



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 15 MAY 2020

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 13 of 2020

Sitting of Friday 15 May 2020

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 3.00 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations 2020 (Government Notice No. 89 of 2020).

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

MAURITIUS - HIGH RISK THIRD COUNTRY - EUROPEAN COMMISSION LIST

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in view of the decline in tourism and export earnings, of foreign disinvestments on the Stock Exchange and of the possible negative impact on external capital flows following the inclusion of Mauritius in the list of High Risk Third Countries by the European Commission, he will state -

- (a) the estimated balance of payments for this year, and
- (b) how a likely external deficit gap will be financed.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, afin de répondre le plus précisément possible à la question qui m'est posée, permettez-moi d'en situer le contexte.

Premièrement, il est important que j'explique ce qu'est la balance des paiements.

C'est l'enregistrement comptable, pour un pays, et sur une période donnée, de l'ensemble des transactions économiques que les résidents dudit pays entretiennent avec ceux se trouvant à l'extérieur du pays.

Conformément aux principes comptables établis par le FMI, ces composantes types sont réparties en deux principales sections -

- D'une part, le compte des transactions courantes, qui se subdivise en : biens et services, revenus et transferts courants.
- D'autre part, le compte de capital et d'opérations financières.

L'équilibre de la balance des paiements est assuré par l'ajustement via les réserves.

En termes d'évolution des réserves, il est primordial de dresser l'historique du niveau des réserves.

Fin 2014, les réserves officielles du pays s'établissaient à 124,3 milliards de roupies, soit 3,9 milliards de dollars, représentant une couverture de 6 mois et demi d'importations de biens et de services.

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

Cette augmentation, elle n'est pas tombée du ciel, bien au contraire.

Elle découle d'une stratégie d'anticipation visant à construire la résilience économique de notre pays pour se prémunir de chocs exogènes.

M. le président, cela s'appelle de la prévoyance. Car gouverner, c'est prévoir.

Jamais, dans l'histoire de Maurice, les réserves officielles n'ont atteint un tel niveau de couverture.

Ces chiffres, sous la loupe continuelle des instances internationales : FMI, Banque mondiale et bailleurs de fonds pour n'en citer que quelques-unes, sont implacables, et ce n'est pas le leader de l'opposition qui va les contredire.

Pourtant, dans le passé, que n'a-t-on pas dit sur cette stratégie d'accumulation des réserves?

Cela me rappelle une des grandes leçons de La Fontaine, et on sera certainement d'accord. Avant que la bise soit venue, le gouvernement a adopté la stratégie de la fourmi, laissant ainsi celle de la cigale à ceux qui préfèrent danser.

Alors que nous sommes dans une crise sans précédent, cette accumulation nous permet, aujourd'hui, de faire face à la situation avec plus de sérénité.

En sus, au niveau des banques commerciales du pays, sachez qu'à la fin de mars 2020, ces dernières détenaient des actifs en devises étrangères de l'ordre de 780 milliards de roupies.

Quant aux actifs nets en devises étrangères auprès des banques commerciales, ils totalisaient près de 400 milliards de roupies, soit 10 milliards de dollars.

M. le président, il est crucial que les membres de l'opposition comprennent, et cessent une fois pour toute de vouloir semer la panique, que Maurice détient à ce jour et au total l'équivalent de 1,000 milliards de roupies en devises étrangères.

Contrairement à ce que certains voudraient faire croire, ces chiffres, exprimés dans la plus grande transparence sont extrêmement rassurants.

M. le président, ces éléments de contextualisation me permettent maintenant d'aborder spécifiquement l'évolution des recettes.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, voici les informations que je souhaite porter au jour.

Pour le premier trimestre de l'année 2020, les estimations en termes de recettes touristiques se situent à 14,1 milliards de roupies, en comparaison aux 16,5 milliards de roupies observées sur la même période l'an dernier.

Pour ce qui est des chiffres de l'exportation de biens, les estimations pour le premier trimestre sont de 12,1 milliards de roupies.

Au regard de la Bourse de Maurice, je souhaiterais rappeler que le principe même d'une place boursière est d'enregistrer des mouvements de transactions, en termes d'investissements tout comme de désinvestissements.

Bien entendu, le Covid-19 n'a pas épargné les places financières, et cela à travers le monde.

Cela étant dit, depuis le commencement de l'année 2020 et ce jusqu'au 14 mai 2020, la Bourse de Maurice a tout de même enregistré des investissements de portefeuilles étrangers de l'ordre de 713 millions de roupies.

A l'égard des Investissements Directs Etrangers (FDI), dans un contexte particulièrement difficile, les entrées sont estimées à plus de 3 milliards de roupies pour le premier trimestre 2020.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne l'effet négatif d'une éventuelle - je dis bien éventuelle - catégorisation de Maurice comme pays tiers posant des menaces au bloc de l'Union Européenne sur les fluctuations de capitaux étrangers, il me faut rappeler que cette liste n'est qu'une proposition émanant de la Commission Européenne et qu'elle n'a pas encore été avalisée par le Parlement et le Conseil européens.

A ce jour, la liste n'a pas force de loi. Preuve s'il en est, la loi européenne stipule clairement que le *Delegated Regulation* doit être soumis à un processus de double ratification, de la part du Parlement Européen et du Conseil.

Pour revenir à l'estimation sur la balance des paiements, selon les prévisions préliminaires de la Banque de Maurice, le déficit du compte courant se situera entre 11% et 15% du PIB.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, l'impact sur la balance des paiements pourrait se traduire par une baisse des réserves d'environ un milliard de dollars, toutes choses égales par ailleurs.

Dans cette perspective, cela signifie qu'une couverture équivalente à 11 mois d'importations de biens et de services sera préservée. C'est donc une couverture plus que confortable que nous réussirons à maintenir, bien supérieure aux standards internationaux.

A titre de rappel, c'est la Banque de Maurice, de par son mandat, qui est en charge de la gestion des réserves officielles du pays.

Dans le contexte actuel, le *COVID-19 Bill* introduira la possibilité pour le Conseil d'administration de la Banque de Maurice d'investir, à sa discrétion et en toute indépendance, dans l'économie mauricienne.

