, and it is under the Net-Metering Scheme and everybody can go and verify what I am saying.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CWA - PROJECTS -2014-2020

(No. B/1005) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the water sector, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the amount of funds disbursed in relation thereto since 2014 to date, giving details of the projects implemented.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that since January 2014, the Central Water Authority has embarked on some 154 projects meant to increase water storage, to increase water treatment capacity and to replace all and defective pipes as well as defective meters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, out of 154 projects, 121 have been completed and a total amount of Rs4.944 billion has been disbursed since 2014 to date. These projects have contributed to a significant improvement in the Central Water Authority distribution network and hours of supply across the island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to projects meant to increase storage capacity, four service reservoirs have been constructed to increase storage capacity by 10,000 m³ namely at Mont Blanc, Balisson, Rivière du Rempart and Montagne Fayence. Works are ongoing for an additional reservoir of 2,500 m³ at Rivière Dragon. Construction of another four service reservoirs is planned.

With regard to water treatment capacity, the Central Water Authority is now treating an additional of 140,000 m³ per day through treatment plants and boreholes representing an increase of almost 20% compared to 2015. Thus, since 2015, production has increased from 670,000 m³ per day to nearly 850,000 m³ per day. This has been made possible through the installation of 21 mobile containerised pressure filtration plants and the commissioning of the Bagatelle Water Treatment Plant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that to address the issue of non-revenue water, the Central Water Authority has implemented a programme for the replacement of old and defective pipes and meters across the island. In this context, some 432.34 km of pipes have been either replaced or renewed.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, le ministre parle de presque R 5 milliards de 2014 à ce jour. M. le président, est-ce que l'honorable ministre pourra nous dire quelle est l'amélioration qu'il y a eu dans la distribution à travers le pays alors que nous constatons, tout le monde constate que tous les jours, il y a des protestations quotidiennes pour la fourniture d'eau? Depuis 2014 à ce jour, vous parlez de R 5 milliards, nous entendons le même discours, quelle amélioration il y a eu dans la distribution d'eau à travers le pays?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, again this is a frivolous statement. There are complaints on a daily basis, yes, of course. It is for this reason that we have hotline whereas what I can say and I have given it in my main reply, we have improved - there is more to be done definitely - in terms of hours of distribution across the island. The 24/7 is a reality for more than 60% of the consumers of the island. There are other areas where we have to improve. We have also improved with regard to storage of water and I have mentioned the construction of service reservoir. We have also improved with regard to water treatment which has been increased considerably to more than 140,000 m³ per day being treated through our treatment plants. We have also innovated by the installation of mobile containerised pressure filtration. We have also embarked on the renewal of pipes but there is a lot of work to be done.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, c'est clair que le ministre, après six ans, - je vais dire l'honorable ministre - aujourd'hui noie le poisson dans l'eau. R 5 milliards de roupies en six ans ! Le ministre lui-même dans un interview quelques temps de cela, nous disait que *the losses level has gone up from 50% in 2015 to 60% in 2020* alors que le ministre parle d'amélioration, de R 5 milliards de roupies !

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, c'est clair qu'il y a contradiction dans ce que le ministre raconte à la population aujourd'hui et dans les faits.

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

Mr Assirvaden: Il y a contradiction dans ce que le ministre expliquait.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, he is not putting the question. What I can tell the hon. Member, we have invested money, if you would have invested money when you were in power, the situation would have been different.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! The Table has been advised that PQs B/1025, B/1026 have been withdrawn. Next question!

CERCLE DE JOACHIM FOOTBALL CLUB - SANCTIONS

(No. B/1006) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the sanctions imposed by the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* on the Mauritius

Football Association which resulted in a fine of 10,000 Swiss francs following the illegal transfer of five Malagasy players to the *Cercle de Joachim*, he will state the actions, if any, taken by his Ministry in relation thereto.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Football Association that whenever any local football club is sanctioned by the *Federation Internationale de Football Association*, the local federation is also fined accordingly. Thus, the Mauritius Football Association has been charged with a fine of 10,000 Swiss francs which it has already settled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that no public funds have been directly allocated to the Mauritius Football Association for the current financial year, that is for period July 2020 to June 2021. No regionalisation grant will be granted to *Cercle de Joachim Football Club* for this financial year. On 24 July 2020, my Ministry referred the matter to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment for onwards transmission to the Commissioner of Police and on 27 August 2020, my Ministry referred to the Director General of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the issue of transfer of funds from *Cercle de Joachim Football Club* to a Licensing Officer of the Mauritius Football Association.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, cette nouvelle sanction à l'encontre de la *MFA* par la *FIFA* a encore une fois terni la réputation de Maurice sur le plan international car n'oublions pas qu'en janvier dernier, cette même *MFA* avait été sanctionnée d'une amende de R 3 millions et une suspension de deux ans pour son retrait de la coupe d'Afrique des nations de futsal à Laâyoune au Maroc. De ce fait, M. le président, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si la *MFA* n'a-t-elle pas aussi agi en infraction avec le *Sports Act 2016*, notamment la section 49, après que de lourdes sanctions ont été portées contre elle par le comité disciplinaire de la *FIFA*. Je profite, M. le président, pour déposer copie du rapport du comité disciplinaire de la *FIFA* à l'encontre du Cercle de Joachim et de la *MFA*, de même qu'une copie de la section 49 du *Sports Act* qui fait état des offenses et des sanctions qui sont imposées à ceux qui commettent des offenses. Je dépose ces trois documents.

Mr Speaker: You can circulate that to the Minister himself.

Mr Quirin: Yes, but I am tabling. Thank you.

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, comme je viens de le dire dans ma réponse, nous suivons cette situation de très près et donc nous avons commencé à prendre les sanctions nécessaires vis-à-vis de la *MFA*.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je pense que l'honorable ministre confond entre l'enquête policière initiée par le ministère du travail, il y a quelques temps de cela à l'encontre du Cercle de Joachim et les sanctions sportives effectivement que devrait prendre son ministère. De ce fait, peut-il nous dire si la réduction de 50% des *regional grants* aux équipes de football est une forme de sanction contre la *MFA* ? C'est une question.

Mr Toussaint: Non, M. le président, cette réduction dans le regionalisation grant pour tous les autres clubs ne découle pas de cette sanction par rapport à la *MFA*. Nous sommes dans une situation économique difficile et donc les autres clubs ne peuvent pas payer les pots cassés par rapport à leur fédération. Mais par contre, comme je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, le Cercle de Joachim, le club de football concerné par ce problème, ne recevra pas son *regionalisation grant* cette année.

Mr Quirin: Dernière question, M. le président, plus de R 3.5 millions d'amende en une année pour la *MFA*, le ministre peut-il nous dire si c'est la *MFA* seule qui en fait les frais ou si son ministère a aussi contribué et, si oui, combien?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, en ce qu'il s'agit de la dernière amende que le *MFA* a dû payer, donc je l'ai dit dans ma réponse initiale, les dix milles francs suisses, donc c'est la *MFA* qui a payé le tout. En ce qu'il s'agit des autres, je n'ai pas les informations nécessaires, donc je pourrais déposer à la Chambre après pour voir qui a payé les amendes pour la *MFA*.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TROCHETIA NHDC RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/1007) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Trochetia National Housing Development Company Residential Complex, in Chebel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd, the list of beneficiaries thereof, indicating the

—

- a) date of receipt of the corresponding application for the allocation of a housing unit;

- b) address of the beneficiaries;
- c) number of beneficiaries being disabled persons and/or families on the Social Register of Mauritius.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Housing Development Company Ltd that, at Chebel, there are two housing projects. Trochetia NHDC Complex consists of 92 housing units and was inaugurated on 25 November last. The second housing project, which is for the time being referred to as Chebel B, consists of 99 housing units and construction works will, according to the NHDC, be completed by the end of this year. As regards, the Trochetia NHDC Complex, the NHDC Ltd has informed my Ministry that, as at date, it has allocated 83 housing units and the remaining 9 housing units corresponding to 10% of the total have been reserved for the National Empowerment Foundation as is normal practice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I stand advised that I am precluded from providing the list of beneficiaries of NHDC housing units without the consent of parties concerned by virtue of the Data Protection Act 2018. However, as regards part (a) of the question, I can provide the information and stand informed that, out of the 83 beneficiaries, 29 had submitted their application for a housing unit to the NHDC in or before the year 2000 whereas 44 had applied between 2001 and 2010 and the remaining 10 cases after 2010.

Concerning part (b) of the question, the NHDC Ltd has informed my Ministry that 76 of the 83 beneficiaries were previously residing in Beau Bassin, 5 in Rose Hill, one in Vacoas and one in Port Louis.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that there are, among the 83 households having obtained their housing unit, 11 persons who are reportedly disabled. I am further informed by the NHDC Ltd that 42 out of the 83 households which have been allocated their unit by the NHDC are on the Social Register of Mauritius. In addition, as per information obtained from the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, the nine housing units reserved for the NEF will be allocated to households on the SRM. So much so that in total, 51 of the 92 housing units will be allocated to households on the SRM.

Mr Quirin: Merci M. le président. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre pourrait être un peu plus précis en ce qui concerne les années qui ont été prises en considération, j'ai compris qu'il a parlé de 2000 ou avant, 2001 à 2010 mais après 2010, quelles sont les années qui ont

été considérées? Est-ce qu'une personne ayant soumis une application, allons-dire cette année ci par exemple, a pu être considérée dans l'allocation de ces maisons? Après 2010, l'honorable ministre veut parler de quelle année?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Cette année-ci cela m'étonnerait, mais c'est du domaine du possible. Comme le député le sait il y a toujours des exceptions faites pour les *extreme hardship cases*, des cas de grande détresse. Par exemple, selon les renseignements qui m'ont été fournis par la *NHDC*, il y a certaines personnes, dont la maison avait été détruite - je crois que c'était en 2017 - pour faire place aux tracés du métro léger où il y avait eu des engagements pris par l'État à qui ont été offert un logement à Trochetia.

Cela daterait de demandes formulées dans l'année 2018 mais je ne suis pas au courant d'un quelconque cas d'une bénéficiaire ayant formulé sa demande en 2020.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, j'ai compris que le l'honorable ministre ne peut pas déposer, ne peut pas dévoiler les noms des bénéficiaires mais est-ce qu'il peut quand même déposer une liste avec les initiales, avec les régions où habitent les personnes qui ont bénéficié de ces maisons et l'année correspondante à l'application de ces personnes sans dévoiler bien sûr le nom dans l'intégralité, tout en gardant la confidentialité que je comprends.

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, si cet exercice aurait un sens c'est que nous serions en violation du *Data Protection Act* précisément. Par contre, si mon collègue, le député de Beau Bassin-Petite Rivière pense connaître un cas précis d'injustice ou de passe-droit, je l'inviterai à m'en parler et je m'engage à enquêter pour voir s'il y a maldonne.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I 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.

(3.17 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – UK COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a statement on the continued refusal of the United Kingdom to withdraw unconditionally its colonial administration from the Chagos Archipelago.

More than one year has elapsed since the United Kingdom has failed to meet the deadline of 22 November 2019 set by the United Nations General Assembly for the United Kingdom to terminate its administration of the Chagos Archipelago. Instead, the United Kingdom continues to occupy the Chagos Archipelago illegally and has been claiming, including in replies given to Parliamentary Questions in the UK Parliament, that it has sovereignty over the Archipelago. The United Kingdom has also continued to take other actions such as purportedly representing the Chagos Archipelago in international and regional organisations and issuing coins and stamps on behalf of the so-called “British Indian Ocean Territory”, in blatant violation of international law, including its legally binding obligations thereunder, as set out in the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 25 February 2019 and UN General Assembly Resolution 73/295.

In its Advisory Opinion, the Court made it clear that the Chagos Archipelago is, and has always formed, an integral part of the territory of Mauritius. The Court also found that the United Kingdom’s continued administration of the Chagos Archipelago constitutes a wrongful act entailing the international responsibility of the United Kingdom and is an unlawful act of a continuing character which arose from the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius. The Court accordingly concluded that the United Kingdom is under an obligation to bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible. The findings of the International Court of Justice were endorsed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 73/295 which was adopted by an overwhelming majority of 116 votes to 6.

In continuing to reject the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the UN General Assembly Resolution 73/295, the United Kingdom shows its disregard for the rule of international law and challenges the authority of the highest Court of the world and of the very institution which it helped to create 75 years ago. In so acting, the United Kingdom is also thwarting the legitimate expectations of the former inhabitants of the Chagos

Archipelago who wish to return to the homes from which they were forcibly removed so many decades ago. In so acting, the United Kingdom could be perpetrating a grave wrong that is seen by many as a ‘crime against humanity’ within the meaning of Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

I invite the United Kingdom to reconsider its position and bring itself into compliance with international law. I also reiterate our request that the United Kingdom terminates immediately its unlawful administration of the Chagos Archipelago, as required by international law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is aware of the security concerns expressed by the United Kingdom and the United States. However, such concerns cannot justify the United Kingdom’s continued illegal occupation of the Chagos Archipelago, given that Mauritius has, on several occasions, expressed its willingness to enter into a long-term arrangement with the United States or, if needed, with the United States and the United Kingdom, in respect of the defence facility in Diego Garcia.

In the message of congratulations which I have addressed to His Excellency Mr Joseph Biden on his election as the President of the United States, I have renewed our offer to enter into a long-term arrangement with the United States to ensure the continued operation of the defence facility in Diego Garcia. I have also pointed out that such an arrangement would be consistent with the common vision and shared principles of Mauritius and the United States in respect of the rule of law and the United States’ historical support for decolonisation. Further contacts are being established with the incoming Biden-Harris Administration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to pursue all political, legal and diplomatic avenues to achieve the completion of our decolonisation process so that Mauritius can effectively and fully exercise its sovereignty over the totality of its territory, including the Chagos Archipelago, and our citizens of Chagossian origin can fulfil their legitimate aspiration to return to the Chagos Archipelago. In this regard, Government will continue to challenge the United Kingdom’s membership of regional and international organisations where it purports to represent the Chagos Archipelago. Some of these initiatives have had to be put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but such delays should not be interpreted as a change in our commitment. Government is also engaged in proceedings against Maldives before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in respect of our maritime boundary,

the results of which could have a significant bearing on the continued erroneous claim of the United Kingdom. An initial ruling in that case is expected early next year.

I take this opportunity to thank all the countries that continue to support the completion of our decolonisation. I also express my gratitude to the African Union for its principled stand on the decolonisation of Africa and in particular for expressing its support to Mauritius in the AU Assembly decision adopted on Sunday last.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

METRO EXPRESS LIMITED - RIDERSHIP

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me permission to make this statement.

In his supplementary questions to PQ B/994 this morning, hon. Xavier Luc Duval mentioned the figure of 160,000 as being the ridership of Metro Express for the first year of operation. I wish to set the record straight. In fact, the figure of 160,000 commuters was the estimated ridership for the previous MLRT project of the Labour/PMSD Government. It is that project that would have been a financial disaster as it would have involved a burden of over Rs37 billion for the population in terms of repayment for loans, interests and adjustment for currency fluctuations over 20 years.

Moreover, the then Government had agreed to provide up to Rs800 m. of subsidies every year for the operation of the MLRT that would have represented an added burden to the State coffers. For the Metro Express Project, Mr Speaker, Sir, the estimated ridership for the first year of full operation, that is, from Port Louis to Curepipe is Rs53,800 as mentioned in the financial plan revealed...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Do not interrupt the Minister!

Mr Ganoo: ... Rs53,800 as mentioned in the financial plan revealed in 2017. This is why I mentioned the figure of around 50,000 in my reply this morning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated in my reply to the PQ, the ridership of Metro Express for Phase I between Port Louis and Rose Hill reached 17,000 per day before the COVID-19 lockdown. After reaching 50% of its ridership in the post COVID-19 period, it has picked up to an average of 10,000 per day despite the fact that many employees who were travelling by Metro Express are still working from home. Losses at this stage are manageable despite

partial operation and the setback of COVID-19. I have no doubt, as Minister responsible for Light Rail, that Metro Express Limited is managed responsibly and professionally. All avenues are being explored to maximise ridership and revenue and I am confident that time will prove us right and the doom-mongers wrong.

Thank you.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

- (a) *The Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Bill (No. XX of 2020)*
- (b) *The Central Electricity Board (Amendment) Bill (No. XXI of 2020)*
- (c) *The Electricity (Amendment) Bill (No. XXII of 2020)*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will suspend the sitting for 10 minutes to sort out some technical problems.

At 3.28 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 3.49 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Members, I have been informed that the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare is proposing to circulate a number of amendments to the Children's Bill (No. XVII of 2020) today. In the circumstances, the resumption of the debate on the Children's Bill and the two related Bills will not be taken today in order to give hon. Members ample time to go through the proposed amendments. We will, therefore, proceed with the Second Reading of the Veterinary Council Bill. Hon. Maneesh Gobin!

Second Reading

THE VETERINARY COUNCIL BILL

(No. XV of 2020)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Veterinary Council Bill (No. XV of 2020) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill was long overdue. It has taken some time since my Ministry has deemed it necessary to have various working sessions and consultations with all the stakeholders concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main objective of the Veterinary Council Bill is to repeal the existing Veterinary Council Act 1991 and to replace it by a completely new enactment in order to provide for a better legal framework to regulate the veterinary profession and to be in line with the latest advancements in the veterinary field.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Veterinary Council Bill 2020 has provided the legal parameters so that the Veterinary Council of Mauritius has the following responsibilities –

1. To promote and safeguard the health and welfare of animals through the regulation of the educational and ethical standards of veterinary surgeons.
2. To strengthen veterinary public health.
3. To better regulate, control and manage the registration of veterinary surgeons.
4. To hear and examine complaints.
5. To ensure that professional standards set are met.
6. To exercise discipline and ensure that the Code of Practice is strictly followed.
7. To promote and sustain public confidence in veterinary medicine and surgery.
8. To establish linkages with regional and international organisations in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill provides for the Council to consist of 21 members compared to 11 actually for a better representation of stakeholders in the sector. The new stakeholders include the representatives from the Ministry of Labour and from the Pharmacy Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been a perception since long that the veterinary profession is synonymous with the treatment of animals only. Over the years, this has proved to be far from reality. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, the '*Organisation Internationale d'Epizooties*' (OIE) describes veterinary service as a public good which encompasses both public and private veterinary services and englobes veterinary public health, animal health and animal welfare. The increasing number of "animal lovers" has given a completely new dimension to this profession.