En effet, la Banque de Maurice a soumis une demande d'élargissement de ces compétences afin d'investir dans l'économie locale certains fonds investis à l'étranger et actuellement soumis à de possibles rendements négatifs.

Au travers de cette demande, la Banque Centrale entend assurer plus efficacement sa mission primaire, afin de concilier la stabilité des prix et la soutenabilité du développement économique.

Comme déjà précisé, le Comité d'investissement chargé de la politique d'investissement des réserves de Maurice au sein de la Banque de Maurice perdurera.

M. le président, je rappelle que l'indépendance de la Banque de Maurice est garantie par les sections 3 (3) et 12 (3) de la *Bank of Mauritius Act 2004*, qui stipulent comme suit -

- Section 3 (3) : Sous réserve des dispositions de la présente loi, la Banque doit, dans la conduite de son mandat, exercer ses fonctions en toute indépendance.
- Section 12 (3) : Dans l'exercice de ses fonctions, le Conseil d'administration ne peut être soumis à la direction ou au contrôle d'aucune autre personne ou autorité.

Au regard de ces dispositions, il est dommageable pour la nation que certains de l'opposition s'acharnent - je dis bien s'acharnent - à trainer dans la boue cette institution dont l'indépendance est l'essence même.

M. le président, pour finir et en toute transparence, laissez-moi rappeler au leader de l'opposition ce que l'ancien gouverneur de la Banque de Maurice, Rundheersing Bheenick, a affirmé il n'y a pas plus tard que quatre jours -

« Fondamentalement, je ne suis pas contre l'idée que la *BoM* – la Banque de Maurice - sorte la planche à billets pour sortir le pays du pétrin. Nous ne sommes pas l'exception qui confirme la règle. Tous les pays le font. »

Pour sa part, son collègue de parti et ancien ministre des Finances, Rama Sithanen, a lui, expliqué -

« Le ministre des Finances n'a tout simplement pas d'autre choix que de dépendre des deux réserves de la Banque Centrale et de sa machine électronique de transfert d'argent pour sauver le pays d'une crise économique et sociale. Tous les pays le font. Mais ils l'appellent différemment. »

Merci, M. le président.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance, if I understand him well, and I am sure he will agree - in the light of what he said in relation to statements made by two former Ministers of Finance and one previous Governor of the Bank, can I ask him whether he is so really hard up that he has to rely on statements made by two former Ministers, that he does not have a mind of his own to decide?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai voulu rappeler tout simplement au leader de l'opposition ce que ces membres ou ancien membres du Parti travailliste ont dit concernant l'utilisation des réserves. Mais ne vous inquiétez pas, M. le président, nous aussi, au niveau du ministère, je suis entouré de techniciens. Et ce sont ces mêmes techniciens qui travaillaient sous les régimes précédents. Donc, je m'appuie énormément sur mes techniciens et eux-aussi travaillent jour et nuit pour trouver des solutions, pour développer des stratégies pour contrer cette crise qui, j'aimerais rappeler à certains de l'opposition, n'est pas une crise simple. C'est une crise exceptionnelle ; c'est une crise systémique, car elle touche en même temps l'offre et la demande.

Dr. Boolell: You are leaning so much on your technicians, hon. Minister of Finance. I do not know whether you know of the story, but let me remind you. Do you recall the story of a baboon falling off from a high perch on its buttock by leaning too much on his officers? Can I now come, Mr Speaker, Sir, on specific issues with respect to trade deficit? Will the hon. Minister of Finance state what was the deficit of the balance of trade in the year 2019?

Dr. Padayachy: J'aimerais simplement revenir sur la question qu'a posée le leader de l'opposition. Quel va être l'impact sur la balance de paiement ? J'ai déjà ...

(Interruptions)

Je peux répondre?

Dr. Boolell: Deficit of the balance of trade! Answer the question! Do not run away! You are leaning too much on your staff.

Dr. Padayachy: Je peux répondre. Où est-ce que c'est dans la question ? Excusez-moi, M. le président, est-ce que c'est dans la PNQ ?

(Interruptions)

J'aimerais expliquer simplement, M. le président. On vient de répondre à la question. Il a posé une PNQ concernant l'impact ; il a posé une question concernant quel va être l'impact sur les réserves, etc., et on a donné la réponse. Concernant l'impact, on a dit ça peut aller jusqu'à un mois de nos réserves. Un mois ! On a douze mois d'imports et si le leader de l'opposition ne le sait pas, actuellement, le niveau des imports est en train de baisser. Donc, les douze mois, si on refait les calculs, peut-être c'est déjà 14 ou 15 mois d'imports, parce que - il ne le sait pas peut-être - le niveau des imports a déjà diminué. Quand vous avez deux mois de confinement, ça a obligatoirement un impact et sur l'export et sur l'import. Donc, voilà, je réponds à la question qui m'a été posé. Je ne vais pas aller chercher quel a été le niveau des imports ou des exports en 2019. Est-ce qu'en 2019, on était dans la situation actuelle ? Est-ce qu'en 2019, on avait à affronter cette pandémie qui est le COVID-19 ? Est-ce qu'en 2019, j'aimerais lui rappeler ...

(Interruptions)

J'ai le droit aussi ! J'aimerais lui demander, est-ce qu'en 2019, on avait eu deux mois de *lockdown* complet ? Est-ce qu'en 2019, il y avait eu un moment où on ne pouvait pas circuler et aller travailler ? Donc, la situation a changé, M. le président. Et c'est cela que certains – je dis bien certains, je précise bien, M. le président, c'est certains, parce que quand je lis la presse, je vois bien qu'il y en a beaucoup d'autres qui ont compris la situation et qui apporte leur soutien. Je ne demande pas l'adhésion des membres de l'opposition. Je demande simplement, M. le président, que les membres comprennent dans quelle situation on est et qu'on réponde à la question qu'ils nous ont posé et qu'on leur dit : voilà, on a préparé. Si ça leur fait mal que par le passé on a préparé l'avenir et qu'on a décidé de mettre un an d'imports, et bien, on s'est préparé pour une crise exogène. Voilà M. le président, ce que j'ai à répondre.

Dr. Boolell: I asked a specific question in respect of pre-COVID-19, and if the Minister had the intelligence to answer the question I put to him, he would have realised that prior to the COVID-19, the Government has mismanaged the economy. And I can give figures. Does the Minister agree - and I put the question to him - that before COVID-19, the EPZ sector had declined by more than 10% in the third quarter and 11% in the fourth quarter? And what is true for the EPZ sector, it is equally true for the sugar sector and the seafood sector. Can he answer to that question? It has nothing to do with COVID-19 or confinement. Unless he wants to be confined!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais répondre simplement à cette question. C'est que, encore une fois, l'analyse de l'économie passe par l'analyse de la croissance globale de l'économie. Jusqu'à présent, jusqu'à cette année, Maurice détenait le record - allez vérifier, M. le leader de l'opposition ! - record de longévité concernant la croissance économique qui était positive pendant presque, sinon plus de 40 ans. Aucun pays au monde, je dis bien au monde, n'a pu réaliser cet exploit, et cela, je le dis bien, c'est grâce à tous les gouvernements ; les gouvernements du passé aussi. Mais vouloir analyser l'économie par, comme on dit, un tout petit bout, pour dire que tout va mal, c'est de la malhonnêteté intellectuelle, M. le président. On vérifie l'économie. Hier, j'ai répondu à cette question. On analyse l'économie de par l'impact ou de par l'évolution de la croissance économique du pays. Quand vous regardez les estimations du FMI, qu'est-ce que vous regardez en premier ? Vous regardez quelle va être la croissance économique du pays. C'est tout ce que vous regardez. Si vous voulez savoir si un pays progresse, si un pays a des difficultés, vous regardez sa croissance économique. C'est vrai qu'il y a certains secteurs qui souffrent et d'autres moins. C'est vrai que vous l'avez ! Mais ce qui est le plus important, c'est d'avoir une croissance économique positive que, malheureusement, cette année on n'aura pas. C'est cela qui est important ! C'est que 40 ans après, avec le COVID-19, on n'aura pas de croissance positive, et cela, ce n'est pas de notre faute. Ce sont des facteurs exogènes. C'est une épidémie, une pandémie exogène à Maurice. Donc, pas de notre ressort.

Merci, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: *Ki to pe fer? Pe koz are to mem?*

Dr. Boolell: Is he aware that the growth rate...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: *Mo en colere! Ki to problem twa?*

(Interruptions)

Ki to problem?

(Interruptions)

Twa ki to problem?

(Interruptions)

A koz to Premier minis, to kapav met are mwa?

(Interruptions)

Kalme twa ta! Kalme twa!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, please! Order, please! I suspend the sitting for some time.

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

On resuming at 3.34 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, be seated! Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since Government has failed on trade deficit and there has been significant increase in the trade deficit and has not been able to take corrective measures to address other sectors of the economy like the services sector, the financial sectors, can I ask the hon. Minister, in the light of a number of offshore structures moving out of Mauritius following the EU blacklisting, is he aware that a large

American bank is already refusing to deal with Mauritius directly and indirectly and what is true for this American bank is equally true for many European banks and banks from OECD countries?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de dire que l'inclusion de Maurice sur cette liste qui n'est pas encore officielle, parce qu'elle doit être ratifiée par le Conseil et aussi le Parlement, n'est pas encore effective. Elle sera effective à partir du 1^{er} octobre, et on a le temps. On a le temps de travailler pour sortir de cette liste. Et ce qui est important, M. le président, c'est que j'aimerais rappeler au leader de l'opposition qu'il n'y a pas eu encore des départs des grandes banques, parce que - il ne le sait pas - toutes les banques internationales qui travaillent avec Maurice, travaillent avec un *enhanced diligence* déjà. C'est pour ça qu'ils sont toujours à Maurice. J'ai dit qu'on va travailler, M. le président, pour ne plus être sur cette liste. Une liste, comme l'a rappelé mon collègue, l'honorable Mahen Seeruttun, qui est dommageable et qu'on ne nous ai pas donné le temps de nous défendre. Une des missions premières, une des directives de l'Union Européenne c'est de donner le temps aux pays concernés de venir se défendre.

Donc, nous, on est en train de travailler au niveau du gouvernement pour ne pas être sur cette liste. Mais, malheureusement, encore une fois je dis, certains semblent jubiler de cette histoire, semblent déjà accepter qu'on est sur cette liste, et pire encore, semblent être en train de dire qu'ils ont eu raison de nous mettre sur cette liste. C'est cela que je trouve inacceptable, M. le président ; avoir ce genre de comportement. Est-ce que c'est un comportement patriotique envers le pays? Est-ce que c'est un comportement patriotique envers le pays que de venir faire semblant de dire déjà qu'on est sur une liste noire? Non, parce qu'on ne l'est pas encore. On a jusqu'au 1^{er} octobre pour se défendre. Et ici, je le dis, mon collègue, l'honorable ministre des Services financiers, le Premier ministre et aussi le ministre des Affaires étrangères travaillent de concert pour trouver comment et pour réussir cette mission de ne pas inclure Maurice sur cette liste.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister reminds me of a comedy which is deeply rooted in the tragic realities of Mauritian politics. He is a disaster. Can I ask the Minister whether he is selling dreams by saying that Mauritius stands a chance of not being on the list of the European Commission? If he says so, he is dreaming. Let me take the case of Trinidad and Tobago which was not on the list established by FATF. Yet, it failed to meet the benchmark established by the European Commission. Is he aware of this?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, s'il me traite de désastre, c'est son choix. C'est ce qu'il pense. Mais est-ce qu'il pense que je suis content de venir dire à l'Assemblée nationale qu'on risque une contraction de plus de 7 % cette année ? Je l'ai dit. Je ne prends pas ça à la légère, M. le président. On sait très bien que le Covid-19 aura un impact énorme sur l'économie mauricienne, et on est allé très loin quand on a fait nos estimations. Dans le pire des cas, on a dit -11 %. Donc, ce n'est pas réjouissant. S'il pense que ça me réjouit, je n'arrive pas à comprendre ce genre de sentiment parce que pour moi, c'est un sentiment antipatriotique.