The quality of veterinary services of the country is a *sine qua non* for the preservation of animal welfare and is underpinned by a multitude of factors, which include basic principles of ethics, organisation and technical capacity. In order to comply with these principles, the veterinary surgeon should have the required qualifications, scientific and medical expertise, experience and independence, which will enable him to make sound professional judgement and decisions. As mentioned earlier, the veterinary surgeons are called upon to play an important role in society. They work to promote animal health and welfare as well as human health, bearing in mind that around 60% of infectious diseases of humans are zoonotic in nature.

Since 2001, Mauritius has suffered from numerous *OIE* listed diseases such as Lumpy Skin Disease in 2001, African Swine fever in 2007, Contagious Caprine Pleuro-Pneumonia in 2009, with a resurgence in 2012, Tuberculosis in Cattle in 2011, Vorrhosis in 2014 and more recently, the outbreak of the Foot and Mouth disease in 2016. The need for expertise in the veterinary field was required to address the situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill has introduced a new concept, which is the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) at Clause 28. This will allow the veterinary surgeons to update their professional knowledge and skills in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery and to better assure animal welfare. CPD is in line with the requirement of Veterinary Statutory Bodies in other countries and in other professional Councils in Mauritius such as the Medical Council. I am confident that the veterinary surgeons will take good advantage of this provision.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the existing Act does not have sufficient provisions to exercise proper supervision of the veterinary services, which includes services provided by both private veterinary surgeons and public veterinary officers. The Bill provides for the setting up of a Code of Practice for the profession. All the professionals in the field will have to comply with same, which will enhance service delivery for animal health. The Code of Practice will be the basis for monitoring of the professionals in the sector and to sustain disciplinary measures when required. It is high time that a Code of Practice be drafted for the profession and due respect be given to the contribution made by the veterinary surgeons to the economy of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another salient feature of the Bill is the registration of veterinary surgeons. In fact, Part IV of the Bill deals with the registration of veterinary surgeons. This

Bill introduces the principles of good governance as required of any statutory body. This principle is enshrined in the way applications for registration of veterinary surgeons will be handled. While the current Veterinary Council Act 1991 confers the power upon the Chairperson to determine an application for registration of a veterinary surgeon, the proposed Bill, now before the House, corrects this state of affairs. In this Bill, the Council shall be assisted by a Registration Board, which will comprise of professionals with good character, having a minimum of 10 years of experience in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery.

The Bill adheres to the recommendations of the *OIE* related to Day1 skills required from the Veterinary graduates who apply for registration with the Council. The Council will thus be reassured that the professionals registered have achieved the degree of competency recommended to practice veterinary medicine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards foreign veterinary surgeon, during the last 15 years, new economic activities have seen the day where the veterinary profession has been called to deliver its expertise. This is exemplified by the setting up of the seafood hub and the creation of the competent Authority seafood in 2011, which performs supervisory role in the export of fish, fishery and aquaculture products to the international market. Another sector of activity is the pre-clinical trials where expertise in veterinary medicine and surgery is lacking. The proposed Bill makes provisions for the registration of foreigners whose expertise in veterinary medicine is not sufficiently available in Mauritius.

Clauses 21 and 22 of the Bill provide for the temporary registration of foreign Veterinary Surgeons in Mauritius. This will provide for more operational flexibility in the field of veterinary medicine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, accountability and transparency are the cornerstones of any profession that need to be of high standard and where there is need to maintain discipline and professionalism. The Veterinary Council Bill provides for the promotion and maintenance of discipline in the Veterinary profession. The Council will have the power to investigate on misgivings by Veterinary Surgeons both in the public and private sectors. This was not catered for in the existing Act.

The Council will also be required to submit an annual report together with audited statements of accounts on the operations of the Council to the Minister who will then lay a copy before the National Assembly.

The Council will also set up a Professional Conduct Committee as and when required to look into disciplinary proceedings. The Professional Conduct Committee will be chaired by a legal professional with not less than 10 years' experience supported by 2 assessors who shall be Veterinary Surgeons with not less than 10 years' experience. The setting up of the Professional Conduct Committee will enable prompt processing of matters at hand as it will be required to complete its proceedings within 90 days.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, the Veterinary Council Bill is coming at the most opportune time. The veterinary profession has gained importance both in value and scope. There is need to have a more up to date and practical body to look into the profession with renewed vigour and passion. I have no doubt that both the animal lovers and members of the Veterinary Profession will welcome this Bill and work hand in hand with my Ministry and Government to continue to support the health, welfare and happiness of our animals.

Before concluding, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are a few typing mistakes which have found their way in the Bill and which I will correct at the appropriate stage, namely in Clause 20(3) b, the word 'dye' should, in fact, read 'due'. In Clause 20(5)(c), the word 'be' is missing and in Clause 41, instead of the 'Board', it should read the 'Council'.

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

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

(4.02 p.m.)

POINT OF CLARIFICATION – CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT

Mr X. L. Duval: With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise both a point of order and a point of clarification.

Hon. Ganoo spoke just now at ministerial statement time. I understand from practice that it is not acceptable for Ministers to make controversial statements. Therefore, using the words like doom-mongers, Mr Speaker, are not appropriate at a time of ministerial statement when the Opposition cannot reply.

I would like firstly your Ruling on that.

Also, with regard to clarification, Mr Speaker, the figures that I have taken concerning the ridership is from a PNQ which I asked myself to the then Minister of Land Transport and it is very, very clear and I will quote with your kind permission.

“On assuming office, Government decided to request the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise to review the whole project with a view to making it more realistic and with an affordable budget. The Singapore Cooperation Enterprise submitted a cost optimised report with a new reference design on 26 October 2016.”

So, it is not the previous Government. Madam Speaker, at that time.

“in regard to part (a) of the question, the estimated cost is 17.7 billion rupees”

So, this is the new project.

“The final cost will, of course, be announced at the end of the current request or proposal exercise.”

This is the interesting statement, Mr Speaker.

“The financial model for this project is based on an average daily ridership of 80,000 passengers in each direction.”

Mr Speaker: Excuse me. Make sure you are not debating on that.

Mr X. L. Duval: No, Mr Speaker. I am just...

Mr Speaker: I can understand fully well your point of order.

Mr X. L. Duval: This is my point, yes.

Mr Speaker: Please.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am just finished. I have finished. I have finished to tell you...

Mr Speaker: Am I allowed to say a few words?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Sir.

Mr Speaker: If you don't mind. I fully understand your point of order. I fully understand your point of clarification. State the clarification you want, send papers to my Office or to the Clerk's Table and the Minister will take cognizance of that and I will give my Ruling. But this is no time for debate and point of clarification should not be taken as a pretext for debate. Please, continue.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am just quoting from what the previous Minister said.

Mr Speaker: You are on a point of clarification.

Mr X. L. Duval: Because this is also live on TV, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Excuse me. You have been a former acting Prime Minister of this country.

Mr X. L. Duval: I have finished.

Mr Speaker: Lead by good examples. On a point of clarification, I told you: don't make debates, don't make discussions. Put the clarification you want. Put it forward.

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. Can I just say one last sentence with your permission? Therefore, the figure of 160,000 passengers per day comes from the statement of hon. Bodha himself and not from me and it relates to this project and not the previous Government's project. So, I would like hon. Ganoo, he is new at the job, to correct himself.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if you would allow me. I will not correct myself. I maintain what I have said, that is...

Mr Speaker: I will give my Ruling. Please, hon. Members, there was a point of order and a point of clarification. Hon. Member asked for my Ruling. I will give my Ruling at a later stage not now.

For now, I will ask hon. Dr. Aumeer to make his speech.

(4.06 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I have had the opportunity to discuss and debate a few Bills in this House and I have, at all times, shared my opinion and made constructive criticisms and suggestions with regard to matters being discussed and I intend to do so today so that the Bill will have its full meaning for veterinary surgeons.

I will, today, very briefly, make a broad overview of the veterinary profession and specific comments on certain Clauses of the Bill that is being presented the Veterinary Council Bill which has, as its main objective, to repeal the Veterinary Council Act and replace it by a new Act so as to provide better regulations to regulate the veterinary profession.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish, at the outset, to place on record my appreciation of the work of veterinary surgeons who undertake a wide range of tasks related to their field in our country. While their job is highly respected, they do indeed face numerous challenges and, hopefully, this Bill will give them the opportunity and the basis of a legal framework so that the veterinary profession is properly regulated due to evolving circumstances that happened during the course of time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main purpose of the Bill is to maintain a high standard in the veterinary profession and the question that, therefore, arises is whether the Bill, in any way, can stop the practice of the unregistered practitioners in the field of veterinary practice. It is a fact that a very great deal of the veterinary work in regard to smaller matters such as injections, minor surgeries is carried out on a day-to-day basis by unregistered practitioners and there is nothing in the Bill to regulate them. It is my opinion, therefore, that, as long they do not represent themselves as veterinary surgeons, they are allowed *de facto* to carry on with their practice and it is this non-regulated approach and tolerance that lead to conflicts, complaints and legal suits against professionals in the sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, veterinary surgeons play a central role in ensuring that their standards are upheld with regard to animal health and safety, welfare, food safety, public health issues. The COVID-19 is a stark reminder of the zoonotic origin that can affect mankind; the foot and mouth disease, as said, by the hon. Minister, himself, in 2016, which was transmitted by cows among others.

They do have, veterinary surgeons, a pivotal role in ensuring precautions against all possibilities of an outbreak of diseases particularly when the transmission mode is from animal to mankind.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill is to ensure a functioning regulatory and legitimate mechanism for the profession of veterinary surgeons. And so, it is incumbent on us, as Parliamentarians in the House, that the public at large has the highest confidence in veterinary surgeons and ensure a legislation that will protect animal health and welfare. veterinary surgeons have a duty to fill their professional responsibilities by maintaining the main principles of practice mainly professional competence, honesty and integrity, independence and impartiality, confidentiality and trust, professional accountability.

It is, therefore, the duty of veterinary surgeons to make animal health and welfare their first consideration when attending to animals and that care must be appropriate and

adequate. Veterinary surgeons, Mr Speaker, Sir, need to meet quality assurance standards since it is imperative that they all need to have been trained in a professionally accredited institution. If a veterinary surgeon does not meet the requirement of the Councils in terms of degree of competency, will there be scope for them to be retrained for their skills and knowledge so that they can be reconsidered for registration? I hope the Bill will be able to answer such concern.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now focus on the particular aspects of the proposed Veterinary Council Bill. There is no specific mention about the regulation that the expertise within which veterinary assistance, veterinary technicians, laboratory technicians and radiology technicians who form, as I understand, an integral part of the veterinary practice being mentioned in this Bill despite vague reference being made at section 19 (2).

Mr Speaker, Sir, veterinary surgeons must therefore ensure that the tasks are delegated only to those who have the appropriate competence and define their limits of practice. The Bill, I suggest, must encompass a code of ethics which must be clearly defined for all practitioners of the veterinary practice in three specific areas, that is, the promotion and maintenance of good health to animals, care of the disease or injure animals and the prevention and control of transmissible diseases to human beings. Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to section 5(j) –

“The Council shall –

(j) advise the Minister on the nexus between veterinary medicine and surgery and food security;”

The essence of food security in this Bill should be specific to any animal product or derivative of animal products and, as mentioned before, too many cases in the course of time and diseases have been transmitted from animals to human beings what we so call the zoonotic approach.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the composition of the Council, and I here refer to section 7(k) whereby 5 persons will be selected for the transparency and good governance. It is extremely important that the criteria for non-veterinary surgeons to be appointed on such Council must be clearly laid down particularly with regard to their expertise in the veterinary field and must not have any vested interest in that profession or its related fields. Such nominees should not use the Council due to their nomination as a back door to promote their own interest or private business in the veterinary field. Recent discussions and debates in this House brought

up the contentious issue between proposed nominees on the Pharmacy Board and their major interest in the business of pharmaceutical products. I hope this suggestion will be taken seriously.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 8(3) concerns the removal from office of any member convicted of an offence. Such offence must therefore be of a grave nature if the Council so decides or criminal convictions of specific nature must be made available so that there is no victimisation or bias or abuse by using such clause of the Bill to make sure that if one person in the Council has any problem with the Veterinary Surgeon, he does not get registered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, subsection 4(c) suspending a member while under an investigation merits that the nature or gravity of the complaint be of such importance to deprive a member of the right to practice for a certain period of time because the onus of innocence must prevail until there is a *prima facie* case against the offender otherwise this may lead to serious abuse.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now comment on the registration as a veterinary surgeon. Registration as a veterinary surgeon is a milestone in one's career, particularly if one has spent so much years in the undergraduate University to become a veterinary and any aspiring veterinary surgeon will undoubtedly comply with section 20 (2). However, the request of additional document and information by the Registrar which may be required will delay a process particularly if these documents or information are not available in Mauritius but at the University abroad where the veterinary surgeon undertook his training.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am well too aware of certain documents being requested for aspiring doctors which, had it been requested initially as per requisite for registration, would not have caused undue delay in registration. Let us make no mistake that delay in registration or causing registration can be a tactical means for those seeking employment in the public sector and they do come low in the pecking order until the privileged few be allowed to have their registration at first hand.

Mr Speaker, Sir, temporary registration as a veterinary surgeon is definitely an important issue as mentioned by the hon. Minister just a couple of minutes ago since it allows foreign professionals in the veterinary field to share their expertise. However, I suggest that the process be streamlined as to avoid unnecessary surprises. I am here referring to section 21(2). Mr Speaker, Sir, how can a veterinary surgeon leave his job, country, travel to Mauritius where the employers pay the ticket, housing and all other expenditures and then get his occupational permit or work permit and now after all these red tape goes for approval of

the Veterinary Council? If for any reason his application is now rejected, all these processes are null and why so much red tape? Mr Speaker, Sir, would it not be better that the Council get involved in the selection process right at the beginning when such expertise are required before and then the arrangements for settling down an occupational permit or work permit be engaged?

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a humanitarian note, deregistration of a veterinary surgeon due to failure of paying the annual fee should not be automatic rather, at least, reminders by registered post must be sent in the first place.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, on a general note, I think it would be appropriate that following the Cabinet decision on 27 January, 2017 whereby the Minister of Agro Industry and Food Security promulgated the Animal Welfare Act despite protest from Parliamentarians and Animal Welfare Societies to enable experiments to be carried out on animals that this Bill makes it imperative that veterinary surgeons have a duty to ensure that good laboratory practices are available as facilities that test drugs intended for humans in macaques since, as we know, we are apparently second in terms of the number of macaques that are subjected to experiments and regular checks are carried out at these centres by the surgeon to ensure that these animals are not subjected to pain, suffering and distress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, also a clear and precise definition, classification and the prerequisite of setting a veterinary clinic, hospital and consultation must be elaborated as any fully registered veterinary surgeon, as per this Bill, will be entitled to have his own practice and thereby this Bill will then help to regulate the practice of veterinary surgery as we have moral obligation to provide the welfare and needs of animals.

I thank you all for your attention and I hope that my suggestions will be considered.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

Mr J. F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take a short call in support to the Veterinary Council Bill (No. XV of 2020). Before going any further, I have to say, what a coincidence and opportune time, as rightly said by hon. Gobin, that just after our Parliament voted the Climate Change Bill two weeks ago, today we are debating the Veterinary Council Bill.

One will realise that the theme for the World Veterinary Day 2020, celebrated on 25 April, is “The Promotion of Environmental Protection for Improving Animal and Human Health”, and that, despite the world is facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which originated from an animal source, as also stated by hon. Gobin and hon. Dr. Aumeer. It is reported that the actions of veterinarians can help to mitigate the effects of climate change and support responsible use of natural resources, for example, water and feed, which is necessary in raising livestock.

Mr Speaker, Sir, human and animal health are inseparably linked and adverse changes to our environment will ultimately harm ourselves and the animals in our care. Veterinarians, in promoting animal health and welfare, have a responsibility as well as the opportunity to safeguard our environment for future generations. The veterinary sector today goes beyond only ensuring animal health and protection. How grateful that veterinary medicine saves the lives of many livestock everyday.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Organisation for Animal Health (*OIE*) is urging countries to review their institutions and legislations in harmony with the international standards; strengthen national capacities; invest in veterinary services, disease surveillance, veterinary quarantine systems, disease reporting, risk analysis - hon. Gobin has mentioned a few problems that we have - data and information management, and create enabling environments for livestock producers’ groups. This Bill meets the requirements of *OIE*.

Mr Speaker Sir, now, allow me to comment and share a few propositions on some provisions of the Bill, that has as objective to repeal the Veterinary Council Act and replace it by a new Act in order to provide a better legal framework to regulate the veterinary profession.

The Bill surely does provide the Veterinary Council with greater means of ensuring veterinarians’ practice to the highest possible standards. In clause 7, Composition of the Council, it appears that the Veterinary Council consists of more people who are non-veterinary surgeons than veterinary surgeons. There are 12 non-veterinary surgeons, 9 veterinary surgeons. So, may this not hinder the proper functioning of the Council?

And I believe that from a democratic perspective, elected members should be majority in any Council. From some quarters, there is concern that this may jeopardise the integrity of the profession, especially when there are issues to be voted; sensible issues. Clause 7(1) (g), provides for a representative of the Pharmacy Board. This is very important for

pharmaceutical advocacy, for access to quality pharmaceuticals, and especially to develop the list of essential veterinary pharmaceuticals that should be available for public use. This process should be encouraged to provide best advice to the public.

In clause 9, 12 members constitute a quorum, and I will propose that there should be at least a half plus 1 majority of veterinary surgeons, so that issues pertaining to veterinary surgeons may have a fair review. I might be wrong, but that's how I see it, and same principle must be applied for clause 11(2) for a Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to say that I am not a veterinary medicine person. Clause 19(2)(b) stipulates that “nothing in this Act shall prevent a person from working as an employee or subordinate of a veterinary surgeon where the work is done under the direct responsibility and supervision of that veterinary surgeon”. It seems to me that this may jeopardise the veterinary profession, as it allows non-qualified person to practice veterinary medicine, despite it is mentioned that it could be done under the supervision of a surgeon. It is also argued that uninformed persons practising veterinary medicine - I see it in Rodrigues - in many quarters around the world there are the main cause of disease outbreaks. We have to be extremely careful. Para-veterinarian to be able to practice should be recognised by law and, if not, that could raise the same problem as was the case for pharmacies before the law was amended.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 22 provides for temporary registration of visiting veterinary surgeon. This is positive, as was the case in Rodrigues during the FMD outbreak. Clause 28, Continuous Professional Development, is a must for the profession, for the veterinarians to keep pace with the latest advancements in veterinary science and technologies. I note that there is no veterinary education institution in our Republic, which makes it a scarcity area. In the Schedule, procedure for election, paragraph 4, I will suggest that provision is made for voting by proxy for registered veterinarians working in Rodrigues and other Outer Islands or on training abroad. Mr Speaker, Sir, for veterinary surgeons exercising in Rodrigues and Outer Islands or on training abroad, eligible as candidates or participating in election, the Council must ensure that all facilities and support are provided to them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now I will comment briefly and specifically on the Bill, in relation to Rodrigues, where many of the people of Rodrigues rely on livestock rearing as a source of income, and it's a valuable asset for them. The objective for our livestock is to increase production for household food security and generate surpluses that we can trade. The Bill has

a significant bearing on Rodrigues and its worth to be updated on the actual estimated livestock population, which is around 12,000 cattle, 13,000 goats, 9,000 sheep, 12,000 pigs. This has been peaked up after the FMD outbreak, and according to latest data available in 2019, the livestock herd of Mauritius, I mean mainland here, was 3,985 heads of cattle, 26,000 heads of goats, 3,800 heads of sheep and 19,600 heads of pigs.

In 2016, before FMD outbreak, the overall population of livestock density in Rodrigues was approximately 11,000 cattle, 29,000 sheep and goats and 10,000 pigs, as replied by hon. Mahen Seerruttun, on 19 August 2016 to the PNQ of hon. Béranger, the then Leader of the Opposition. Mr Speaker, Sir, the health of animals in Rodrigues is managed by only two veterinary officers plus a skeletal support staff as compared to Mauritius where there are 93 registered veterinarians, out of which 12 are foreigners.

From the statistics above, it is observed that the ratio of veterinary officer to animal is too large - I am referring to Rodrigues -, resulting in certain important aspects of animal health management being at times neglected.

The House will recall the episode of Foot and Mouth Diseases (FMD) outbreak of July 2016, which has thankfully been resolved, and its negative impact that was strongly felt in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I, myself, following the FMD outbreak, witnessed the tough activities that were carried out regularly for epidemiological surveys, diagnostics, sero-surveillance and meat inspections, and so on.

I did feel sorry for our only two veterinary officers in post in Rodrigues, who could not cope with the enormous workload despite their determined commitment. Luckily, there was some support from the Ministry of Agro-Industry and the Indian Ocean Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the recommendations of a Fact Finding Committee, following the FMD Outbreak - the Committee, I mean, in 2017, was “a restructuration and uplifting of the veterinary services in Rodrigues”. The Committee recommended that, and I quote –

“the two veterinarians for the livestock population of Rodrigues are not enough. It is highly desirable that more veterinarians and qualified technicians be posted at the Veterinary Services to help those two veterinarians in the discharge of their duties.”

Today, this Bill shall absolutely urge necessary action for recruitment or posting of more veterinary officers by the Regional Assembly to be better prepared against any future

disease outbreaks, which we don't want to happen again. We need to ensure that veterinary service is strengthened in Rodrigues.

There should be also consideration to provide appropriate training on a continuous basis to the veterinarians and the technicians in Rodrigues; associated technicians.

Hence, I am highlighting that Rodrigues needs more Rodriguan veterinarian officers and they must have a greater role to play in the Veterinary Council as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 5(j) provides that –

“the Council shall advise the Minister on the nexus between veterinary medicine and surgery and food security.”

This clause is very important. It is in support to at least four Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) –

- (i) Goal 1 - end poverty;
- (ii) Goal 2 - end hunger and achieve improved food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture;
- (iii) Goal 12 - ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, and
- (iv) Goal 15 - restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Veterinary Authority is empowered by law to control movements of animals, to inspect production and quality of meat.

With regard to control of epidemic diseases and control of the import and the certification of export of animals, recently there was a consignment of goats from Rodrigues placed under quarantine in Mauritius for potential disease control, since 05 September 2020.

I did raise the matter with hon. Minister Gobin that this is a very long quarantine period, and I was made to understand that the Ministry is still awaiting laboratory testing results from France, not Mauritius, and France is under lockdown.

However, I welcome the timely response and decision taken thereof by the Livestock and Veterinary Division of the Ministry of Agro-Industry for necessary arrangement and a new protocol to be observed for movement of goats and sheep from Rodrigues, as per Cabinet decision of 20 November 2020, to the satisfaction of farmers and trade.

However, I've just been informed that there is a major problem with the new protocol - I've just been informed, just then - with regard to exportation of livestock to Mauritius from Rodrigues, which should be reworked in close collaboration with the Commission for Agriculture of the Regional Assembly.

It is felt that the last protocol is more stringent than that for importation from South Africa, for example, it requires live animals from Rodrigues to use microchips instead of ear tag, as is the case for importation from South Africa. This has to be reviewed.

One will note that there is a *relance* of the sector in Rodrigues with the support of Central Government. Thus, it's a question of solidarity and survival for the Rodrigues economy within the Republic. This has to be protected and guaranteed by Central Government.

In the same line, it's worth to be noted that during FMD outbreak, tests were carried out in countries like France, South Africa and UK, as the Animal Health Laboratory of the Ministry is not well equipped for same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that the Veterinary Services of our Republic must be equipped with its own State-of-the-Art Laboratory and trained technicians, and should have less direct recourse to international expert services.

As the Fact-Finding Committee on FMD recommended that Rodrigues should also have a proper Animal Laboratory to enable the carrying out of tests more rapidly and consequently to detect any possible disease in a very short time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Dr. the hon. Payadachy, Minister of Finance, was in Rodrigues to witness the Rodrigues Economic Development Model and has guaranteed that, together, we must find new opportunities to support and modernise our agri-business strategy.

Thus, with the aftermath of COVID-19 and to accomplish our food security strategy, our Republic cannot continue to rely on external facilities to resolve our interior problem.

He has envisioned that our Republic requires a State-of-the-Art Laboratory to a very high standard, and I would say, why not to the same level as the *Laboratoire Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation de France [ANSES]*.

I hope that necessary funds will be provided in next Budget for the laboratory and also for research purposes in support of disease prevention and improved food security.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one issue that I would like to be enlightened by the hon. Minister is what is the real situation today of African Swine fever that broke out in Mauritius in 2007.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before concluding, one important aspect that the Council must pay attention to is communication for both the public and the veterinarians.

The Council should be updated with time. They should have a website to provide information for the members of the profession and the public, for example, to allow payments to be done online; to allow for publications of research done by veterinary surgeons, be it local and international, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with these words, I also commend the Veterinary Council Bill to the house.

I am done, and I thank you for your kind attention.

(4.37 p.m.)

Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to take part in the debate of this Bill about the veterinary profession.

This profession, indeed, brings valuable contribution to human society in numerous ways. It is right to say that it serves human kind by contributing to the health, well-being and longevity of our companion animals.

Pet plays a central role in the quality of life of a large proportion of our population, where the human animal bond helps to improve people's lives. But, sadly, some animals undergo abuse, neglect and cruelty. And the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare is often the very institution at the centre of a numerous number of controversies, which ironically is supposed to be the very place where the welfare of animals is most safeguarded.

A controversy among many others, in 2016, the country was shocked when a horrific video footage was released, showing workers from the MSAW slaughtering dogs, not only making no discrimination between strays and loved family pets, but the dogs were killed in the most inhumane fashion.

It is our duty and responsibility towards our pets to ensure their health and welfare, and it is a moral obligation to ensure humane treatment towards all animals.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a growing number of people sharing their homes and lives with pets, whereby the animals become part of their families. And these pet animals not only serve as companions, but can help out in many societal ways as well, whether it is for –

- therapy purposes, where the animals are engaged with patients of nursing homes and hospitals to improve their quality of life;
- for rescue purposes, where animals assist firemen and policemen in tracking and searching of people;
- for medical alert and detection of certain illnesses to save lives, and
- for assistance, to help physically impaired people in their daily tasks.

The veterinary profession is at the forefront of pet health care to ensure our pets lead comfortable and healthy lives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the veterinary profession also ensures the welfare and good health of animals for food production and supports the farming sector. It safeguards the breeding of livestock and the sanitary control of the animal products entering our food supply, thus its crucial role in food security and nutrition. On an economic aspect, the incidence of animal diseases has significant impacts on the agricultural sector, particularly to the livestock industry and animal farming. That was recently shown by the 2016 outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Mauritius and Rodrigues, disease that affected the cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. The economic consequences of this outbreak were devastating. More than 7,000 animals in Mauritius and Rodrigues either succumb to the disease or had to be slaughtered and millions of rupees were lost by the country. The animal's embargo from Rodrigues to Mauritius was only lifted in January last year. It took almost three years for the virus to be eliminated. The impacts on the economy and community could have been minimised through a veterinary department which maintains trained, response ready staff and systems to ensure that an emergency animal disease incident would be promptly and efficiently controlled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this profession also contributes to environmental conservation by addressing wildlife and eco-system health and in medical research by evaluating the safety and efficacy of medicines, medical products and food additives. Mr Speaker, Sir, the veterinary profession plays a critical role in public health in minimising potentially dangerous disease spread by controlling zoonosis, the diseases that are transmissible to humans such as

rabies, tuberculosis, bird flu, Ebola, dengue fever, plague and corona viruses among others. Animal diseases cause significant and unpredictable negative impacts on the livelihoods of all citizens. More than 60% of animal diseases are transmissible to humans making animal health and public health closely related.

The COVID-19 pandemic we are currently facing is an obvious example where the disease originated from an animal thus ensuring animal health and its proper service delivery is of major public importance. Animals and the health systems which ensure their protection play a vital role in the security, the economic and the social wellbeing of the whole population. Hence, the importance of a proper Veterinary Council Bill which provides the right legal and regulatory framework to the profession of veterinary surgeons and to ensure continuous quality of care.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the present Act, the Veterinary Council Act was enacted since 1991. After 29 years, it is certain that amendments are necessary given the increasing number of veterinary surgeons over the years to now reach around 85 and the growing importance and progress of the veterinary field in our country. This Veterinary Council Bill introduces some much needed safeguards against illegal practice, misconduct, fraud dishonesty, malpractice and negligence and through the setting up of a Professional Conduct Committee to maintain discipline.

However, I will share my concern on a few points especially regarding the composition of council in Part 3, management of council under clause 7 of this Bill. Under the law of 1991, the council is composed of 11 members whereby seven of them are elected following an election amongst all registered veterinary surgeons and 4 non-elected members are appointed by the Minister. However, this Bill shall increase the council composition to 21 members among which only 7 are elected veterinary surgeons while the other 14 members are all appointed persons. It is not democratic to have such an imbalance with a much larger number of appointed persons as compared to elected persons. Isn't that a way for the Minister to have control over the council? Moreover, of these appointed members, section (k) provides that 5 persons, not being veterinary surgeons, to be appointed by the Minister. The appointment of these five non-veterinary persons automatically renders the majority of a council member to be non-veterinary, thus limiting the powers of veterinary surgeons. That creates a substantial imbalance to the council composition whereby a considerable majority of a voting power lies in the hands of Ministry appointed persons having no qualification, expertise or experience in veterinary medicine.

Under this Bill, the Council will be composed of 21 members out of which only a maximum of 10 will be veterinary surgeons or having expertise in veterinary medicine. Less than half of a total number of members, take the composition of the Medical Council, for instance, 68%, almost 70% of the Medical Council consist of registered medical practitioner whereas in this Bill, the Veterinary Council consists only of a maximum of 48% of registered veterinary surgeons. Does the Council, which is mostly made up of person having no expertise in veterinary medicines, most competent to provide consultancy for a code of practice for the continuous professional development programmes to advise on the connection between veterinary medicine and food security or on any matter regulating to the profession of veterinary surgeons?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I plead for a fairer representation of veterinary professionals in the composition of the council. Mr Speaker, Sir, my other concerns relate to the foreign points which are ambiguous and need to be clarified by the hon. Minister. Part 4, veterinary surgeon, section 2(a) of clause 19 states –

“(2) Nothing in this Act shall prevent – (a) a person who holds a degree, diploma or an equivalent qualification in veterinary medicine and surgery, from providing services which do not include final decisions and are done under the direct responsibility and supervision of a veterinary surgeon;”

But what is the definition of final decisions? This is quite vague and this deserves clarification regarding what are the activities defined as final decisions? And what is also the definition of supervision? Does it imply physical supervision or remote supervision? Mr Speaker, Sir, this section deserves to be more precise and clear definitions and parameters should be set. Again, in the same clause 19, in section 2 (b), Para veterinary workers and person working as subordinates should indeed be regulated but the regulations need to be clear, defined and include specification restricting the activities that may or may not be performed by a subordinate and specify what activities can only be completed by a veterinary surgeon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my last point of concern is regarding some aspects of quality of care. It is crucial to ensure that registered veterinary surgeons offer the proper standard of service and care so as to maintain a level of effectiveness, integrity and quality which will entitle them to the confidence of the veterinary profession and to the public. Could the hon. Minister enlighten us regarding how he intends to maintain quality of care besides the required set

qualifications standards in clause 20 section 1(b) and through continuous professional development programmes? Will there be educational training provided locally? Will a veterinary school be set up in Mauritius? Or does he intend to establish entry exams?

To conclude, Mr Speaker, I hope that my concerns and suggestions will be given due consideration, and clarification, and amendments will be brought in particular for a more proper and fairer representation of the veterinary profession in the composition of the Council, to give the Council the ability to take sound decisions in the best interest of the veterinary industry.

Thank you for your kind attention!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will break for 30 minutes.

At 4.49 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.35 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! Please be seated! I call upon hon. Rawoo.

Dr. I. Rawoo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Members of the House, it is a privilege for me to address and participate in the debate regarding the Veterinary Council Bill and I would like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, hon. Maneesh Gobin, for presenting the Veterinary Council Act to the House and repeal the previous one.

Let me start, first of all with a previous orator, Dr. hon. Aumeer who stated there are unregistered practitioners to carry surgeries, but, according to the Veterinary Council, a Council regulates and controls the profession of veterinary surgeons. Same as Medical and Dental Council, any unregistered practitioner, who does any sort of surgery, should be reported to the Council and it is considered as a police case.

Ensuring animal welfare is a human responsibility that includes consideration for all aspects of animal well-being including proper housing, management nutrition, disease prevention, treatment or responsible care, human handling and, when necessary, human euthanasia.

The main objective of this Bill is to amend and provide better legal framework for the veterinary surgeons and thus maintain a discipline in the profession. It will help in the advancement of veterinary medicine and surgery and will ensure animal welfare.

M. le président, ce texte de loi est extrêmement important. Il aborde des questions nouvelles sur la santé animale, le bien-être animal et aborde également la question de l'ordre des vétérinaires donc de la profession. Par ailleurs, ce projet de loi intègre les évolutions internationales et régionales en matière de normes des services vétérinaires.

M. le président, il existe de nombreuses perspectives sur le bien- être animal qui sont influencées par les valeurs et les expériences d'une personne. Il existe également divers moyens de mesurer le bien-être animal y compris mais sans illimités la santé, la productivité, le comportement et les réponses physiologiques. Le médecin vétérinaire peut, dans l'exercice de sa profession, donner des conseils permettant de prévenir les maladies animales et promouvoir les moyens favorisant une bonne santé sur les animaux. L'exercice de la médecine vétérinaire constitue tout acte qui a pour objet de donner des consultations vétérinaires, de faire des examens pathologiques d'animaux, d'établir des diagnostics vétérinaires, de prescrire des médicaments pour animaux, de pratiquer des interventions chirurgicales vétérinaires, de traiter des infections médicales vétérinaires en faisant usage des procédés mécaniques, physiques, chimiques, biologiques ou radiothérapie.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill is of relevant importance as animal welfare is the well-being of animals. The standard of good animal welfare varies considerably between different contexts. These standards are very important to be under constant review and must be debated in this Bill created and revised accordingly. I quote -

“In 2008, the World Reference Organisation for Animal Welfare adopted a definition on animal welfare. Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the condition in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if, as indicated by scientific evidence, it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express in a behaviour and if it is not suffering from unpleasant state such as pain, fear and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal, the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry and humane treatment.”

It is, therefore, of utmost importance that the veterinarians should be licensed and supervised by an independent veterinary statutory body.

M. le Président, les membres de la profession vétérinaire doivent posséder un large éventail d'expertises et de compétences qui rendent les vétérinaires unique dans leur compréhension du comportement et du bien-être des animaux.

Les vétérinaires doivent faire preuve de pragmatisme pour examiner et évaluer le bien-être des animaux dans leur environnement et faire des recommandations pour améliorer le bien-être là où cela est nécessaire.

M. le Président, les pratiques quotidiennes des vétérinaires doivent être considérées comme une obligation professionnelle pour tous les membres de la communauté vétérinaire. Dans leurs relations quotidiennes avec les animaux, les vétérinaires doivent toujours adhérer aux principes de soin et de compassion qui peuvent être exprimées en fournissant des soins médicaux vétérinaires appropriés et en provenant, développant et appliquant des protocoles et des techniques de gestion efficaces et un personnel suffisant et qualifié pour assurer les activités vétérinaire de routine à être exécutées avec moins de contrainte envers les animaux et de manière compatissante avec les animaux.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this Bill, it can be noted that there is substantial change, taking a look in clause 7 which is the management of Council and composition for the Bill -

“The Council shall consist of – (a) a Chairperson elected from among members referred to in subsection (1)(h); (b) a Vice-chairperson who shall be a person of high moral and professional integrity, having relevant qualifications, expertise and experience in either law or veterinary medicine and surgery, to be appointed by the Minister;”

The above denotes that there will be no ground for errors since that the person will be highly intellectual dotted with required skills as well as knowledge. Besides, there will be a representative of the Ministry who will be responsible for the subject of health, one for the subject of labour, one from Pharmacy Board and also five persons not being veterinary surgeon to be appointed by the Minister.

The above elements were not present in the former Act and here, in this Bill, with the presence of these representatives, there is bound to be appropriateness, fairness, correctness, integrity as well as transparency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this respect, CPD (Continuous Professional Development) Programmes in section 28 of this Bill, already present in medical and dental professions, will now be in the veterinary surgeon in the Veterinary Council Bill. This will, definitely, help them to keep in touch with new advancement in the field and thus provide updated professional knowledge, skills and new technologies in different veterinary fields. Training sessions, programmes, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences or workshops will be organised by official CPD providers registered by the Veterinary Council. The same will apply with a minimum number of hours to attend by the surgeons to be able to be registered yearly.

Furthermore, in section 22, temporary registration of visiting veterinary surgeon for purpose of teaching, research or study will be facilitated.