J'aimerais revenir - bien sûr qu'on va travailler, on l'a déjà fait dans le passé. On avait eu les mêmes risques avec l'OCDE, avec l'Union Européenne. On a travaillé pour sortir. On doit travailler, M. le président. Je pense que le leader de l'opposition ne sait pas ce que c'est que ce mot. C'est travailler pour sortir de cette liste. Ça demande l'effort de tous et de chacun pour qu'on puisse sortir. Et cela demande, M. le président, un effort particulier de la part de certains dans l'opposition qui, au lieu de se glousser de cette histoire, feraient mieux de trouver et d'aider à trouver des solutions à ce problème, parce que c'est un problème d'ordre national, ce n'est pas un problème politique. Et je suis outré de voir ce genre de réaction, M. le président. De venir sur un sujet aussi important, de le prendre dans une question supplémentaire pour venir dire comme quoi on n'est pas en train de regarder ce problème. Je suis désolé, M. le président. Pour moi, ce n'est pas un comportement digne d'un honorable membre de l'opposition.

Mr Speaker: You made your point!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me ask the Minister whether he is aware that the foreign reserves of the Bank of Mauritius have fallen by more than USD 600 m. from January to March 2020. Now, I would like to know from him whether the Bank of Mauritius is not selling enough foreign currencies because it does not want its reserves to decline further. Is that so?

Dr. Padayachy: La politique monétaire, M. le président, la politique monétaire, je le répète, n'est pas du domaine de la politique fiscale. Ce n'est pas du domaine du gouvernement. C'est pour ça qu'on dit que la Banque de Maurice est indépendante. La Banque de Maurice a à voir la politique monétaire, la politique des taux de change. C'est à eux de décider. Ils ont une mission, je l'ai dit et je le répète, savoir jouer à l'équilibre, savoir faire l'arbitrage entre la stabilité des prix et la soutenabilité du développement économique

d'un pays, et c'est cela leur mission. Ce n'est pas leur mission de voir et d'accumuler que des réserves, c'est aussi de voir quel est l'impact sur l'inflation et aussi sur le développement économique.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that you have no control over the reply given by the Minister, but you cannot allow him to go on rumbling. I would allow my good friend to put a question.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Minister of Finance is going on about the independence of the Bank of Mauritius and he is saying again that it is the Bank of Mauritius which requested to be given the power to amend the law so that it can facilitate economic development. Being given that asking such power is against section 46 (2) of the Bank of Mauritius Act, which provides that the Board must ensure security and liquidity before return of the official reserve, is the hon. Minister of Finance prepared to lay on the Table of the National Assembly, the Letter of Request from the Bank of Mauritius where they ask this power to be given to help economic development? And if he is not prepared to do so, will he stop behaving as if he is still the First Governor of the Central Bank?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, après la proclamation de la loi, ce sera un plaisir de déposer cette lettre de la Banque de Maurice au niveau de l'Assemblée nationale.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(3.43 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

(a) **THE COVID-19 (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL (NO. I OF 2020)**

(b) **THE QUARANTINE BILL (NO. II OF 2020)**

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. I of 2020) and the Quarantine Bill (No. II of 2020).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to join my colleagues to express heartfelt condolences to all bereaved families who have been affected by the Covid-19, both in Mauritius and abroad. Mr Speaker, sir, as we sit here this afternoon, today on 15 May, the world knows more than 4,539,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19 around the world. And when we debate two Bills, the Quarantine Bill and the COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, we have heard a number of arguments, we have heard, of course, demagoguery also, and out there, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a population, the people of Mauritius who have been generally very cooperative, who have collaborated during the confinement and who still collaborates with the directives of the Ministry of Health and this in the higher interest of our country.

So, in the midst of this debate, I have to seize this opportunity this afternoon to take a few minutes, come on dirt en Francis pour re-enter le debate. De quoi est-ce que nous parlons quand nous sommes ici pour les deux projets de loi ? La question est aussi, M. le président, c'est pour rassurer aussi le peuple qui se pose plein de questions et le peuple n'entend pas nécessairement des réponses à travers les débats dans cette Chambre, parce que, malheureusement, les débats se concentrent trop, à mon humble avis, sur les questions pour les gains politiques. La première question que je pose et je m'adresse à travers vous, M. le président, et à travers les cameras que vous avez installé au peuple, à mes concitoyens. Qu'a fait ce gouvernement, et je demande au peuple, votre gouvernement face à cette pandémie? Pour rappel, M. le président, l'OMS déclare une urgence internationale de santé publique le 30 janvier de cette année. Qu'a fait le gouvernement à partir de cette date?

Tout d'abord, M. le président, le 30 janvier, quand l'OMS déclare une urgence internationale de santé publique, le gouvernement de la petite Ile Maurice, au milieu de

l'océan Indien, ne tarde point. Le 31 janvier de cette année, le ministère de la Santé prend toutes les mesures pour la prise de température pour tous les passagers arrivant à l'aéroport de Plaisance. Immédiatement, c'est le branle-bas, toutes les opérations sont déclenchées par le ministère de la Santé. Les Mauriciens, arrivant à Maurice, sont pris en charge pour la quarantaine. Les passagers étrangers, surtout en ce début du mois de février de cette année, en provenance de Chine sont interdits d'entrée. Tout cela, pour protéger le territoire mauricien. D'autres passagers, en provenance d'autres pays tels que la Corée, l'Italie, Singapour, Japon, l'Iran sont sous stricte surveillance à partir du mois de février. Le temps passe et nous arrivons au 11 mars, la date butoir où l'OMS déclare la pandémie mondiale. Nous étions tous ici, à Maurice, dans un état de frayeur. Je n'ose pas exagérer pour dire nous étions tous face à la peur, la peur de l'inconnu, mais le gouvernement a pris les décisions nécessaires. Tous les étrangers étaient interdits à partir du 19 mars et depuis cette date, plus de 3,000 Mauriciens sont rentrés et placés en quarantaine aux frais de l'État, d'abord, dans les bâtiments publics, à Pointe aux Sables, Pointe Jérôme, Quatre Sœurs et par la suite, dans les hôtels, avec la collaboration du secteur privé, avec tout l'encadrement médical du ministère de la Santé. Le 18 mars, c'était comme si le ciel nous tombait sur la tête. Nous avons le 18 mars, les trois premiers cas répertoriés à Maurice, et le 19, nous avons le premier décès, sans exagération, *this is what we dreaded and this is what happened.*

What did Government do? Government stepped up the efforts when everybody was confined at home, a small core team worked night and day, seven days a week until today, to step up and stand up to the situation. The hospitals in Souillac and Vacoas, the ENT were equipped with all the necessary equipment.