M. le Président, les vétérinaires doivent devenir suffisamment influent et agir en tant que principale source de bien-être animal de la société pour apporter une expertise scientifique et éduquer le grand public sur l'élevage de base. Le grand public s'intéresse et s'inquiète de plus en plus de la manière dont les animaux sont utilisés et traités. Le bien-être animal est un domaine d'expertise multidisciplinaire qui comprend la science vétérinaire, l'éthique, les religions, la politique, l'économie. Il est évident que des recherches scientifiques supplémentaires dans ces domaines sont nécessaires pour mieux comprendre et découvrir les meilleures pratiques pour améliorer le bien-être animal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the main aim of the amendment of the Bill 5(f) is to maintain the standard of our veterinary surgeons and also for the best treatment, improvement and care for all animals. The main challenge of the veterinary profession is to ensure verification of safety of product of terrestrial and aquatic animal origin intended for human and animal consumption and promoting trade of products of animal origin.

Even last year, on 13 July 2019, the Veterinary Council Act was amended in section 20 to any disciplinary measures by the Council under subsection 1 in accordance with section 9(6) of Dangerous Drugs Act is now in section 30 subsection 3(a)(b) in this Veterinary Act -

“(a) the veterinary surgeon has prescribed a dangerous drug which is in excess of the amount that is properly required for the veterinary treatment of an animal; or (b) the veterinary surgeon has prescribed a dangerous drug knowing that such a prescription is not required for the veterinary treatment of an animal.”

All these regulations, mainly for the prevention of cruelty for the protection of animals, thus controlling experiment on animals or training of animals in a cruel manner.

I quote from the Veterinary Council Act 1991 –

“A veterinary surgeon must vacate office if he has committed a misconduct, default or breach of trusts in the discharge of his duties as member or otherwise which is in the opinion of Council renders him unfit to be a member.”

But in the Bill section 8 (3) –

(3) The Council may remove from office any member who -

(c) commits an act of professional misconduct, malpractice, negligence, fraud or dishonesty, or a breach of the Code of Practice, which, in the opinion of the Council, renders him unfit to be a member;

The law will be more severe in the Bill as compared to the Act which leads to less act of malpractice, negligence or fraud or even breach of conduct. The above severity in that Bill will help to minimise or even eradicate the fraud, negligence, malpractice and so on as the non-adherence to this will entail severe penalties.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, veterinarians must have the necessary skills and tools to meet the social expectations and profession obligation regarding the animal welfare. In addition, veterinarians should make themselves available to cooperate with all interested parties to improve the welfare and well-being of animals. There must be numerous animal welfare programmes, projects, initiatives on different national and international levels involving Government and private sector to improve and promote the animal welfare and the protection of animals in different fields.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill will create a revolution in the Mauritius Veterinary Council and since it is transparent, fair, credible, simplified and almost unique, these are the aspects of the Veterinary Bill which has been brought forward and which will demarcate from the old one because this Bill is an innovative one which take into consideration many aspects that were missing in the previous Act. I am indeed in favour to vote for this Bill and, without no doubt, there will be no longer any flaws which have been witnessed in the past, and with the management of such good policies, there will be indeed regulation and tighter control of veterinary surgeons. This will be even innovative advancement in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery which will benefit the society at large.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in summary, the veterinary profession must be well prepared and responsible to use its skill and expertise to help animal owners and the public to provide the best practice and education about animal welfare. This profession has great potential, opportunity and responsibility to engage in a wide range of employment fields that deliver animal welfare services to the benefit of the society and all animals. Veterinarians should continue to identify current needs and future developments, and ensure the veterinarians are always properly trained in the field of the animal welfare.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

WEEK-END NEWSPAPER – PRESS ARTICLE – PRIVILEGE COMPLAINT

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I have an announcement to make.

Hon. Members, I wish to inform the House that the hon. Government Chief Whip, Ms Ramyad, has, in writing, on Tuesday 24 November 2020, given notice of her wish to raise a privilege complaint arising out of an article which appeared in the newspaper *Week-End*, in its edition of 22 November 2020, under the caption *Interview - Shakeel Mohamed, whip de l'opposition: "J'envisage de traîner le Speaker devant la Cour suprême"*.

The Chief Government Whip is of the view that the content of the said article may amount to a contempt of the Assembly under section 6(1) (s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act for uttering and publishing a statement reflecting on the conduct and character of the Speaker, and containing accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty as Speaker.

The matter has been referred to me by Mr Speaker. Hon. Members, I have perused the said article against the provision of section 6(1) (s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, which reads as follows –

“6. Contempt of the Assembly

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

Subsection (s) reads as follows –

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

Hon. Members, I take the view that the content of the said article may amount to a statement reflecting on the conduct and character of or containing or amounting to an accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty by the Speaker.

I consider that the offence may have been committed under the aforesaid section of the law.

Ms Ramyad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the light of your Ruling, I move that the matter, whereby an article appeared in the newspaper *Week-End*, in its edition of 22 November 2020 under the caption *Interview - Shakeel Mohamed, whip de l'opposition: "J'envisage de traîner le Speaker devant la Cour suprême"*, be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action pursuant to Standing Order 74(4) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly.

Dr. Jagutpal seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: We proceed with the next speaker, hon. Mrs Mayotte.

(5.55 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity and privilege today to address myself to the House on the Veterinary Council Bill.

Being myself together with so many others of this House an unconditional animal lover, and, also, a strong advocate for animal rights and welfare, it is with a great sense of honour and respect that I will deliver my message to the House today.

I seize this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to our Prime Minister, the Rt. hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and hon. Maneesh Gobin, Minister of Agro-Industry and Security and Attorney General for having fully understood the importance and urgency of such a Bill and enabling same to be tabled in this Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Strategic Plan (2016-2020) for the Food Crops, Livestock and Forestry Sectors issued in January 2016 by the Ministry of Agro-Industry was already raising a very strong alarm regarding the many limitations, if not, complete obsolescence of the present Veterinary Council Act, how it was adversely and heavily impacting on our farming, livestock, venison, poultry and dairy production for the last decade preceding this Report.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I fully agree with this Report's finding mentioning that the acute lack of veterinarians reported in the Strategic Plan (2016-2020) and its subsequent consequences have been putting our very food security at risk.

Even more, in 2020, while going through this COVID-19 pandemic, this situation has shown us the vital importance of being self-sufficient regarding our basic needs, firstly, food production. One of the main recommendations of this Report was to bring drastic changes to the actual Veterinary Council Act, recommendation that has been fully acknowledged, and now, being implemented by this Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as per the same Report, the veterinary services of Réduit, which themselves, have been running for many years with less than 60% of their normal establishment, have cut down on many essential services being provided to farmers. Since many years now, no veterinarians are available from Réduit for night emergencies, leading to the death of many animals due to lack of medical assistance and care. As a direct result of above, many farmers have, over the years, obviously chosen to opt out, thus leading us to this present situation of an agonising local dairy and meat industry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, long gone are the days where nearly all Mauritians could have readily access to freshly produced milk with this unique taste and aroma, stating its bio and traditional label that is forever engraved in some part of my childhood memories. But with the passing of this Bill as well as all the many incentives of that the Government is providing to not only professional farmers, but to young starters, I am sure, in no time, we will soon see these sectors thriving again.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the numerous positive economic fallouts from a completely uphold veterinary service and healthcare system that will be derived from the new legal framework being provided in this Bill will be both quick and very beneficial to our nation. For sure, other fellow Members of this House will be more explicit on all these economic aspects being positively impacted by this Bill.

Quant à moi, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without downsizing economic positive outcomes of this Bill, I bring my unconditional support to this Bill and express my deep gratefulness, once again, to the Government for allowing same because it will finally provide to all animals in our country access to proper and adequate medical assistance and healthcare. Animals, since the early ages of civilization, and even in mankind primitive cave ages, have

always been our faithful companions, ensuring subsistence, warmth, security, transportation and companionship.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, every single religion, does it not elevate the sacred bond between mankind and the animal realm? Ask Alexander the Great, and he will tell you how many wars he won with Bucephale, his faithful horse; ‘no better friend’, he used to say to all. Ask the people of Ōdate in Japan and they will tell you the story of Hachikō which was faithful to his master even after death. Ask me, Sandra Mayotte, and I will tell you about Marley, my five-year-old dog, my son, a true friend who rejoices with me in my good times, who can comfort me like no one else in bad times. The same friend which only a few days back, I held for hours in my lap, while he was profusely bleeding from a cut; there was not one single veterinary doctor available at night. How many are living the same traumatic experience everyday throughout the island, seeing their loved animals suffering and dying in their laps without any help possible?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is it not a sacred duty for all of us to ensure that same as for us humans, the best possible medical coverage and healthcare is made available to all animals irrespective of its species in our country? Our country is presently facing an unprecedented shortage of veterinarians in all sectors, including governmental and private. Conditions imposed by the Council for the recruitment of expatriate veterinarians are impossible to meet. Actually, delaying tactics to provide registration have discouraged almost all possible candidates willing to work in Mauritius. Actually, no veterinary services are available for after hours and emergencies. Many veterinary clinics like MSAW, HSI and PAWS had to cease operations because of no veterinarians available.

Ceasing of sterilization also arises now due to, again, no veterinarians available. Lack of several essential medicines due to penalising conditions being imposed on some specific importers and reducing of services offered to farmers, especially for night emergencies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Veterinary Council Bill, in conformity with the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Report 2016-2020, will ensure good governance and running of the Veterinary Council as per its governing Act and the expectation of its parent Ministry; avoid all possible conflict of interest scenarios and other agendas than those of the Act itself; ensuring adequate numbers of veterinarians in both Government and private sector to meet good norms of assistance and care; allow after hours and emergency services with extra veterinarians being recruited; see the creation of a considerable number of jobs for

Mauritians in the paramedical veterinary services such as nurses, veterinary assistants, veterinary technicians, etc.; blow life again in our livestock, venison, dairy and other related industry; see the restoration of massive sterilization campaigns for dogs and cats.

Life as a veterinarian is rewarding but challenging and demanding. To be a veterinarian, you must have a passion for or a clinic interest in animals, have great interpersonal skills and possess a strong work ethic. Veterinarians are the only doctors educated to protect the health of both animals and people. They work hard to address the health and welfare needs of every species of animal. Veterinarians also play critical roles in environmental protection research, food safety and public health. I would like, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to end my address to the House by reading the oath that all veterinary doctors take, and I quote -

“As a member of the veterinary medical profession, I solemnly swear that I will use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society. I will strive to promote animal health and welfare, relieve animal suffering, protect the health of the public and environment, and advance comparative medical knowledge.”

Let all Members of this House, irrespective of our political allegiance, be all human and compassionate towards all the animals that will benefit from this Bill and ensure that this very solemn oath is fully respected by those who take it. God bless the Republic of Mauritius!

Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

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

(6.05 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Veterinary Council Bill, which is a very crucial piece of legislation to regulate the veterinary profession. Members of this profession are called upon to play a key role and bring their valuable contribution to the development of livestock and welfare of animals in Mauritius. Here, I wish to extend my congratulations to hon. Maneesh Gobin, Attorney General and Minister of Agro-industry and Food security, for coming up with this Bill, which provides a more modern and flexible legislative framework to regulate more effectively the veterinary services in the country.

The very objective of this Bill as spelt out therein is to repeal and replace the Veterinary Council Act, which dates back to 1991. This Bill takes into account recent developments and innovations in the veterinary practices throughout the world.

M. le président, ce projet de loi qui ne doit être nullement politisé prouve l'intention du gouvernement, sous la férule d'un Premier ministre que je suis fier de pouvoir qualifier d'homme de vision, de ne pas rester les bras croisés par rapport à la noble fonction de vétérinaire et les services autour. Les vétérinaires qui ont à cœur l'éthique ne doivent pas voir le verre à moitié vide ou à moitié rempli en parcourant ce projet de loi, puisqu'il vient en quelque sorte les mettre à l'abri contre les abus trop souvent décriés dans le domaine de la médecine vétérinaire dans le pays. Effectivement, les vétérinaires qui font preuve de professionnalisme trouveront dans ce projet de loi un rempart contre les abus et seront ainsi protégés par rapport aux charlatans qui opèrent dans l'ombre et même parfois au grand jour.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir this Bill will pave the way for the establishment of a new Veterinary Council which, *inter alia*, will be responsible to register veterinary surgeons, as is the case for other professions such as Medical and Health Officers, Architects and Quantity Surveyors, amongst others; regulate and control the profession of veterinary surgeons to ensure that quality and expert services are made available to animals; exercise and maintain discipline in the profession of veterinary surgeons, and promote advancements in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery in the wake of emerging challenges of the 21st century, which affect animals as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir at first glance, this Bill may seem of lesser importance to some. It is definitely not the case, if we understand the capital importance under the associated potential of value creation that can be generated within this industry. Allow me to enumerate a few points to highlight the importance of this Bill.

Our long-suffering dairy and meat industry need to be revitalised to enable the country to progress towards self-sufficiency. While it will generate a considerable number of additional jobs in the farming and veterinary sector, it will also protect animals by ensuring that they duly receive the best health care and treatment that they so rightly deserved.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, animals have been our faithful companion since the dawn of ages. Not only they feed us but guard our families and properties. They are also our essential teammates in so many activities and areas, be it as police or narcotic dogs, therapy animals, amongst others. In so many households, they are reckoned as a family member *à part entière*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure that most Members of this august Assembly do have a pet at home which they cherish dearly. It is also a very sad fact that in many countries, authorities hardly care for the pain and suffering inflicted on animals, given that they are so much focused on their own right, comfort and privilege that they turn completely deaf when it comes to the welfare of animals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can proudly say that such is not the case, neither for Mauritius, thanks to the leadership and guidance of our Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, a leader who rightly understands that every soul, whether it is a human or animal living in our motherland, has the right to the best possible healthcare.

This brings me to share a quote from Mahatma Gandhi who once said –

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through this legislation Mauritius is displaying its greatness as a nation, confirming that our moral values are more vibrant than ever. This Bill is the fruit of many years of hard work, culminating from an all-inclusive report that was published and labelled - and that was mentioned by the previous speaker, hon. Mrs Sandra Mayotte - The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 for the Food Crops Livestock and Forestry Sectors.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would invite Members of this Assembly to consult this essential report that revealed how the agricultural sector, particularly the farming sector which comprises our livestock and dairy industry came near extinction during the 10 years preceding 2015. Had this Government not intervened at the opportune moment, food security and safety would have been severely compromised. One of the main findings of the report I have just referred to was the complete obsolescence of the current Veterinary Council Act in its present form.

Bringing drastic changes to the outdated Veterinary Council Act within a reasonable timeframe was subsequently one of the strongest recommendations of the Strategic Plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to this ailing act, was added the undeniable fact that for many years now, the Veterinary Council of Mauritius had been taken hostage by a group of veterinarians, bullying themselves to be re-elected mandate after mandate. They only had their own personal and pecuniary interests in mind instead of working towards the objectives of the Council and its governing Act. Previous speakers have also given a number of examples which arose from this situation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the complete malfunctioning of the Veterinary Council ultimately led to the severe conflict of interest among its executive members. As such, the Veterinary Council imposed rigid conditions for foreign veterinarians to be employed by local bodies and, as a result, our country finds itself among those with the lowest number of practicing veterinary surgeons.

As of now, less than 70 veterinarians cater for the whole island, including Rodrigues, and most of them are State veterinarians and this is the situation which my colleague, hon. Francisco François, mentioned earlier on for Rodrigues.

We, as a responsible Government, cannot condone such a situation. Legislation is required to enforce the application of animal health protection practices in the interest of service users and consumers of livestock products.

Hence, the current legislation is being reviewed and reengineered in line with latest developments in the livestock sector. The new legislation will enable stakeholders in this sector to be adequately equipped to meet the daunting challenges arising from technological progress in strict compliance with requirements of international agreements and conventions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now, I am going to dwell on some of the key features in this Bill. I will start by the provision at clause 7 which relates to the composition of the Council and that was earlier mentioned by a previous speaker. The new Council will consist of, yes, 21 members, including the Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson. The new Council will have on board a representative, each from the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and the Pharmacy Board.

In addition, 5 persons, not being veterinary surgeons will be appointed by the Minister and here is the important point I want to stress upon, we cannot expect a Council to consist of 9 veterinary surgeons as members out a total of 11 members, as it is the case presently. We need to have a governing body which is adequately represented from the appropriate sectors and expertise to strike a right balance.

It is also worth pointing out that the term of office of the Council members, in exception of the ex-officio members, has been reduced to 2 years from 3 previously. This is considered to be a reasonable term of office and a sound governance practice with a view to monitoring the performance of the Council more effectively.

Another salient feature in this Bill pertains to the setting up of a Registration Board. The current legislation does not provide for such a body which promotes good governance

and transparency. Clause 10 of the Bill provides for the composition of the Registration Board, comprising a Chairperson and two assessors. The main responsibility of this Board will be to assist the Council in screening applications for potential registration of local veterinary surgeons.

Section 12 of the present Veterinary Council Act provides for the appointment of a Registrar which shall be a veterinary officer of the Ministry and who is designated by the Permanent Secretary. This appointment is not in line with good governance practices, especially taking into consideration that the Council shall be a corporate body as spelt out at clause 3(2) of this Bill. This practice has been rightly addressed as it empowers the new Council to appoint the Registrar on the terms and conditions it may decide.

Veterinary medicine is the branch of medicine that deals with the prevention, control, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, disorder and injury in animals. It also deals with animal rearing, breeding and research on nutrition and product development. The scope of veterinary medicine is wide, covering all domesticated animal species.

The 21st Century society is moving from relatively slow pace, linear growth to exponential growth underpinned by rapidly advancing and disruptive technologies in a complex global setting.

In such a challenging environment, the veterinarian professionals will be a major player in promoting the health and welfare of animals, pets and livestock. Veterinary surgeons should be professionals who are well equipped and well-versed in the science of health. They also contribute to public health research by identifying and combating infections and zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from animals to human. A previous speaker has mentioned the issue of infections and pandemics. The current trends show that there is a growing incidence of infectious diseases that put both men and animals at risk through disease outbreaks and pandemics. This reality is driven by increased globalisation and population connectivity which enable diseases to reach widely dispersed populations at unprecedented speed. In the face of growing challenges, continuous professional development for the veterinarians is of paramount importance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by stating that the Government's main responsibility is connected with evident public interest in a holistic manner. This includes monitoring of general animal health conditions, the prevention of outbreaks of contagious animal diseases, the eradication of animal diseases dangerous to human health, controls on

the quality of products sold on the market, certification of the effectiveness of drugs and vaccines and training of the veterinary personnel at all levels. With the strengthening of the human animal bond, there has been growing expectation on veterinary medicines to provide better medical care. I have no doubt that the provisions in this Bill will bring the landmark change required to enable the veterinary services in Mauritius to give the *lettre de noblesse* to the professionals in this domain.

I, therefore, fully support the provisions in this Bill.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Long live the Republic of Mauritius!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ehsan Juman!

(6.21 p.m.)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Merci, M. le président. Je comprends que le présent projet de loi vise à établir un meilleur cadre légal pour la profession vétérinaire. J'ai eu l'occasion de discuter avec quelques professionnels du domaine. En général, je dois dire que ce projet de loi est bien accueilli, néanmoins, ils m'ont fait part de quelques appréhensions. Je ne vais pas trop m'y attarder puisque les précédents orateurs ont déjà relevé plusieurs manquements, je vais donc me consacrer sur un des aspects qui me préoccupe et qui a été soulevé d'ailleurs par ma collègue, l'honorable Foo Kune. J'ai personnellement une grande appréhension concernant la composition du *Board*. Je me réfère, bien entendu, à la section 7, *Composition of Council*. Je dois admettre que je suis choqué, M. le président, oui, choqué, on aurait cru qu'après les récentes protestations contre des mauvaises pratiques, le gouvernement aurait fait marche arrière en faisant preuve de bon sens, mais au contraire, il me semble que le gouvernement est encore plus enclin à faire exactement le contraire de ce que veut la population.

Je serai très bref mais j'expliquerai, en me basant sur ce projet de loi, comment le gouvernement continue d'étendre honteusement ses tentacules sur les institutions et les organisations, et dans le cas présent, M. le président, sur le *Veterinary Council*, afin d'en avoir une mainmise totale en vertu de la section 4 de l'actuel *Veterinary Act*. Le *Board* est composé de 11 membres actuellement, de ces 11 membres, seulement deux sont nommés par le ministre. C'est ce que prévoit, je le redis, la présente loi qui va être abrogée pour être remplacée par ce présent projet de loi. Or, selon ce présent *Bill*, ce nombre va presque doubler, M. le président, oui, doubler, passant de 11 membres à 21, ce qui est, à mon humble avis, extrêmement déraisonnable.

Le ministre a fait référence au *Medical Council* lors de son allocution et même l'honorable Rawoo. Je présume que le gouvernement a voulu aligner le *Veterinary Bill* sur la *Medical Council Act* qui fait provision pour une vingtaine de membres, mais est-ce justifié que le *Medical Council* et le *Veterinary Council* aient le même nombre de *Board members*? Non, M. le président ! Non, simplement parce que le *Medical Council* représente environ 3,500 médecins, alors qu'il y a que 75 vétérinaires qui sont enregistrés au *Veterinary Council*. En termes de ratio, on ne peut logiquement mettre les deux conseils sur le même pied d'égalité.

Savez-vous, M. le président, qu'en Irlande où la profession vétérinaire compte environ 4,000 professionnels, y compris des infirmiers, il n'y a que 19 membres qui siègent sur le *Veterinary Council of Ireland* ; un conseil de 19 membres pour une profession comptant 4,000 professionnels, alors que chez nous, on veut instituer un conseil de 21 membres pour une profession qui ne compte qu'environ 75 professionnels. Où est la rationalité dans cette provision ? C'est insensé, du moins c'est insensé pour nous, pas pour ceux de la majorité car le plus important pour le gouvernement, c'est de pouvoir caser des proches sur des *Boards*. Et ce qui va probablement se répéter dans ce cas-ci, car le ministre de l'Agro-industrie pourra maintenant nommer au total non pas deux mais six membres sur le conseil, trois fois plus de chance et d'opportunités souriront donc aux proches du gouvernement.

Ce qui est encore plus écœurant, M. le président, c'est que même le vice-président, sans précédent, sera nommé par le ministre sous ce présent *Bill*, tel n'a jamais été le cas auparavant. En d'autres mots, le vice-président pourra dicter sa propre loi car il aura la bénédiction du ministre alors que le *Chairman*, élu par les membres du *Board*, pourra lui se retrouver avec les mains liées. Cela ne peut pas être ainsi, M. le président, il faut que le vice-président soit également élu par les membres du Conseil comme c'est le cas pour la présidence. Je vois par ailleurs qu'on a voulu, une fois de plus, émuler le *Medical Council* en permettant que le ministre puisse nommer cinq membres sur le Conseil. Nous savons tous que cinq déjà c'est beaucoup quand il s'agit d'influencer des décisions prises par le *Board*. Le comble cependant c'est que ces cinq membres, en vertu de la section 7(1)(k), ne doivent pas être des *veterinary surgeons*, *five persons not being veterinary surgeons to be appointed by the Minister*. Qui seront-ils, M. le président ? Verrons-nous encore des nominations qu'on a vues au *Medical Council* ?

Le ministre de la Santé nous a dit, pas plutôt que la semaine d'avant, au niveau de *Medical Council* quels genres de nominations sont faites. Il n'y a pas mal à ce que des

personnes issues de la société civile siègent sur ce *Board* mais encore faut-il qu'elles aient un minimum d'expérience dans ce domaine. Une personne ne doit pas être nommée simplement parce qu'elle a été agent de tel député ou tel ministre.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Juman: Je dis ça pour moi aussi.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman, continue!

Mr Juman: Comment pouvons-nous attendre à ce que quelqu'un qui n'a absolument aucune expérience dans un domaine spécifique et donc on ne sait même pas les engagements sociaux, à venir défendre les intérêts de la profession, de veiller à ce que le code d'éthique ou le code de déontologie soit respecté ou encore de superviser et juger la pratique des professionnels ? On peut comprendre qu'il ne faut pas qu'un, mais pas cinq représentants de la société civile - celui-ci doit d'abord avoir un désintérêt, des compétences ou des qualifications qui permettraient au *Veterinary Council* d'accomplir ses objectifs. Cela doit être précisé dans cette nouvelle loi pour éviter qu'il n'y ait des abus au niveau des nominations. Ce qui me préoccupe, M. le président, c'est la mainmise qu'il y aura au gouvernement sur les décisions du Conseil. Les sept membres élus du *Board* qui représentent la profession se verront en situation de minorité face aux douze autres membres composés des nominés et des représentants des divers ministères proposés et organismes, ce qui sous-entend que les vétérinaires, eux-mêmes, n'auront pas leur mot à dire dans les prises de décision. À un moment où l'on parle de plus en plus d'autorégulation, ou au moins d'assurer qu'il y ait le moins d'ingérence possible dans le fonctionnement des institutions, des organismes et des instances régulatrices, c'est exactement le contraire qui se passe avec ce projet de loi, M. le président.

Je me demande si le gouvernement est sourd aux critiques et aux appréhensions de la population ou si ce n'est qu'un manque de considération des mauriciens parce qu'ils sont considérés comme des insignifiants, comme dirait l'autre. J'espère, par souci pour la démocratie et la bonne gouvernance, que le gouvernement revoie toute la section 7 de ce projet de loi. On ne peut pas continuer à tolérer à ce qu'il y ait autant d'ingérence politique ou

ministérielle dans une instance régulatrice. On doit mettre un frein à ce genre de pratique une fois pour toutes, M. le président, à moins qu'on ne veuille nous prendre pour une République bananière. En passant, je tiens à saluer tous les professionnels du secteur et je vous remercie pour votre attention.

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

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Veterinary Council Bill we are debating today in this august Assembly, is aimed at providing a better framework to regulate the veterinary profession in Mauritius. It will also provide an appropriate framework for the registration of duly qualified veterinary surgeons, mainly discipline in the profession and promote all the latest findings and good practice in the field of vet medicine and surgery. This Bill comes at a point in time when the importance of vet surveillance and expertise is proving to be capital in the management of public health issues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me first come up with some points raised by hon. Ehsan Joomaye...

(Interruptions)

... by hon. Ehsan Juman, especially about...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister has corrected it.

Dr. Jagutpal: Hon. Ehsan Juman.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! He has corrected it! Continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall again point out that hon. Ehsan Juman, especially talked about the composition of Council members; whether the council should have more veterinary surgeons or members, it is not an arbitrary figure. The decision to have lay members, I believe, my colleague Minister will elaborate on this later on. But, so far, it meets the objectives and it ensures transparency with regard to the composition of Council members. Definitely, there will be more members, especially members from the different fields, which is very important. Again, the hon. Member also made reference to the Medical Council and its composition, the numbers that we are having. It is not that today we are

having 3,500 members. The law - I will not cite it now because the hon. Member has to do his homework - was not passed yesterday. At that time when it was passed, he should have known about the number of registered members before comparing members with the Medical Council and the Veterinary Council. So, there is no point in making this comparison. He also made reference to members that have been appointed by the Minister. This has been the practice since many, many years and we all know that Ministers represent the people, they are elected democratically and, as per the law, they can nominate members.

I will come again to what hon. Dr. Aumeer said before. He made reference to whether the Bill can stop the practice of non-registered practitioners. Obviously, this is the objective of the Bill, those who will be registered can practice veterinary medicine and those who are not, obviously, will commit an offence. Now, he also made reference to whether veterinary surgeons not having registered at the time that this Bill will pass, whether they will be registered or they will not be able to be registered, as it happened for the Alight Health Professionals, if they do not meet the required criteria to be registered, they will be offered a top-up programme and that will be decided by the Board. Reference was made again about the food security. There is the Food Act that will deal about the food security; it is not a Council that will regulate the profession of the veterinary that will look into the food security.

In regard to the foreign veterinary surgeons, whether the Council will process it if ever they wish to come and work in Mauritius, that will depend as there is a lot of criteria that have to be met, especially the Occupational Permit and other conditions. The Veterinary Council cannot, beforehand, start giving its views on whether an overseas veterinary surgeon can get registered or not.

Hon. Mrs Foo Kune pointed out that there was an incident with the MSAW and that the animals were not properly looked after. Well, that is the objective of the Bill: they will be subject to disciplinary proceedings whenever animals are not properly treated. These are the comments that have been made and, for me, this Bill has made provisions for so many of them and this Bill has come at the right moment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come back to my speech. The COVID-19 outbreak and the ongoing pandemic outline the very importance and urgent need to closely monitor the animal to human interface, which can act as a primary source of emerging zoonotic diseases. Now, it is an established fact that most of the new and emerging diseases that affect human health originate from animals. Prediction shows that the world is under the threat of 1.6 million

viruses which might emerge in the future. The current era is already, and will continue to be marked by substantial increase in zoonotic outbreaks, as nowadays the gap between the animal world and the human civilization is receding. Human, animals and animal products nowadays move rapidly across the world. This intensified movement trend allows pathogens to adapt and, in some cases, jump from one species to another. We have witnessed that for far too long, duties and responsibilities of vets have been solely and wrongly associated with only pet care. Vets have a more extensive role, they have responsibility to involve themselves in biomedical research and monitor food and agricultural systems. In the biomedical field, it should be noted that vets had a huge contribution alongside other health experts in the identification of the structure of the Ebola Virus as well as in its mode of transmission. It is thanks to their collaboration that the spread of the deadly virus has been successfully contained. Apart from providing training, advice and information to livestock farmers, they also act so as to prevent food safety hazards. If Mauritius is considered as being self-sufficient concerning its need in poultry, meat and eggs, our country does rely on importation of live cattle. The Ministry of Agro- Industry and Food Security is already doing an extraordinary work in ascertaining that our aviary sector as well as live animals entering our territory are free from disease.

This essential monitoring will now be enhanced and will operate in a more dynamic and conducive framework. Veterinary Council, as proposed by this Bill, will have the responsibility to regulate and control the profession of veterinary surgeons. As the margin between public health and animal health is becoming more intricate, it has become an absolute must to instil more professionalism and accountability in the vet profession. The Council which shall, among others, comprise of elected Chairperson, competent representatives of vet profession, of the Prime Minister's Office, of my Ministry and of the Pharmacy Board shall be assigned with the duties of registering vet surgeons, bid to exercise in the public or in the private sector. The Council shall also have the mandate to facilitate all the latest trends, development and innovation in the veterinary field.

CPD and dissemination, continuous professional development and dissemination of latest information will also allow veterinaries to learn best practices and acquire more knowledge from their peers. They should also keep up to date with latest available information on issues related to animal health and also keep track on issues where animal health has bearings on human health.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a recent interview given to a newspaper, hon. Maneesh Gobin made it clear that, the preferred strategy, as from now, will be one where strays will be sterilised. However, as noble as our ambitions might be, it will not succeed without the concerted efforts of all, that is, Government, NGOs, civil society and the vet surgeons. Mauritius, unfortunately, counts only on a limited pool of vets. I gladly note that the Council will be able to register foreign vets on a temporary basis or as visiting vet surgeons provided, of course, they meet all the established criteria in order to exercise as vet surgeons in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today, more and more Mauritians have pets which form an integral part of their families. Our elderly find comfort in having a pet by their sides. Pet health care has become a popular feature and it is, indeed, a good indication when domesticated animals are given appropriate health care and medical attention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before concluding, allow me once more to congratulate the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security for having come forward with this new Bill, which will repeal a former Veterinary Council Act. My Ministry will offer its full support, its full collaboration in the process of harmonising veterinary health care and finding comprehensive approach to prevent and address all issues which might result from increased animal to human interaction. My Ministry will also pursue and willingly enhance the expertise it provides regarding the importation of live animal and animal products in our territory. Now is the time to recognise that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.

I thank you for your attention.

(Applause)

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

(6.44 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. First of all, I wish to thank all hon. Members for their valuable comments and proposals and for their intervention on the Veterinary Council Bill.

I wish to address some of the points raised by my colleagues on both sides of the House. First of all, the questions raised by hon. Dr. Aumeer are, indeed, valid as regards the

issues concerning the allied professionals, in the sense that they are compared to the paramedics or the paralegal for the medical and the legal profession. Yes, these are indeed valid points, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but there is always a starting point. The starting point is for the veterinarians first, and then, for the allied professionals.

I assure the House that the necessary regulations will be made, if need be, by way of a Bill, but the starting point still remains for the veterinary surgeons in the first place. As regards the issue about disciplinary proceedings and whether there are sufficient guidelines as to the conduct of those disciplinary proceedings, I wish to reassure the House that the same principles will apply in disciplinary proceedings concerning vets as compared to disciplinary proceedings concerning doctors, lawyers or any other professionals. The rules of natural justice, for example, apply to one and all, such that principles which have evolved in decided cases from previous disciplinary cases will also apply in disciplinary proceedings concerning veterinary surgeons.

Insofar as the delays for registration purposes, the law is clear; the Bill makes provision for a delay of 21 days, in section 20, for registration purposes and a delay of 90 days for disciplinary proceedings.

As regards to points raised by my distinguished colleague from Rodrigues, yes, the situation of Rodrigues, indeed, calls for some comments. There are, indeed, only two vets in Rodrigues and they need support. The example of 2016 was given by my distinguished colleague, hon. François, but if we are ourselves in the whole Republic, in a situation where we lack veterinarians, how are we going to assist more with providing vet services to Rodrigues? This is where the question of foreign vets comes in. How can we attract foreign vets if we do not review the functioning of the Council? There are more and more specialised areas where veterinary surgeons are required. How do we attract those specialists if we do not review the functioning of the Council?

Perhaps Members of the House are not aware of this. Recently, in the course of this year, the Public Service Commission had advertised for recruitment of veterinary officers in the public service. Members of the House will be shocked to learn, there were no applications, nobody is interested; maybe, they are interested in other aspects of the profession in the private sector, so, well and good, but we need veterinary officers. How do we cope? The numbers were cited by a number of Members of the House that there are only

75 or 79 or so veterinarians in Mauritius. Would that be enough? So, how do we review the service that we have to provide if we are not to review the functioning of the Council?

This has to come by way of a review, I insist, on the functioning of the Council. Much has been said by Members of the other side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I think that is the crux of their argument. There is general consensus that the existing Veterinary Council Act 1991 has to be reviewed. However, Members of the other side have put emphasis on the composition of the Council and that is the crux of their argument.

Let me take a few minutes to explain something. With this Bill, the Veterinary Council will rise to the level of becoming a regulator. The Council will register veterinarians. The Council will exercise disciplinary control over veterinarians. The Council may suspend a veterinarian. The Council may deregister a veterinarian. This is the role of a regulator. Now, if a regulator is composed of only its own members, there is a direct case of conflict of interest. Will I, as a veterinarian, like competition from a newly registered veterinarian? Is that the role? Am I not in conflict in the exercise of my own profession? And this is the difference, if an institution, a body is composed of only its own members, that body or institution is called a club, it is called an association or it is called a trade union; that is not what a regulator should be. A regulator cannot be a club; a regulator cannot be an association. A regulator cannot be a trade union; it has to be composed of other members other than the professionals of that profession. Common sense is sufficient authority for this proposition. But, if I have to give an example, not an example, some authority about who has said so, I will refer to the debates in 1999, when the Medical Council Bill and the Dental Council Bill were before this House and those two Bills were introduced by the then Minister of Health and Quality of Life, hon. Deerpalsing. At page 2352 of the Hansard, on this very point of the composition of the Councils, this is what the then Minister of Health had to say. I quote him at page 2352 of the debates dated 09 November 1999, I quote,

“Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bills we have before us today are the product of extensive consultations. Under existing legislations, the Councils are constituted mainly of representatives of medical and dental professions respectively. The general duties of the Councils are to safeguard the interests of the public, uphold the reputation of the medical and dental professions and guide doctors and dental surgeons. They should not be perceived as associations or unions for protecting professional interests. In fact, Sir William Reid, a former UK Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner, who was on mission to Mauritius in 1997,

recommended that the composition of these two Councils should be reviewed to include lay members as well. The new Bills take care of Sir William Reid's recommendation. The rationale is to ensure complete transparency and reinforce public confidence in these institutions. Section 4(c) of these two Bills makes provision for that."

I need not say more, but, unfortunately, there still is more to be said. Hon. Members on the other side have chosen to look at the composition of the Council in isolation. I have to remind each and every one of them that the Council does not function in a vacuum. Insofar as registration is concerned, the Council will base itself on the recommendation of the Registration Board. Nobody has read the composition of the Registration Board. The Registration Board is composed of three persons: the Chairperson, who is a veterinary surgeon, two Assessors who are veterinary surgeons. What is wrong with the composition of the Registration Board? Nobody has said anything about that. They have conveniently ignored the composition of the Registration Board.

Second point, who is the Registrar of the Council? Is he a lay person? Is he appointed by the Minister or is he coming from outside the profession? No, the Registrar is a vet himself!

Third, the regulator will exercise disciplinary control over vets. How will the Council perform these functions? It will be by way of setting up the Professional Conduct Committee. That Professional Conduct Committee is composed of three persons: first, the Chair is either a Judge or a Magistrate or a Law Officer with more than 10 years standing. The two assessors are vets. So, for these three points, the Registration Board, the Registrar and the Professional Conduct Committee, nobody has cared to read. I, therefore, wish to allay the fears of those who think that the Council will be functioning in a vacuum; that is certainly not the case. The Council will be guided in its functions by these bodies. The Council, in fact, has to perform the functions of a regulator.