Les hôtels, M. le président, furent reconvertis en centres d'accueil, avec la collaboration, je le redis, du secteur privé. Les ambulances mobilisées 24/24, les véhicules d'autres ministères réquisitionnés, le ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports, le ministère de la Sécurité sociale, le ministère de l'Agriculture et d'autres, véhicules réquisitionnés pour mettre à la disposition du ministère de la Santé. Les protocoles de soins, alors que les médecins du monde entier hésitaient par manque d'informations scientifiques, nous avons eu à prendre des décisions sur le moment et des décisions ont été prises par les médecins très courageux et ces décisions ont porté les fruits ; c'était concernant le traitement à base de hydroxychloroquine et azithromycine. Ces décisions ont été prises par les médecins dans la petite Ile Maurice. Des décisions ont été prises concernant le traitement à base de plasmaphérèse alors que d'autres pays dits avancés hésitaient encore. Pendant ce temps, le

gouvernement n'a pas lésiné sur les moyens pour s'approvisionner en équipements. 231 tonnes d'équipements médicaux importés à travers les contacts entre le gouvernement de l'Ile Maurice et les pays amis. De par notre réputation et notre sérieux, des pays amis ont réagi et par vol spécial, par exemple, de l'Inde, 500,000 comprimés de hydroxychloroquine, un autre vol spécial de Ethiopien Airlines pour les équipements en provenance du *Centre For Disease Control* de l'Union africaine basée à Addis-Abeba, deux millions de masques importés, les *personal protective equipment*, les lunettes de protection et des gants, tout cela s'est fait simultanément. Le *hotline* avait été mis en place le 8924, la construction des *flu fever clinics* avait débuté et qui, aujourd'hui, est une réalité, grâce aux efforts du ministre et du ministère du *National Infrastructure*.

Le *contact tracing* avait été mis sur place et régulièrement tous les jours, la population a été informée des résultats du *contact tracing*. Je prends quelques minutes pour expliquer que le *contact tracing* avait été mis en place dès le premier jour à Maurice, M. le président, parce que, alors que le *contact tracing* avait été mis en place ici, dès le premier jour, c'est maintenant que l'Europe découvre ce que c'est le *contact tracing*. Peut-être que la population à l'Ile Maurice ne le réalise pas, le *contact tracing* ne se pratique pas du tout en Angleterre, alors que nous nous l'avons pratiqué dès le début, et c'est à travers le *contact tracing* qu'on a pu savoir où était ceux qui étaient potentiellement infectés par le virus.

Le gouvernement de la petite Ile Maurice, face à cette pandémie, M. le président, n'a pas lésiné sur les moyens. Les *Rapid Antigen Tests* furent recommandés. Les équipements et d'autres dispositifs ont été mis en place concernant la distanciation sociale et les gestes barrières avec les conseils du ministère de la Santé. Aussi, également les équipements, notamment pour les tests PCR de l'Université de Maurice et du *MSIRI* ont été, je dirai, 'réquisitionnés', parce que ces institutions ont volontairement donné leurs équipements au ministère de la Santé pour les tests *PCR*. C'était un moment où le pays était, comme on dit, lors de l'hymne nationale, *as one people, as one nation*.

Chaque ressource a été mise à la disposition du pays. Le confinement, M. le président, a été mis en place. Pourquoi ? Je le dis encore, c'est le seul moyen pour éviter la propagation, pas seulement à Maurice, mais dans tous les pays. Les pays qui ont hésité payent le prix fort aujourd'hui. Or, le gouvernement à Maurice n'a pas hésité et a mis en place le confinement dès les premiers jours, ce qui a permis de ralentir la propagation. Quand nous avons constaté un manque de discipline, notamment dans les bazars, le Premier ministre n'a pas hésité un seul instant et a imposé le total *lockdown*. Bien sûr, cela a causé des

inconvenients à la population, mais c'était dans l'intérêt général, c'était dans l'intérêt du public, et cela la population l'a bien compris. Aujourd'hui, nous voyons que la propagation du virus a considérablement ralenti. En même temps que ces efforts étaient déployés au niveau médical, le gouvernement n'a pas lésiné sur les moyens pour venir en aide aux familles vulnérables.

La distribution de vivres a été organisée pour 45,000 familles. Le *Wage Assistance Scheme* a été mis en place par le ministère des Finances immédiatement pour 243,000 employés et, en contrepartie, le ministère des Finances avait demandé aux entreprises un engagement à ne pas licencier, et ces mesures se retrouvent aujourd'hui dans le *COVID-19 Bill*. Pour les *self-employed*, une allocation de R 7,650 à 163,000 travailleurs et petits entrepreneurs du secteur informel. L'annulation des loyers pour 13,000 maraichers puisque les bazars étaient fermés. A ne pas oublier aussi le soutien aux entreprises pour le paiement des loyers et le moratoire sur le remboursement des emprunts aussi. Je dresse cette liste, M. le président, pour expliquer à la population ce que ce gouvernement a fait depuis le 30 janvier de cette année quand l'OMS avait déclenché la pandémie.

La réouverture des supermarchés s'est organisée de façon très contrôlée par ordre alphabétique. On a eu, bien sûr, une pénurie artificielle sur certaines denrées alimentaires, mais le problème a été vite maîtrisé et aujourd'hui on voit que le prix est même inférieur au prix fixé par la loi, soit R 17 ou R 18 pour les oignons et les pommes de terre. Le contrôle des prix a été tout de suite mis en place par mon collègue, le ministre du Commerce, sur les produits de première nécessité et d'usage quotidien, tels que les conserves, les céréales, le riz Basmati, les pâtes, les couches, les fromages, le beurre. On a eu la suppression de la TVA sur les désinfectants, les masques de protection et appareils respiratoires. Le service de protection des consommateurs a déclenché toutes ces opérations et a enregistré 1,200 plaintes, effectué 3,838 descentes des lieux et a dressé plus de 2,487 contraventions pour des pratiques abusives. Tout cela s'est fait simultanément, et cela avec pour seul but de protéger la population de notre République. Mais qu'entendons-nous, ici, à Maurice ? Bien sûr, il y a ceux qui choisissent de ne pas voir ce qui est *glaring to the eyes and they choose just to criticise*. Mais heureusement, M. le président, les institutions indépendantes, et surtout à l'international, le verdict est clair.

M. le président, le *Lockdown Stringency Index* de l'Université d'Oxford *speaks volumes of what Mauritius has done*. Les reportages de la *BBC*, et plus récemment sur *Le Figaro*, nous encourage dans les mesures que nous prenons à Maurice. Et selon le sondage

par la firme VERDE, M. le président, 91.3% de la population *approved the bold measures taken by Government so far to contain the virus*. Tout ceci, m'amène, M. le président, eu égard au temps qui s'écoule, à venir sur ce que nous avons entendu sur les débats à l'Assemblée.

Against this background, what do we hear from the Opposition? Demagogical arguments to say that the law provides essentially, according to this Opposition, disproportionate sentencing; the law provides for unfettered powers of Police and that for the first time as if in this country the Police will have some powers of arrest without a warrant. They went upon instilling fear in this country and I will take a few minutes, with the permission of my friend, the hon. Chief Whip, to dispel this fear in the population.

Let me come to the proportionality of sentencing which was raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He even stated that when he heard me or when he looks at me, he thinks of Pinochet. I will not bear grudge to the hon. Leader of the Opposition for thinking of Pinochet when he looks at me, because I know that his consultants, who have written his speech and who are sitting in Garden Tower Building, have put that in his speech. I will not bear him grudge...

(Interruptions)

Let me come to the proportionality of sentencing. What is the sentencing provided now in the new law, Rs200,000 or even Rs500,000? The fine which was Rs500, which is still Rs500, lies in the Public Health Act. That Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, dates to 1925. If I am not mistaken, in 1929, - the central bankers perhaps will have to confirm it - with Rs500 you could probably buy property in this country. Such was the value of money. If we look at the Consumer Price Index over the number of years from 1925 to 2020, what does it come to? So, is Rs200,000 or even Rs500,000 disproportionate when we compare to what was the situation in 1925? It is not disproportionate. Secondly, it is not disproportionate when you think of the consequences of propagating a virus which is deadly and which has proven to be deadly.

Let me come to the very sad dramatic case of Dr. Cheong. When Dr. Cheong met his patient, at no time did patient reveal to him that he could be potentially infected with COVID-19. Dr. Cheong was not aware that he was treating a patient who was a potential carrier of COVID-19 virus. What was the end result? Both patient and doctor are no longer with us today. Should we not legislate to impose a duty to provide information? Should we

not legislate to provide that it is an offence if you fail to do it? We will live up to our duty and we will include in the legislation what needs to be included because we believe that we are doing what is right.

Let me come to the allegedly unfettered powers of the Police to arrest. Unfortunately, they have instilled so much fear that this has reached where we have – I have read letters even coming from *le diocèse*. On parle des pouvoirs accrus de la police. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire 'des pouvoirs accrus de la police'?

Cela veut dire plus de pouvoir comparer à la situation antérieure. Est-ce qu'on a donné des pouvoirs accrus à la police, M. le président? Laissez-moi lire la section 11 du *Quarantine Bill* tel que devant la Chambre. Le *Quarantine Bill*, I quote clause 11 –

« 11. **Police powers**

A police officer –

- (a) shall provide such assistance as may be reasonably required by a quarantine officer under this Act;
- (b) may –
 - (i) board a ship or an aircraft;
 - (ii) enter premises without a warrant;
 - (iii) arrest, without a warrant, a person whom he has reasonable cause to believe has committed an offence under this Act or any regulations made under this Act.”

We have borrowed, Mr Speaker, Sir, this clause from another legislation. Let me read the legislation from which we have borrowed it. I quote from the other legislation. I am going to give the title of the legislation from which we have borrowed. I quote section 10 –

“Police Powers

- (1) Every police officer -
 - (a) shall enforce compliance with this Act and with any order, instruction or condition lawfully made, given or imposed by a person under the authority of this Act;
 - (b) may board any ship or aircraft and enter any premises without a warrant.

- (2) A police officer may arrest without a warrant any person whom he has reasonable cause to believe has committed any offence under this Act.”

The question, Mr Speaker, Sir, from where did we borrow this? From the Quarantine Act of 1954. It is word for word, a replica of what is in the Quarantine Act of 1954 and none of the lawyers sitting over there have taken the pain to check the existing legislation called the Quarantine Act 1954.

(Interruptions)

Or they have checked it and deliberately chosen not to mention that it already exists in the Quarantine Act 1954 and they have deliberately, out of demagogy, instilled fear in the population.

(Interruptions)

There is more, Mr Speaker, Sir. They pretend that it is for the first time that we speak of arrest without warrant. There is another legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir, called the District and Intermediate Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, do you know when this legislation was enacted in this country? In 1888! In that one, commonly called the DIC (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, even a private person can arrest without warrant when he sees a crime committed or attempted to be committed or a dangerous wound given. That is section 16 of the DIC (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, I quote it –

“A private person who sees a crime committed or attempted to be committed or a dangerous wound given, may, without warrant, arrest the offender.”

Are we reinventing the wheel?

And section 22 of that DIC (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act says –

“An officer – of course speaking of a police officer – may arrest a party without warrant, in all cases where a private person may so arrest, and also on a reasonable charge made of a crime committed or of dangerous wounds inflicted by the party arrested.”

Le contrôle, M. le président, c'est par le magistrat, where the prisoner or the arrested person is taken before a Magistrate, as has always been the case and will always be the case in our country. This is the level of the argument of this Opposition.