Now, let me, before ending, comment on the importance of reviewing the functioning of the Council. This country needs vets. We do not need vets only for pets or to run private veterinary clinics for pets; yes, we do, but that is not all. We do not need vets only for horse racing. We need vets for goat, sheep, for cattle, *pour les petit ruminants*, for venison, for pig rearing, for milk production. We need vets all along. This is what we are talking about, direct consequence to the economy. How can we function with only 75 or 79 or even 80 vets in this

country? This cannot go on. Now, if a foreign vet is to come to Mauritius, the application will invariably go through the Ministry of Labour as it is now. Does the Ministry of Labour have any say in the functioning of the Vet Council? Not at all! This is why we are including the representative of the Ministry of Labour on that Council. This is crucial going forward. If we need to take livestock seriously in this country, if we need to be serious about food security, if we need to be serious about biosecurity, we need more vets. *Cela passe par une nouvelle législation, telle que nous la voyons devant la Chambre.*

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

THE VETERINARY COUNCIL BILL

(No. XV of 2020)

Clauses 1 to 19 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 20 (Registration as veterinary surgeon)

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

Mr Gobin: Mr Chairperson, I have minor amendments in clause 20 as follows –

“In Clause 20(3) (b), the word ‘dye’ to be replaced by the word ‘due’.

In Section 20(5) (c), to add the word ‘be’ before the word ‘prescribed’.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 21 to 40 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 41 (Annual Report)

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

Mr Gobin: Mr Chairperson, I move that in clause 41 (1), the words ‘The Board’ to be replaced by the words ‘The Council’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 41, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 42 to 51 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded the Veterinary Council Bill (No. XV of 2020) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment matters! Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

MATTERS RAISED

(7.05 p.m.)

AGALEGA - ACCESS - BANK GUARANTEE

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):
M. le président, ce soir je vais soulever la récente décision de l'*Outer Island Development Corporation (OIDC)* d'imposer une garantie bancaire de R403,000 pour toute personne désirant se rendre à Agaléga, idem pour un Agaléen qui veut venir à Maurice et l'*OIDC* tombe sous la tutelle du *PMO*.

Comme vous savez, Agaléga forme partie de ma circonscription, la circonscription numéro trois. Cette décision, M. le président, est une atteinte à la liberté de mouvement des

mauriciens sur leur territoire et emprisonne les Agaléens. Il est souvent nécessaire que les Agaléens fassent le déplacement pour venir à Maurice pour différentes raisons, dont, pour des raisons médicales. Déjà depuis le début des travaux d'agrandissement de la piste d'atterrissage, l'accès à l'île était devenu difficile.

The Deputy Speaker: Raise the issue, hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Maintenant avec cette garantie bancaire l'accès est devenu quasi impossible. C'est un véritable coup de massue. M. le président, je vous demande un peu d'indulgence car il s'agit d'une affaire extrêmement importante.

M. le président, l'île Maurice est en train de tout faire pour réclamer un retour sur les Chagos et sur la scène internationale on réclame de temps en temps notre souveraineté. Comment d'une part, on peut réclamer le droit de retour sur Les Chagos et en même temps exiger...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! It's Adjournment Matters. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, I will listen to the issue that you have to raise rather than a complete lecture on this thing.

Mr Ameer Meea: Okay. M. le président, ce soir je me fais le porte-parole des mauriciens mais surtout des Agaléens pour l'abandon et l'enlèvement immédiat de cette mesure injuste et incompréhensible.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall bring the matter to the attention of the hon. Prime Minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Nuckcheddy!
(7.07 p.m.)

DR. BRUNO CHEONG HOSPITAL, FLACQ –

CASUALTY DEPARTMENT – STAFF

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, M Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request tonight is addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness and it concerns the Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital at Flacq. Due to the large catchment area, at certain point in time, especially in the evenings, the Casualty Department is short of nursing staff, which entails long queues and waiting time. I will thus request the Minister to see if

more nurses can be deployed at this newly named Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital at Flacq. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): I thank the hon. Member. I am aware of this shortage of nursing officers. Until recently, nursing students have been qualified and they will be recruited by the Public Service Commission. So, we are waiting till their recruitment so as to palliate the issues of shortage of staff.

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

(7.08 p.m.)

EDWARD VII MONUMENT, CHAMPS DE MARS – LIGHTING FACILITIES

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My request is addressed to the Minister of Local Government. It concerns the lighting facilities available at the Edward VII monument which is located centrally at the Champ de Mars. This area is pitch dark and is regularly used by the inhabitants of Port Louis in late evenings. I humbly request the hon. Minister to see with the relevant authorities so that it can be improved. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will speak to the Lord Mayor to sort it out.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Kushal Lobine!

HOLYROOD FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND – LIGHTING FACILITIES

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

My request is addressed to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government. It concerns the lighting facilities at Holyrood football playground. For the last six months, football clubs have been complaining to the municipal council for same to be repaired, but in vain. Could the hon. Vice-Prime Minister look into the matter with the Council, please?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): I'll talk to the Lord Mayor concerned. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

QUARTIER MILITAIRE ROAD – ACCIDENTS

Mr S. Dhunoo: Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse au ministre Hurreeram. Ça concerne Quartier Militaire Road venant de Wooton. Il y a une courbe qui cause pas mal d'accidents, s'il pourra demander au *Road Development Authority* de voir le réalignement de cette route pour le bien-être des habitants. Merci.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This project was on the list of RDA projects for the next financial year but after consultation with the DPM and my hon. colleague of the Constituency, we are considering doing it this financial year itself. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Uteem!

(7.10 p.m.)

CEB - VALLEE PITOT - CONSTRUCTION

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président, je voudrais soulever une question qui concerne le ministère de l'énergie et le *Central Electricity Board*. Ça concerne les habitants de la région de Vallée Pitot et en particulier l'impasse Sauzier. Dans cette région, il y a plusieurs maisons qui ont été construites sur le flanc de la montagne et il y avait auparavant des lignes à haute tension du *CEB*. Je crois comprendre que ces lignes ne sont plus utilisées mais ils sont toujours de service et les habitants ne peuvent plus construire à étage parce que la municipalité de Port Louis les empêche de construire à cause de la présence de ces lignes du *CEB*. Le *CEB* est au courant de cette affaire parce qu'il y a plusieurs habitants qui ont écrit déjà au *CEB* mais toutes ces lettres sont restées lettre morte. Donc, je fais un appel à l'honorable ministre de soulever la question auprès des autorités concernées. Merci.

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

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising this matter at adjournment time. I will request the CEB to look into this issue but I can inform the House that once a line is decommissioned or a network is decommissioned, CEB normally removes either the poles or the electric wires.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(7.12 p.m.)

CITÉ LA CURE - YOUTH CENTRES

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, hon. Toussaint. In view of the current school holidays, there is a special request on behalf of the inhabitants especially the youngsters in the region of Cité la Cure, they shall be grateful if the Minister could review the opening hours of the Youth Centres. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): M. le président, je remercie ma collègue pour cette demande. Cela me permet en même temps d'informer les jeunes du pays que nous avons mis sur place un programme de vacances qui a démarré depuis hier. Donc, je demanderai aux jeunes de prendre contact avec les différents centres de jeunesse de leur région premièrement ou bien de rentrer sur la page Facebook du ministère pour avoir toutes les informations nécessaires et troisièmement de rentrer sur le *website* ou la page Facebook ou d'appeler le *Mauritius Sports Council* pour avoir tous les renseignements concernant les différentes activités de vacances. En ce qu'il s'agit du centre de jeunesse de la Cité la Cure, donc je vais voir quelles sont les activités qui ont été proposées pour les jeunes de la région et on va faire le nécessaire.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Stéphanie Anquetil!

(7.13 p.m.)

METRO EXPRESS - VACOAS/FLORÉAL INHABITANTS - COMPENSATION

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je vous remercie, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au vice-Premier ministre et ministre du Logement et des Terres. Les habitants de Vacoas/Floréal qui sont affectés par l'installation du métro sont

toujours dans l'attente des négociations justes et correctes. Je sollicite l'intervention du vice-Premier ministre pour déterminer une date à laquelle les déboursements des compensations financières seront effectués. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, je me renseignerai au sujet de cette question et je ferai parvenir les informations nécessaires à Madame la députée.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger!

(7.14 p.m.)

SIR CHARLES LEES STREET, CUREPIPE – SCHOOL PROJECT

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci. J'aimerais attirer l'attention du ministre des Collectivités Locales sur l'implémentation d'une école dans une zone résidentielle à 17, Sir Charles Lees Street à Curepipe à travers la compagnie CICRA Ltd. Cette activité commerciale dans une zone résidentielle cause de nombreux préjudices aux habitants des alentours avec le passage d'innombrables véhicules dans une allée qui est actuellement une allée commune privée. Si je me fie aux nombreuses plaintes des habitants, il semblerait également que les conditions attachées au permis de construction ne soient pas respectées et que le permis d'opération s'entachait d'irrégularités ce qui pourrait porter préjudice aux enfants eux-mêmes. Je lui demande donc de bien vouloir s'assurer que toutes les procédures soient respectées et que les habitants ne soient pas dérangés par cette activité. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will discuss it with the Mayor of Curepipe.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(7.15 p.m.)

CWA - WATER TANK - ALLOCATION

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Yes, thank you. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Energy and Public Utilities this evening regarding the CWA's new scheme for the allocation of Rs8,000 for a water tank and

a domestic water tank for people who are in need of such assistance. Now, there was a previous batch, it is about Rs5,000 for the water tank and Rs3,000 for the water pump. The previous scheme entailed only a water tank and many people when they have come across the communiqué of the CWA, they have gone to the CWA to ask for a water pump but they were declined such an offer. Because of the prevailing drought and severe water cuts, I would like to request the hon. Minister to kindly consider whether those who have benefited the water tank before could be made to benefit a water pump as well because of the very low pressure in the reticulation system these days. Thank you.

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Yes, I thank the hon. Member for raising this matter. Can the hon. Member be more specific in sharing with me the name of the Office where they were refused to be granted that CWA water pump?

The Deputy Speaker: That can be done in private later, you contact him later. Hon. Ritesh Ramful!

(7.16 p.m.)

SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME – TAXI OWNERS

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have an issue which concerns the Self-employed Assistance Scheme and therefore it concerns the Ministry of Finance. I have been informed by some taxi owners that they have not yet received their assistance from the MRA, they have enquired at the level of the MRA and they were informed that this is due to some administrative problems. May I request upon the hon. Minister to kindly look into the matter because things are quite difficult for them and if he can ensure that they get their allocation on time? Thank you.

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

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour sa question. Je lui garantis que je vais jeter un œil et puis je vais faire le nécessaire pour remédier à cette situation. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

(7.17 p.m.)

LA CHAUMIÈRE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY – ACCESS ROAD

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission allow me to draw the attention of the Minister of Public Infrastructure of a problem affecting the planters of La Chaumière Cooperative Society and drivers in general who use this road to go to the reservoir of St Martin and to the temple. The drains built alongside the road were not covered which is a permanent danger to drivers using this road.

Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the road is too narrow, that needs enlargement and a complete re-asphalting. If I may, with your kind permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, make a pledge to the hon. Minister to do needful before the Thaipoosam Cavadee.

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

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for giving me advance notice of this issue. We are looking into the issue together with the PPS of the region, hon. Tania Diolle. So, we will look into the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. David!

(7.18 p.m.)

JAMES SLATE STREET, PLAINE LAUZUN – WASTEWATER LEAKAGE

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de l'Énergie et des Services publics et concerne ce qui semble être un écoulement d'eau usée à la rue James Slate à Plaine Lauzun. Selon les habitants du quartier, cette situation dérangeante proviendrait du fait que certaines maisons de cette rue ne sont pas connectées au réseau existant d'eaux usées. Ce problème dure depuis plus de deux ans et a fait l'objet d'une pétition des habitants et de plusieurs plaintes restées sans réponse concrète. Puis-je demander au ministre de faire le nécessaire auprès de la *Wastewater Management Authority* pour évaluer la situation et trouver une solution adaptée et durable ? Merci.

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

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for giving me advanced notice with regard to this matter he has raised at Adjournment Time and this has enabled me to gather some information.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the WMA that following a representation received from one Mr Goolam Noyek in July 2020 concerning a wastewater nuisance being faced by the Juman and Mohamed families, residing at James Slate Street in Plaine Lauzun, an investigation was carried out during the same month by the technical team of the WMA.

The survey revealed that the onsite wastewater disposal system for the concerned houses were not functioning properly and were the cause of nuisance to the inhabitants. I understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that site visits were carried out in the presence of the PPS of the constituency with the contractor and officers of the WMA and the inhabitants of that street. From there, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a topographical survey was carried out regarding the feasibility to provide sewer connections to the three houses concerned. The extension works to be carried out, I understand, require 109 metres of sewer extension along that James Slate Street.

In view of the complexity of the works and the topography of the land, the cost of the works is estimated at Rs794,000, including VAT. I also understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that approval has already been conveyed for the above extension works to be undertaken under the Framework Agreement, namely Contract WW381W, Sewer extension and sewer maintenance work.

I also understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the works onsite at that James Slate Street are scheduled to start tomorrow, Wednesday 09 December 2020.

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

(7.22 p.m.)

**LOSARTHAN TABLETS - SUPPLY - AREA HEALTH CENTRES,
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU HOSPITAL & SOUILLAC HOSPITAL**

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

My request is addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness. It has been brought to my attention, mostly by elders, that there is an irregular supply of Losartan tablets in Area Health Centres, Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital and Souillac in the south. If the hon. Minister could, please, look into the matter? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Lexotan tablet is an antihypertensive medication. There was a shortage of this medication, but I am informed that this medication is now available at the Central Store Division of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I see no hand raised. Good evening!

At 7.22 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MBC - DIRECTOR GENERAL

(No. B/981) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) since when the post of Director General thereof is vacant, indicating who has been appointed in an acting capacity;
- (b) when the vacancy will be filled, and
- (c) if the Corporation is presently fulfilling its duties in a fair and equitable manner as per section 4 of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation Act, in particular, with regard to the broadcast of news bulletins.

Reply: In regard to part (a), of the question, the post of Director General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation became vacant on 26 February 2020 following the resignation of the incumbent. Mr M.N.S. Ramsurrun, Deputy Director General, was

consequently appointed as Director General, in an acting capacity, with effect from 27 February 2020.

In regard to part (b) of the question, appointment to the post of Director General of the MBC is made by the Prime Minister, pursuant to Section 13(2) of the MBC Act. As just mentioned, the post has been filled in an acting capacity, and the incumbent is already discharging the duties and shouldering the responsibilities of the post. Action will be taken to fill the post at an appropriate time. It must be pointed out that appointment of the Director General of the MBC is normally made on a contractual basis for a fixed term of office and no appointment is made in a substantive capacity.

In regard to part (c) of the question, the MBC has also informed that the Corporation endeavours to strike a fair balance in all its news bulletins, thus ensuring impartiality, neutrality and independence, keeping in mind its public service obligations. It ensures that each news coverage, including Press Conferences of political parties and trade unions, is treated in an equitable manner, whilst taking into consideration other determining factors such as newsworthiness and plurality.

SIR GAËTAN TUG - CREW MEMBERS - DEATH - COMPENSATION

(No. B/982) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the death of three crew members of the Sir Gaëtan tug which sunk on 31 August 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to –

- (a) if any compensation has been paid to the bereaved families and, if so, when, and
- (b) the additional support extended to the families to alleviate their hardships.

Reply: To remind, on the night of 31 August 2020, the MPA Tug Sir Gaëtan sank off the coast of Poudre d'Or while it was towing the barge L'Ami Constant from Pointe D'Esny, sailing towards Port Louis. It is indeed very sad and unfortunate that out of the eight crew members onboard of the tug, three were retrieved dead and one member is still missing.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has informed that the three bereaved families, under the Pension and Family

Protection Schemes with SICOM Ltd, have each been paid a death gratuity, a lifetime pension for their spouse, children pension allowance for children below 18 years old and benefits under the Family Protection Scheme. The disbursements have been made to each family on 25 September, 12 October and 16 October 2020 respectively.

The Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has also informed that employees of the Authority are also covered under a 24-hour Group Personal Accident Cover with SICOM for injury or accidental death. In regard to the three deceased employees, the Mauritius Ports Authority has requested SICOM Ltd to process their respective claims under the Group Personal Accident Cover.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Mauritius Ports Authority, as a responsible employer, has visited and provided support to all the distressed families in terms of psychological assistance by retaining the services of a psychologist who has been in constant contact with the eight affected families. The Mauritius Ports Authority has also assisted the families in their funeral expenses.

The Mauritius Ports Authority is further considering providing some assistance to accompany the children of the aggrieved families throughout their education path up to undergraduate level for academic studies or vocational courses, as applicable.

Concerning Mr Moswadeck Bheenick, who was reported missing, the Supreme Court has, on Monday 07 December 2020, pronounced the Judicial Declaration of Death of Mr Moswadeck Bheenick and has fixed his death to 31 August 2020, date on which the tragic accident took place. In the light of the Supreme Court decision, the Registrar of Civil Status has been directed to make an entry into his books and registers in relation to the judicial declaration of death of Mr Moswadeck Bheenick. The Mauritius Ports Authority has advised the family of late Mr Moswadeck Bheenick to have the affidavit of succession prepared so that there is a timely processing of the entitlement of the heirs of Mr Moswadeck Bheenick.

In the meantime, the Mauritius Ports Authority has been providing the family a monthly financial support, advanced from the pension and other benefits payable to him, to assist in meeting its household expenses.

**SIR SEEWOOSAGUR RAMGOOLAM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT -
PRIVATE JETS - 20 MARCH 2020 TO DATE**

(No. B/983) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to private jets, he will state the number thereof that have been granted permission to land at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport since 20 March 2020 to date, indicating in each case –

- (a) the date of application and approval thereof;
- (b) the number of passengers;
- (c) their respective ports of embarkation;
- (d) purpose of the visit, and
- (e) if all quarantine procedures were followed by the passengers and members of the crew thereof.

Reply: The Director of Civil Aviation has informed that 131 private jets were granted permission to land at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport between Friday 20 March 2020 and Thursday 03 December 2020.

As regards parts (a) to (e) of the question, the requested information is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2021 - DATE

(No. B/985) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Municipal Council Elections, he will state if any date for the holding thereof in 2021 has been finalised.

Reply: Reference is made to the reply to Parliamentary Question B/150 of the Sitting of Tuesday 30 June 2020.

In fact, the House was informed therein that by virtue of Section 11(1)(a) of the Local Government Act, the Municipal Council Elections would be due in June 2021. The last Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council Elections were held on 14 June 2015.