Finally, in the Quarantine Bill, it is very clearly stated that the power given to the Police Officer is to provide assistance as may reasonably be required by a quarantine officer

under this Act. Paragraph (a) and paragraph (b) have to be read together and not like they have done disjunctively. This is a basic cardinal rule of statutory interpretation as far as the law school, I have attended, is concerned.

(Interruptions)

I do not know which law school they qualified.

(Interruptions)

This is what I wanted to highlight as being the arguments of this Opposition. Before I end, Mr Speaker, Sir, of course time being of the essence, two things I want to say. First of all, it concerns my colleague, the Minister of Labour, who recently had made a statement in public concerning the question of pay cut allegedly attributed to the party, the MMM, on his own behalf and on behalf – since I have the floor – of Government, I want to make it clear that, *bien sûr, les paroles ont dépassé sa pensée*. He was labouring under misapprehension and he has already honourably made amends today in public, and I confirm same in this House.

Finally, before – I was about to say resuming my seat, but I am already seated – ending, Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleagues join me to thank you and the staff of the Assembly for making necessary arrangements in this House. This has allowed us to sit in these troubled times in keeping with the rules of social distancing.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

(4.12 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Paul Bérenger!

Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you. Je commencerai mon intervention en saluant et en remerciant les *front liners* engagés dans le combat contre le Coronavirus et en félicitant ensuite la population pour son comportement tout au long de la crise actuelle et j'exprime toute ma sympathie aux familles endeuillées.

L'heure n'est pas au *cheap politics*, mais je me dois de dire brièvement deux choses. Premièrement, si nous manquons de moyens pour combattre le Coronavirus, c'est avant tout le résultat de la politique budgétaire et de la gestion de la dette publique depuis 2015. Et deuxièmement, il y a des erreurs et des faux pas qui auraient pu être évités dans le combat contre le Coronavirus, mais je choisis de revenir sur tout cela en temps et lieu.

Je dois par ailleurs protester contre le peu de temps qui nous a été donné pour étudier un projet de loi massif qui amende 56 textes de loi existants pour y apporter des changements fondamentaux et pour consulter tous ceux et celles qui méritaient de l'être. Et je proteste aussi contre le peu de temps alloué à l'opposition dans son ensemble pour le commenter ici au Parlement.

J'entre dans le vif du sujet et que les choses soient claires. Nous sommes contre le *COVID-19 Bill* qui est très dangereux et injuste. Et nous dénonçons le fait que le gouvernement profit de la crise du Coronavirus pour faire voter les choses inacceptables.

Je commence mon examen du *COVID-19 Bill* par les mesures financières et économiques proposées dans le *COVID-19 Bill*, mesures que nous considérons très dangereuses et à courte vue.

Les amendements au *Bank of Mauritius Act* tuent la banque de Maurice. Il n'y aura plus de Banque de Maurice indépendante digne de ce nom. La Banque de Maurice devient une simple planche à billets pour financer sans limite le gouvernement lui-même et même pour investir dans des compagnies privées. Et, pour ce faire, la Banque de Maurice pourra puiser dans les réserves en devises étrangères du pays et dans le *Special Reserve Fund* de la banque.

Les amendements au *Public Debt Management Act* éliminent toute limite à l'endettement du pays en *deleting* complètement, purement et simplement la section 7 du *Public Debt Management Act* et élimine aussi du calcul de la dette publique toute garantie donnée par le gouvernement. Les amendements au *Finance and Audit Act* pompent de 3,5 milliards à 15 milliards les avances entre guillemets, parce que ce ne seront pas des avances, et soi-disant les avances sont portées donc à 15 milliards, les avances qui peuvent être faites par le gouvernement à partir du *Consolidated Fund* et qui vont aller dans des *special funds* et échapper ainsi au calcul du déficit budgétaire et à tout contrôle par le Parlement.

Les amendements à l'*Income Tax* officialisent la gestion par la *MRA* (*la Mauritius Revenue Authority*), du *Wage Assistance Scheme* et du *Self Employed Assistance Scheme*, mais on sait qu'il a été annoncé au Parlement dès le mardi 5 mai que ces deux *schemes* prendront fin ce mois-ci, ce que le ministre des Finances a confirmé hier dans son discours. Je le répète. Les propositions financières et économiques contenues dans le *COVID-19 Bill* sont très dangereuses et hypothèquent l'avenir même du pays et de ses enfants. Les amendements au *Workers Rights Act* et à l'*Employment Relations Act* sont injustes et ont été dénoncés par

les syndicats qui ont parlé de trahison. Les licenciements deviennent plus faciles et le concept du congé non payé est introduit. Le *work from home* peut être imposé par l'employeur. Des changements importants sont apportés au paiement de l'*overtime* et des congés annuels. Le ministre a insisté que tous - ce que j'ai bien entendu, le ministre a insisté que tous ces amendements au *Workers Rights Act* sont temporaires. Il est permis d'avoir des doutes surtout après que le Premier ministre n'ait pas dit ça dans son discours d'introduction. J'espère et il est indispensable que le Premier ministre clarifie les choses dans son *summing-up*.

Mes collègues Arianne Navarre-Marie et Rajesh Bhagwan se sont exprimés au nom du MMM sur les amendements à l'*Education Act* et au *Sports Act*. Nous condamnons l'absence de consultations des enseignants et des sportifs et nous condamnons de même la confusion totale qui règne concernant la reprise des classes et la relance des activités sportives.

Dans le cas des amendements au *Pharmacy Act*, qualifiés de sournois et dangereux par les professionnels du secteur et par la presse, tous les doutes sont permis qu'il y a un *hidden agenda* et que c'est du taillé sur mesure au profit d'un proche du pouvoir actuel. En temps et lieu, toute la lumière sera faite sur cette affaire.

Concernant les Mauriciennes et Mauriciens bloqués à l'étranger à cause du coronavirus, il est clair que le gouvernement n'a pas fait tout ce qui pouvait être fait pour qu'ils rentrent au pays au plus vite. D'ailleurs on se souvient qu'au début de la crise, le gouvernement avait même interdit officiellement le retour au pays des Mauriciennes et Mauriciens se trouvant à l'étranger. Ce qui était anticonstitutionnel et un viol de la loi du sol. Il faut que le gouvernement agisse enfin sans plus tergiverser pour que tous les Mauriciennes et Mauriciens qui le souhaitent puissent rentrer au pays dès que possible, le plus tôt possible.