Furthermore, the Act also provides that the Municipal Council Elections shall be held at such date, as the President of the Republic shall, on the advice of the Prime Minister, appoint.

Accordingly, the date of the next Municipal Council Elections will be decided at the appropriate time and the Elections will be conducted in accordance with the Representation of the People Act as well as the Municipal City and Municipal Town Council Elections Regulations 2012, as amended in 2015.

ANTI DRUG AND SMUGGLING UNIT - POLICE OFFICERS & OTHER GRADES OF OFFICERS

(No. B/987) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number of Police Officers and other grades of officers attached thereto;
- (b) equipment and logistics provided thereto, and
- (c) budget allocated thereto.

Reply: The Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU), under the responsibility of a Deputy Commissioner of Police, is responsible for the prevention and detection of offences connected with drugs.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has informed that as at date, 438 Police Officers of different grades are posted to the ADSU. Since 10 October 2018, 19 Police Constables from the Special Mobile Force are on attachment to further reinforce that Unit.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has also informed that the ADSU is being provided with the necessary support, logistics and state-of-the-art equipment so that it can effectively counter the drug scourge. These tools are being used for effective communication during crackdown operations, gathering of digital evidence, profiling and tracking the movements of drug traffickers, and identification and detection of

synthetic drugs. However, for security reasons, it would not be appropriate for me to disclose the details thereof.

As regards part (c) of the question, equipping ADSU with the latest technological tools for combating the proliferation of illegal drugs, including synthetic drugs, is a matter of top priority for my Government. To that effect, an amount of two hundred and fifty-three million nine hundred thousand rupees (MUR 253,900,000) has been allocated to the ADSU for this Financial Year (2020/2021) to strengthen the effective operational capacity of the Unit.

MINOR K. R. - ASSAULT - INQUIRY

(No. B/988) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the statement made by one Mr K.R., on 24 November 2020 at the Eau Coulée Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate where matters stand, including, the number of persons arrested in connection therewith, if any.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police has informed that on Tuesday 24 November 2020, at 1913 hours at Eau Coulée Police Station, one minor K.R., aged 17, residing at Galeea Road, Castel, accompanied by his mother, one Mrs P.R reported a case of ‘Attempt at Larceny’.

Minor K.R. declared that, on the same day at around 1730 hours, when he was alone in his family shop, namely “Castel Vegetable Shop”, located at Royal Road, Castel, two male individuals wearing integral crash helmets and face masks entered the shop. Whilst he was attending to one of them, the other came behind the counter and tried to strangle him and steal money from the drawer. During the struggle, minor K.R. fell on his back and he shouted for help. The two individuals ran away. Nothing was stolen and no damage was caused to the shop. However, minor K.R. sustained injury to his left forefinger. He thereafter attended treatment at Castel Health Centre.

Enquiry has been initiated therein and two persons have been questioned. There has been no arrest so far and the enquiry is ongoing.

**POUDRE D'OR - AIR-SEA RESCUE OPERATION - POLICE HELICOPTER
SQUADRON**

(No. B/990) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the air-sea rescue operation at Poudre d'Or in the night of Monday 31 August 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) rank of the officer of the Police Helicopter Squadron responsible therefor;
- (b) number of helicopters requisitioned therefor;
- (c) reasons why another helicopter, adapted to effect night rescue operations, was not requisitioned therefor, and
- (d) time at which the bowser was requested to attend to the refuelling of the helicopter/s at Poudre d'Or, indicating the time taken therefor.

Reply: The incident which occurred at Poudre d'Or on 31 August 2020 was indeed very tragic and sad for our country. The Government has thus appointed, under Section 10(2) of the Merchant Shipping Act, a Court of Investigation on the casualty at sea of the Tug “Sir Gaëtan” on 31 August 2020. The Court of Investigation is chaired by Mr Joseph Gérard Angoh, former Puisne Judge with Captain Mahendra Babooa, Master Mariner and Mr Imran Mohamad Dowlut, Marine Engineer, as members.

In view thereof, it would not be appropriate to give details about the rescue operation which was carried out when Tug Sir Gaetan sank into deep water off the coast at Poudre d'Or.

**CARGO HANDLING CORPORATION LTD - EMPLOYEES - ALLEGED
DRUG TRAFFICKING**

(No. B/991) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of employees thereof allegedly involved in cases of drug trafficking within the port area, since January 2015 to October 2020, indicating -

- (a) the respective grades thereof;
- (b) if a security profiling exercise is carried out prior to the recruitment of employees thereat, and
- (c) the measures taken to enhance the surveillance system thereat.

Reply: The Managing Director of the Cargo Handling Corporation has informed that for the period January 2015 to October 2020, six employees have been involved in alleged cases of drug trafficking within the Port area.

As regards part (a) of the question, the Managing Director has also informed that these employees are from the grade of Cargo Logistics Supervisor (2 cases), Senior Lasher (1 case), Lasher (1 case) and General-Purpose Worker (2 cases).

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Managing Director further informed that in accordance with Cargo Handling Corporation recruitment guidelines, all new recruits are required to produce a clear Certificate of Character prior to their being appointed in their respective post.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the Managing Director also informed that in order to enhance surveillance system at Cargo Handling Corporation Limited, the following measures have been reinforced –

- (i) the five Gates at the Mauritius Container Terminal which were previously manned by either Police Officers, Mauritius Revenue Authority Officers or Cargo Handling Corporation Limited personnel are now all manned by Police except for Gate 4 which is manned by Officers of the Mauritius Revenue Authority. A minimum of thirty random stops and searches are carried out daily on vehicles entering and exiting the Terminal;
- (ii) at the level of Pedestrian Gate at the Mauritius Container Terminal, all Cargo Handling Corporation Limited's personnel and other persons accessing thereat are required to produce their respective access pass which is issued by the Mauritius Ports Authority and their entries and exits are recorded by Police Officers;
- (iii) all access points are under constant monitoring of CCTV Cameras, and

- (iv) joint meetings with all the Port Stakeholders and concerned Authorities are conducted quarterly with a view to revisiting security protocols for more strict surveillance. The last meeting was held in August 2020.

In addition, subsequent to meetings held with the MRA officials, the following new measures are being implemented –

- (i) the MRA Dog Squad is carrying, on a daily basis, patrols within the Terminal, and
- (ii) a Customs officer is posted onboard vessels during their operations.

SOCIAL REGISTER – ALLOWANCE - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/1008) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the allowance granted to those found in situation of absolute poverty, she will state –

- (a) the number of beneficiaries thereof in mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues, respectively, region-wise, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for a review upwards of the quantum thereof and, if not, why not.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am tabling the information on the number of households and beneficiaries in Mauritius and Rodrigues who are eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius on a district-wise basis.

With regard to part (b) of the question, for the time being consideration is not being given for a review upwards of the quantum of allowance payable to SRM beneficiaries.

NATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATIONS - SPORTS ACT 2016 - COMPLIANCE

(No. B/1009) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Sports Act 2016, he will state if his Ministry has carried out any assessment to determine the level of compliance of National Sports Federations thereto and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Reply: Since the enactment of the Sports Act 2016, my Ministry has been urging National Sports Federations to comply with the provisions of the new legislation. In this endeavour, my Ministry holds regular meetings with the representatives of sports federations to assess the level of compliance and provides the necessary guidance to facilitate their compliance with the new legal requirements. For example, upon request, the National Sports Federations are provided with funds to meet the costs of an insurance cover for their licensees as well as to cover expenses for carrying out auditing exercise of their financial statements.

Concurrently, my Ministry is keeping a database to be able to follow-up on the level of compliance of National Sports Federations with the provisions of the Sports Act 2016. It has been noted that the degree of non-compliance varies. Hence, as at February 2021, 32 out of the 40 National Sports Federations receiving financial assistance from my Ministry have amended their rules and submitted same to the Registrar of Associations for approval. The rules of 20 of these 32 National Sports Federations have already been approved. 35 National Sports Federations have a valid insurance cover. All the 40 National Sports Federations have signed a Performance Agreement with my Ministry.

My Ministry will continue to monitor the situation and assist the National Sports Federations in complying with the provisions of the Sports Act 2016 while at the same time ensuring that the approach is athlete-centric and, in no way, penalises the sports community.

PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS – CHILDREN IN GOOD HEALTH – PLACEMENT

(No. B/1011) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to children in good health placed in public health institutions by the Child Development Unit, since January 2015 to date, she will state the number thereof on a yearly basis, indicating in each case, the –

- (a) age thereof;
- (b) duration of the stay;
- (c) reasons therefor, and
- (d) measures taken to ensure the welfare thereof thereat.

Reply: Children in good health are not placed in hospitals by the Child Development Unit.

CWA - BEST CONSTRUCT LTD - CONTRACTS

(No. B/1012) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to contracts awarded to Best Construct Ltd. since January 2015 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the number thereof, indicating in each case, the -

- (a) contract value thereof;
- (b) delay, if any, in the implementation thereof, and
- (c) variation costs, if any, claimed and paid.

Reply: In my reply to PQ B/474 on 04 August 2020, I provided details on the 11 contracts awarded by the Central Water Authority to Best Construct Ltd since January 2015 in respect of laying of pipes, connection to households and road reinstatement works.

I am informed that as at date, works are ongoing on nine contracts.

I am further informed that there has been delay in some of the projects and variation costs have been claimed. A total amount of Rs73.5 m. has been paid in respect of all the projects.

A mediation exercise is currently being finalised with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution to complete outstanding works under the contracts and to resolve differences regarding claims.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD – EMPLOYEES – ADDITIONAL UNILATERAL PAY CUT

(No. B/1013) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will state if his Ministry –

- (a) was consulted by the administrators thereof prior to imposing an additional unilateral pay cut on the salaries of all the employees thereof and, if so, indicate when, and

- (b) is in presence of representations from *Plateforme Syndicale Travayer Air Mauritius* in relation thereto and, if so, indicate if he has discussed same with the administrators and, if so, when and, if not, why.

Reply: Section 32(2) of the Workers Rights' Act (WRA) 2019 provides that -

“An employer may require a worker to work temporarily for a time shorter than that specified in his agreement at a reduced remuneration, subject to the approval of the Supervising Officer.”

With regard to part (a) of the question, my Ministry received on 11 August 2020 a first application from the Administrators appointed for Air Mauritius Ltd requesting approval under section 32(2) of the Workers' Rights Act to require workers of Air Mauritius Ltd, with the exception of Cabin Crews, Flight Pursers, Pilots, Managers and employees in the professional grade, to work for a shorter time than specified in their contractual agreement at a reduced remuneration for period 01 October 2020 to 31 March 2021. On the basis of information provided by the Administrators and after proper examination of the justifications provided, the said application was approved by the Supervising Officer of my Ministry and the Administrators were informed accordingly on 13 August 2020.

Furthermore, I am informed that, on 16 September 2020, the Administrators submitted a second application in respect of workers not covered in the first application, that is, Cabin Crews, Flight Pursers, Pilots, Managers and employees in the professional grade. Again, after examining the request made by the Administrators, the application was approved on 21 September 2020.

Insofar as imposing a unilateral additional pay cut on the salaries of all the employees, I am informed that my Ministry has not received any such request from the Administrators.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the *Plateforme Syndicale Travayer Air Mauritius* has, in a letter dated 15 October 2020, made a request for a meeting to discuss issues pertaining to, *inter alia*, powers of the Administrators, restriction of the Mauritian Air Space and the unilateral change of conditions of work of all the employees.

I am further informed that a meeting was held on 19 November 2020 at the Conciliation and Mediation Section of my Ministry whereby *Plateforme Syndicale Travayer*

was informed that as it does not have any *locus standi* for the purpose of collective bargaining according to the Employment Relations Act, the Management of Air Mauritius does not intend to negotiate with it. Negotiations are, however, still being held with the recognised Trade Unions of Air Mauritius Ltd. Subsequently, *Plateforme Syndicale Travayer* withdrew its representations and informed that a dispute would be reported to the Commission for Conciliation and Mediation.

I wish to inform the House, insofar as issues pertaining to conditions of work of employees are concerned, my Ministry is ensuring that all measures being taken by the Administrators are in line with the Workers' Rights Act.

**SINGLE USE PLASTIC AND RELATED ITEMS – BANNING – 15
JANUARY & 15 APRIL 2021**

(No. B/1014) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the single use plastic and related items, he will state the –

- (a) alternatives therefor identified, if any, following the banning of the use thereof with effect from 15 January and 15 April 2021, respectively and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (b) measures taken or that will be taken, if any, to preserve the industries involved therein, indicating the expected number of job losses in relation thereto.

Reply: Le Programme Gouvernemental 2020-2024 prévoit de faire de Maurice un pays sans plastique dans les délais les plus rapprochés possibles. Ainsi *L'Environnement Protection (Control of Single Use Plastic Products) Regulations 2020* ont été faits le 15 juillet 2020 dans le but principal de réduire les déchets provenant des produits en plastiques à usage unique non biodégradables. Les produits qui seront interdits à compter du 15 janvier et du 15 avril 2021 sont ainsi énumérés sous le *Second Schedule* du *Regulations*, dont l'entrée en vigueur a été fixée à des dates précises afin de donner largement le temps aux importateurs et aux fabricants pour trouver des solutions alternatives.

Divers articles fabriqués à partir de matières biodégradables sont déjà disponibles à l'échelle locale et internationale, à savoir des matières végétales comme la fécule de pomme de terre et de maïs, l'acide polylactique, la pulpe de bois et la bagasse, le riz et le bambou. De

plus, des articles réutilisables comme les pailles et les couverts en métal, qui ne sont pas biodégradables en soi, constitueraient également des alternatives à certains des produits qui seront interdits.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, aucun effort n'est épargné pour inciter les industries impliquées dans l'importation ou la fabrication de produits en plastique à usage unique non biodégradables à passer à des produits verts, biodégradables et compostables novateurs. En effet, dès mai 2018, le ministère du Développement industriel, des PME et des coopératives (Division PME) *Development* en collaboration avec le *Partnership for Action on Green Economy*, une agence chargée de coordonner l'action des Nations unies sur l'économie verte, a organisé un forum sur le *Green Business* afin de promouvoir l'approvisionnement durable, les éco-entreprises et l'accès des PME au financement vert. Des ateliers et des programmes de formation ont également été organisés par *SME Mauritius* dans le contexte de *Greening of SMEs*.

En outre, mon ministère en collaboration avec le ministère du Développement industriel, des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (PME) et des coopératives a lancé une campagne de sensibilisation le 15 octobre 2020 en vue de diffuser des informations sur les produits qui seront interdits et les alternatives disponibles. Dans le cadre de cette campagne, une exposition de deux jours a été organisée à Port Louis les 15 et 16 octobre 2020, durant laquelle environ 24 petites et moyennes entreprises, des sociétés coopératives et des producteurs locaux ont exposé et mis en vente des alternatives biodégradables tels que des assiettes, des bols, des tasses et des couverts biodégradables à base de bagasse entre autres, des pailles biodégradables comme des pailles de riz, et des contenants alimentaires biodégradables et compostables, entre autres. Des expositions supplémentaires seront organisées à travers l'île.

L'*Environment Protection (Control of Single Use Plastic Products) Regulations 2020* prévoit que les importateurs et les fabricants de produits biodégradables à usage unique s'enregistrent auprès de mon ministère. À ce jour, environ 24 demandes ont déjà été reçues et sont en cours de traitement. Ceci indique un transfert de la commercialisation de produits en plastique à usage unique non biodégradables vers des produits alternatifs.

Avec toutes ces mesures, aucune perte d'emploi importante n'est prévue dans l'industrie.

LA VIGIE - SLAUGHTERHOUSE

(No. B/1015) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a slaughterhouse at La Vigie, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

Reply: I would invite the hon. Member to refer to the reply to Parliamentary Question B/166 of 16 April 2019, wherein it was stated that my Ministry had launched a bidding exercise for consultancy services for the provision of the management, design and supervision of a new slaughterhouse for cattle, pigs and ovine on 25 February 2019.

An amount of Rs75 m. was earmarked in the budget for the Financial Year 2018/2019 for the implementation of the proposed project.

However, My Ministry could not proceed further with the consultancy services as funds were not provided for the implementation of the project in the Budget for the Financial Year 2019/2020. The project was instead included in the list of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Projects.

In August 2019, my Ministry had consultations with stakeholders, including representatives of the Build Operate Transfer (BOT) Projects Unit and the Public Sector Investment Programme Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to discuss on the way forward for the implementation of the project.

In September 2019, the project was registered as a potential BOT project with the BOT Project Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

There is need to follow a given set of process for the proper implementation of BOT projects as advised by the Procurement Policy Office of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, which are namely –

- (i) designate a project officer to manage the BOT project cycle;
- (ii) set up a multi-skilled project team to support the project officer;
- (iii) structure the project with the assistance of the BOT Projects Unit, and
- (iv) launch Request For Proposals for the project through the Central Procurement Board.

The multi-skilled project team set up at my Ministry is having consultations with relevant stakeholders for the proper implementation of the Slaughter House Project. The assistance of the BOT Projects Unit will be required.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS - SCHOOL NET II PROJECT

(No. B/1016) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the School Net II Project for secondary institutions, he will state –

- (a) the contract value thereof, indicating the amount paid to the contractor;
- (b) if the telecommunication tests have been carried out and the project completed, and
- (c) if liquidated damages are due by the contractors and, if so, indicate the quantum thereof and the amount recovered, if any, and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Connectivity Project in Secondary Schools, also referred to as School Net II Project, aimed at providing high speed internet access and wireless connectivity in 164 sites to cover mainly secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The bidding exercise for the project was carried out through the Central Procurement Board (CPB). Tenders were launched on 22 July 2014. As at closing date, on 30 September 2014, four bids were received.

The evaluation exercise was carried out by the CPB and was completed on 31 October 2014. On 13 November 2014, the CPB reported that it had approved the award of contract to the lowest evaluated substantially responsive bidder, Data Communication Ltd for the total contract value of Rs122,457,992.00, inclusive of VAT. After notification procedures to all bidders, two bidders, namely Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecoms Ltd lodged a challenge at the Independent Review Panel (IRP) on 03 December 2014. After hearing the case, the IRP set aside the representations of Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecom Ltd on 25 February 2015 and 06 August 2015 respectively and maintained the award.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the letter of award was issued to Data Communications Ltd on 25 September 2015. The contract was subsequently signed on 24 December 2015 for the sum of Rs122,457,992, inclusive of VAT. This amount represents the cost of equipment for the sum of Rs88,484,784.00 and rental of communication lines for two years for the sum of Rs33,973,208.00.

As at date, a total amount of Rs81,783,169.70 has been paid for equipment inclusive of variation cost amounting to Rs2,146,863.70, due to specific adjustments in some schools which required extra cabling works, cabinets, switches and labour. As regards rental of communication lines, Rs1,880,480.00 were paid for the period 12 September to 31 October 2016 for testing and commissioning purposes.

Therefore, only a total amount of Rs83,663,649.70, out of the contractual amount has been paid.

As for part (b) of the question, telecommunication tests were successfully carried out, in 2018, at 156 sites out of the 164. Tests could not be performed at eight sites for the following reasons –

- (i) renovation works were ongoing at Modern College, Flacq, and
- (ii) non-provision of connectivity between Mauritius and Rodrigues by the supplier to cover seven sites in Rodrigues.

Thereafter, the supplier was expected, as per the contract, to provide connectivity to those sites but failed to do so in spite of several meetings and exchange of correspondence whereby the latter took the commitment to complete the connectivity part of the project.

On 18 March 2019, the Ministry was made aware by the company BDO & Co that Data Communications Ltd had gone into receivership.

As at that date, the company had completed only the setting up of the equipment in the schools, without completing the connectivity part of the project.

With regard to part (c) of the question, in view of the non-implementation of the project within the approved time frame, liquidated damages at the rate of 1% of the contract value, up to a maximum of 10% are due by the supplier. This amounts to Rs12,245,799.20. This amount is yet to be recovered in view of the fact that the company is in receivership. However, procedures at the level of the Attorney General's Office have already been initiated.

NLTA - FREE TRAVEL SCHEME - REPORT

(No. B/1017) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Free Travel Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to if the –

- (a) Technical Committee set up to look thereinto has submitted its report, and
- (b) findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers have been implemented and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Free Travel Scheme was introduced in 2005 with a view to providing free public transport to students of primary, secondary and tertiary students for their educational needs as well as to the old aged pensioners and disabled persons for their personal needs. Thus, monthly Free Travel Compensation is being paid to bus operators as from August 2005 under this Scheme. An amount of Rs1.256 billion has been provided in the Budget for the Financial Year 2020/2021 under this Scheme.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that a Technical Committee has been set up at the level of the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA), under the chairpersonship of the Road Transport Commissioner, to examine the current administration of the Free Travel Scheme. Furthermore, the Committee shall look into the terms and conditions governing the subsidy allocation under the Bus Company Recovery Account (BCRA). The Technical Committee shall thereafter make recommendations for a more efficient mechanism thereof.

The first meeting was held on 29 May 2020 and the Committee has, so far, met on seven occasions whereby an assessment of the present Free Travel Scheme has been conducted with a view to identifying shortcomings and making recommendations on measures which may be put in place to enable proper monitoring while making way for more accountability with regard to disbursement of subsidies to bus operators.

The draft report is presently being finalised by the Technical Committee prior to relaying same to the Ministry. Once the report is finalised, Government approval will be sought and thereafter appropriate actions would be initiated in order to implement recommendations thereof.

As regards part (b) of the question, PricewaterhouseCoopers Private (India) Ltd (PWC) highlighted the need for a more efficient and transparent administration of the Free Travel Scheme (FTS). In fact, the study carried out by PWC revealed that the current disbursement mechanism, which dates back to 2005, is ineffective as it is linked with the number of licences held by bus operators and does not take into account the number of senior citizens, disabled or students conveyed. Bus operators are thus being compensated on a lump sum basis, paid at the end of each month, without being directly accountable to services provided.

Accordingly, one of the main recommendations of PWC for enhancing the administration of the FTS is the implementation of a Cashless Bus Ticketing System (CBTS) to provide better accountability and to ensure that subsidies allocated by Government to bus operators meet the intended purpose. With this mechanism, refund of free travel subsidies would be made on a pay per head basis in line with the number of old-aged, disabled and students conveyed by bus operators. This would, at the same time, provide Government with a reliable tool to assess the level of financial support being extended to the transport industry in terms of free travel compensation.

In view of the technical intricacies of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System (CBTS), options in relation to the implementation thereof are currently being assessed as there is need to identify the best solution so that Government obtains value for money and that the country avails of the best solution for its public transport system.

The complex nature of the CBTS calls for the project requirements to be carefully defined to ensure that the system seamlessly interfaces with the Electronic Ticketing System of the Metro Express in the context of a unified cashless architecture.

Once the best option and way forward are identified, necessary actions would be initiated by the Ministry and the NLTA to implement the Cashless Bus Ticketing System to, *inter alia*, address the shortcomings of the free travel administration.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 16 - METRO EXPRESS PROJECT - PHASE II

(No. B/1018) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the work progress of Phase II of the Metro Express network in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Ltd., information as to the number of –

- (d) households affected by works being carried out in connection therewith, and
- (e) compulsory acquisitions effected as at to date, indicating the quantum of compensation paid in each case.

Reply: The Metro Express Project is the first Light Rail Transit (LRT) system that is being implemented in Mauritius. The whole project consists of 26-km rail alignment with a total of 19 stations to alleviate traffic congestion. It is meant to provide a rapid mode of

public transport along the corridor of Curepipe to Port Louis. Phase I of the project from Port Louis to Rose Hill is operational since December 2019.

Works for Phase II of the project are already ongoing along the Metro Express corridor in several locations, for instance, at Belle Rose, Vacoas, Curepipe and Floreal.

I am informed that the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning (MHLUP) has initiated the necessary procedures as per the law to make all the land available for the Metro Express Project. All relevant stakeholders, including Metro Express Limited (MEL), Municipalities, Valuation Department, amongst others, are fully collaborating with the MHLUP to provide the land for the implementation of the project under the best possible circumstances.

Moreover, I am informed that, Public Relation (PR) exercises have also been undertaken by the Contractor (Larsen & Toubro Ltd) since the start of the works. The purpose is to inform and sensitise the local residents about the works and diversions and the alternative routes they should use to gain access to their respective houses. Extensive communication has also been done through different channels, namely the media, MBC, Facebook page of Metro Express Ltd, and other social media platforms. Engagement with the local inhabitants through the Municipal Council of Curepipe and Vacoas-Phoenix has also been carried out prior to start of any diversions or works.

In addition to all of the above, I am apprised that an information desk has been set up by L&T at Curepipe near the junction of Sivananda Avenue and Phoenix-Plaisance (A10) Road, and also at the Municipal Council Curepipe (MCC). The objective is to provide information to the residents and the public in general and also to answer any query with regard to the works being carried out.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that with the implementation of the Phase II of the Metro Express Project, several households along the alignment and its vicinity have been impacted, directly or indirectly.

For part (b) of the question, I am informed by the MHLUP, that out of 65 plots of land to be acquired, 22 have already been acquired and vested in my Ministry.

I am informed that no payment of compensation has been effected yet. However, the MHLUP is processing payment of compensation in respect of the 22 plots.

**ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE - BOARD OF TRUSTEES -
CHAIRPERSON & MEMBERS**

(No. B/1019) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Islamic Cultural Centre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the composition thereof, indicating the date of appointment of the Chairperson and members of the Board thereof.

Reply: The Board of Trustees of the Islamic Cultural Centre, which was reconstituted on 25 November 2020, has at its first Board meeting on 27 November 2020, appointed Mr Abdool Samad Sairally as Chairperson, for a period of three years, in accordance with section 5(1)(a) of the Islamic Cultural Centre Trust Fund Act 1989.

I am tabling information regarding the full composition, the date of appointment of the Chairperson and members of the Board of Trustees of the Islamic Cultural Centre.

PACK & BLISTER - VENTILATORS - PURCHASE

(No. B/1020) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the 50 ventilators purchased from Pack and Blister, he will state if the installation thereof by foreign experts have been successfully completed.

(Vide reply to PQ B/993)

POLICE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT – STAFF & EQUIPMENT

(No. B/1021) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the *Police de l'Environnement*, he will state the number of -

- (a) officers attached thereto, and
- (b) equipment and offices put at the disposal thereof, island-wide.

Reply: The *Police de L'Environnement* is manned by 33 Police Officers who are deployed in six teams to provide service island-wide. Its current staffing position is as follows -

- 2 Inspectors;
- 5 Police Sergeants;

- 3 Police Corporals;
- 1 Woman Police Corporal;
- 15 Police Constables, and
- 7 Woman Police Constables.

With regard to part (b) of the question, protective equipment in terms of safety shoes and gas masks are provided to the officers. Each team has also been allocated a mobile phone for ease of communication and this Ministry has put a fleet of seven motor vehicles at the disposal of the *Police de L'Environnement*.

The Headquarters of the *Police de L'Environnement* is located within the precincts of this Ministry in Port Louis and five other units operate from the Police Stations at Flacq, Trou-aux-Biches, Rose Hill, Midlands and Rose Belle.

GOVERNMENT - LOANS, GRANTS & LINE OF CREDIT

(No. B/1022) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to loans, grants and line of credit taken or received by the Government, including parastatal bodies, Government-owned companies or public and private companies where Government is a shareholder since January 2015 to date, he will give details thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) types of facilities;
- (b) amount received;
- (c) rate of interest, if any;
- (d) terms of repayment, and
- (e) names of the donor agencies and institutions.

Reply: The information requested by the hon. Member is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

COVID-19 - SECOND WAVE – CONTINGENCY PLAN

(No. B/1023) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID–19 pandemic, he will state the Preparedness Plan put in place by his Ministry in case of a second wave thereof, indicating the –

- (a) measures taken to prevent the spread thereof, and
- (b) logistics put in place for the treatment of infected and sick patients, indicating the therapeutic protocol that will be implemented.

Reply: Mauritius remains one of the very rare examples where the first episode of viral circulation of the coronavirus has been successfully managed and contained. In case of a second wave of COVID-19, a national response and Contingency Plan has been prepared by my Ministry as early as September 2020. The Plan takes into account international recommendations and guidelines, including those formulated by the WHO, and all the best-practices developed and acquired locally following our experience in responding to the first infection wave registered in Mauritius.

As regards part (a) of the question, the measures put in place by my Ministry are as follows –

- (a) all Mauritian citizens and non-citizens coming from abroad have to produce a negative PCR test before boarding the flight. On arrival, they are placed in quarantine for a period of 14 days and PCR testing is done on day 0, day 7 and day 14. If negative, they are discharged on the 14th day under medical supervision;
- (b) the surveillance at community level has been enhanced and five COVID-19 testing centres have been set up over the island for early screening and detection of COVID-19 among the local population. An average of 80 to 100 PCR tests are being carried out on a daily basis in every COVID centre. The tests are performed on every patient attending the hospital with symptoms like flu. There is a constant surveillance which adds to our monitoring mechanism and helps us to ascertain that there is no COVID-19 case in the community;
- (c) a doctor is available on a 24-hour basis through a hotline for all contacts or persons with suspected symptoms of COVID-19. If the doctor believes that it is a suspected or probable case, he/she will refer the patient for a PCR test at a COVID testing centre of a regional hospital and activate the rapid response team respectively. The hotline is also available for the follow-up of patients discharged from the ENT Treatment Centre and the Lady Sushil Ramgoolam Recreation Centre at Pointe aux Piments. The hotline is also available for the general public for any queries regarding COVID-19;

- (d) rigorous contact tracing is being done around all positive local cases to limit the further spread of the virus. All direct contacts will be isolated for 14 days from the day of exposure to a positive COVID-19 patient;
- (e) there is one Rapid Response team assigned to each of the five health regions of Mauritius. In the event of a severe epidemic, the number of rapid response team per region will be increased progressively to five, that is, 25 for Mauritius. The Rapid Response Team consists of an ambulance, a driver, a nursing officer and a medical doctor;
- (f) sophisticated equipment and reagents have been purchased, as well as automatic RNA extractors, bio-safety cabinets, thermocycler and geneXpert cassette. Therefore, the testing capacity of the Central Health Laboratory has been increased to above 1,000 tests daily with the support from the High-Level Committee;
- (g) a medical laboratory with a testing capacity of up to 1,000 tests daily has been set up at the SSR International Airport. This facilitates screening of incoming passengers for COVID-19 with timely issue of results, and
- (h) sensitisation campaigns in schools and in the media to keep the public in general abreast of the ongoing pandemic and its evolution worldwide as well as on developments related to treatment and advancements on any eventual vaccine.

As regards part (b) of the question, the New ENT Treatment Centre already has the necessary stock of medications and consumables for the treatment of positive patients. I am informed that one of the Wards at the New ENT Treatment Centre is equipped with a system of negative pressure comprising of an air purifier Hepa Air Filter which, when activated, reduces the viral load in the Ward.

I am also informed that there is a dialysis machine for patients with renal failure on stand-by at SSRN Hospital which can be mobilised if the need arises. In light of our experience with the management of positive patients, the existing therapeutic protocol for asymptomatic and symptomatic patients has been reviewed by a panel of specialists, including the WHO.

In case of a severe epidemic of COVID-19, my Ministry has already earmarked the New ENT Hospital as an exclusive Treatment Centre for severe cases and the Souillac Hospital as a Centre for the treatment of patients with high risk factors and comorbidities, and

mild cases will have their medical follow-up in designated hotels. Moreover, only urgent casualties will be handled at hospital level in case of a severe epidemic of COVID-19.

I wish to highlight, and this is of utmost importance, that this Plan has taken into account all the necessary measures to maintain the optimum and continuous service delivered in our public health care centres for pathologies other than COVID-19.

Even if Mauritius remains one of the rare countries that has been able to fight and eradicate the first episode of COVID-19 circulation, the country has learned from the various challenges it has had to address and, therefore, my Ministry has taken all the necessary steps to ensure that we remain prepared and ready in the event of a second wave of COVID-19 within the local community.

ALUMINIUM COMPOSITE PANELS - GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, PRIVATE SECTOR - REGULATION OF USE

(No. B/1024) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to aluminium composite panels, he will state –

- (a) the number of Government buildings cladded therewith over the past five years;
- (b) if any survey of the use thereof in the private sector has been carried out, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the regulation of the use thereof for safety and security reasons.

Reply: I am informed that aluminium composite panels, which comprise two aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core, are the most widely used cladding materials for modern buildings. These panels represent a cost-effective solution for end users looking for a streamlined structure and a contemporary architecture. Compared to other panel options available on the market, aluminium composite panels are economical and of high-quality.

Being light-weight, having not much bearing on a building structure and having better durability properties, these composite panels are used as cladding materials in the construction industry. In addition to being weather resistant, they are safer to use as aluminium does not emit harmful fumes and gases when moulded into composite panels.

However, I am advised that these materials are susceptible to dents during severe weather conditions and their fixation requires skilled workmanship to avoid any issue concerning leakage.

With regard to part (a) of the question, over the last five years, the following four Government buildings have been cladded with aluminium composite panels –

- Community Health Centre at Baie du Tombeau;
- The Headquarters of the Independent Commission Against Corruption at Reduit;
- The Police District Headquarters at Abercrombie, Ste Croix, and
- The Mauritius Institute of Education Building at Reduit.

As regards part (b) of the question, no survey has been carried out on the use of aluminium composite panels in the private sector. I am, however, informed that all aluminium composite panels used in the private sector projects are subject to the recommendations and approval by Consultants employed on the projects.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the Mauritius Fire Code already stipulates the requirements for external walls and cladding on external walls. However, the Code does not provide any specific requirement for aluminium composite panels or any other materials.

The Building Control Advisory Council set up under section 5 of the Building Control Act, is at present working in collaboration with the Mauritius Standards Bureau and my Ministry to develop appropriate building codes for construction in Mauritius. Consideration will thereafter be given, if ever necessary, for the regulation of the use of aluminium composite materials accordingly.

MAURITIUS VOLLEYBALL ASSOCIATION - MR K. T. - ZONE 7 ELECTION - PARTICIPATION

(No. B/1025) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Volleyball Association, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if the Association has –

- (a) approved the participation of Mr K. T. in the Zone 7 election, and
- (b) informed the African Volleyball Confederation that Mr. K. T. is facing trial for the offence of sexual assault in Gold Coast, Australia.

(Withdrawn)

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SPORTS - SCHOOLS & UNIVERSITIES -
SETTING UP**

(No. B/1026) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the National Council for Sports in Schools and Universities, he will state, since the setting up thereof to date, the –

- (a) composition of the successive Boards thereof;
- (b) number of activities organized by the Council, and
- (c) yearly budget allocated thereto.

(Withdrawn)

**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS - FAULTY MEDICAL EQUIPMENT -
REPAIR**

(No. B/1027) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medical equipment in public health institutions, he will state the number thereof having been reported faulty since January 2020 to date, indicating the actions taken for the replacement or repair thereof, as the case may be, indicating the time frame set therefor.

Reply: I am informed that since January 2020, approximately 100 major equipment have been reported as faulty.

These equipment are either covered by a warranty period or are under maintenance with the supplier for a specific time frame. Equipment not covered by warranty or Maintenance Agreement are serviced by the Bio Medical and Surgical Technology Units of my Ministry.

For equipment covered by a warranty, routine maintenance/repair/servicing and calibration are carried out on regular intervals by the supplier. For those equipment which are under Maintenance Agreement, the suppliers are called for repairs in the event of any breakdown.

In case spare parts are required, same are procured by my Ministry in some instances, while in other cases, they are provided by the supplier depending on the clauses of the

Maintenance Agreement. In cases where spare parts are not available on the local market, arrangements are made by the supplier for prompt delivery of same from abroad.

Replacement of equipment is normally carried out when the latter has reached its life cycle or is beyond economic repair.

I would like to reassure the House that my Ministry ensures that patients are not penalised when any major equipment are not in working condition. Arrangements are made at hospital level for patients to be transferred to other hospital, or even abroad in urgent cases, for them to benefit from the required treatment.

MEDICINES - STORAGE

(No. B/1028) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medicines, he will state -

- (a) where same are stored, and
- (b) the method used for the –
 - (i) storage, and
- (c) order forecasts thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that medicines received from suppliers are stored in warehouses located in different regions, namely the Central Supplies Division and Tobacco Board at Plaine Lauzun, Agricultural Marketing Board at Moka, Les Guibies (Pailles) and Castel.

As regards part (b) of the question, depending on the nature of the products, they are either stored on plastic pallets, kept in wooden crates, in cold rooms and refrigerated containers. Specialised drugs, expensive drugs as well as controlled items (dangerous drugs) are stored separately. Dangerous Drugs are stored under lock and key. The premises are equipped with alarm system and are under Police surveillance. The Dangerous Drugs fall under the control of a Principal Pharmacist.

As for part (c) of the question, pharmaceutical products are procured on the basis of annual requirements which are submitted by the Regional Health Directors of regional hospitals. The requirements are then compiled at the Headquarters and are vetted by the Pharmacy Department prior to submission to Procurement Section for the launching of tenders. At evaluation stage of the procurement, the figures of actual stock, any expected deliveries and the average monthly consumption pattern are considered prior to award of a new contract.