Et j'en arrive à la fin du confinement et surtout à la levée de l'interdiction de *kite lakaz* qui était nécessaire et qui a été appliqué de par le monde mais ça ne peut pas être éternel et ça ne doit pas l'être. Le fait est que, de par le monde, de plus en plus de pays mettent fin ces jours ci au confinement et surtout à cette interdiction de *kite lakaz*.

Pays après pays sont en train de le faire, y compris des pays où il y a encore de nouveaux cas de coronavirus et même de décès dus au coronavirus. Mais, dans tous les cas, les pays concernés prennent toutes les précautions nécessaires à commencer par le *social distancing* : garder une distance minimum entre les personnes. Tous les pays prennent ces

précautions nécessaires et se réservent aussi le droit de revoir la situation si de nouveaux cas l'exigent, parmi ces pays, les Seychelles, la Réunion et la France mais aussi l'Australie et la Nouvelle Zélande, le Danemark et bien d'autres. Aux Seychelles, l'interdiction de *kite lakaz* et la plupart des autres interdictions ont été levées le 04 mai parce qu'il n'y a pas eu de nouveau cas de coronavirus depuis le 06 avril mais aussi parce que, aux Seychelles comme à Maurice et partout ailleurs, l'interdiction de *kite lakaz* pèse très lourd sur la liberté de la population et encore plus sur sa santé mentale et physique, et surtout sur les *gran dimounn* et les enfants et les victimes de violences domestiques.

A Maurice, il n'y a pas eu de nouveau cas de coronavirus depuis le 27 avril, soit depuis 18 jours à hier. Et avant cela, du 13 au 27 avril, il y avait eu 10 jours pendant lesquels aucun cas de coronavirus n'avait été décelé. Par ailleurs, plus de 240,000 *Work Access Permits* ont été accordés à ce jour. Et des milliers d'autres sont accordés ces jours-ci. Si, malgré tout cela, le gouvernement décide de continuer à imposer l'interdiction de *kite lakaz*, qu'il améliore au moins les conditions du confinement qui sont en force à partir de ce 15 mai pour permettre, par exemple, le droit à l'exercice et au jogging comme en Afrique du Sud ou la réouverture des librairies.

En attendant, je me suis renseigné sur comment les choses se sont passées depuis ce matin et j'ajoute, dans l'immédiat et en priorité, il faut améliorer d'urgence les arrangements pour le *social distancing* dans le transport public dans certaines régions surtout, et il faut qu'il y ait le nombre requis de bus sur la route pour que le *social distancing* puisse être appliqué. Il faut d'urgence, je le répète, à partir d'aujourd'hui même, améliorer les arrangements pour le *social distancing* dans le transport public et il faut faire mieux respecter le *social distancing* en général. J'avais oublié de dire, tout à l'heure, qu'à part le fait qu'il n'y ait pas eu de nouveaux cas de coronavirus à Maurice depuis, je le disais tout à l'heure, dix-huit jours, il n'y a aussi plus de cas actif à Maurice.

Mes collègues, avant moi, ont fait savoir que nous sommes aussi contre le nouveau *Quarantine Act*, dans sa forme actuelle. Bien sûr, il faut remplacer le *Quarantine Act* de 1954, mais il s'est passé bien des choses depuis. Ce n'est pas acceptable qu'aujourd'hui on vienne nous proposer de copier certaines clauses de 1954 et d'y ajouter 100 garde-fous. Nous sommes en 2020 et il est inacceptable, après les cas de violence policière dans la prison, les horreurs que ce pays vient de vivre, qu'on augmente les pouvoirs que la Police a déjà. 100 garde-fous, comme c'est le cas dans le nouveau *Quarantine Act*, c'est ouvrir la porte plus grand encore aux abus et aux atteintes aux droits fondamentaux des citoyens.

Je termine en saluant à nouveau la population dans son ensemble et les *front liners* en particulier, et en souhaitant aux Mauriciennes et Mauriciens une bonne fin de confinement et bon courage pour la difficile relance avenir du pays et de son économie.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

(4.29 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As we near the end of our debates on these two Bills, it is obvious now what is the demarcation line between that side of the House and this side of the House. Government has come forward with a clear message. We have been since, let us say beginning of February, in a sanitary emergency. This has gone on and we are still under threat. We can have a resurgence and, being a small country, we must protect ourselves. The health of our citizens comes first, but at the same time, we have to keep the balance with the economy, making sure that our citizens can earn their living and not face the threat of unemployment, so that our economy does not face the threat of recession. I have been following the Private Notice Questions of the Leader of the Opposition as well as the answers of the Minister of Finance, and I think all this is very clear to the population.

On the other side, the Opposition is united in its message. We have just heard the speech of the First Member for Constituency No. 19. What do they say? We have not had any case for the last so many days. We are no longer in a state of emergency, let us relax everything, and these two Bills are a pretext.

Le chanfre de cette proposition n'est nul autre que le premier député de la circonscription no. 3 qui vient vous dire que lui, il a une base scientifique pour étayer ses arguments. C'est très, très bien d'avoir trouvé ça pour l'opposition, parce qu'avant il n'y avait pas, à part le verbiage; là il y a quelque chose de scientifique : R est égal à 0.1. Vous vous rappelez ! Et quand il le dit, vous croyez entendre Dr. Gaud devant vous. An armchair virologist speaking to us and telling us there is nothing wrong in this country, why are you doing this? That is the thesis of the Opposition. But, of course, where does the hon. First Member get this R equals 0.1? It is from Boris Johnson who was the first one to talk about it in his recent Press conference which was aired on the BBC. I heard about it on 02 February. It was a Sunday, the Prime Minister - on the eve, we had a function - told me there is going to be an urgent meeting the next day at his office. Nobody likes going to see the Prime Minister

on a Sunday morning. We went, and there we met the representative of the World Health Organisation who explained to us this famous curve; that we were going to have 1,000 to 2,000 people because our formula was R equals 5. I did not know what was 'R' and I did not bother to ask, but he explained and I heard, the First Member of Constituency No. 3 has again repeated it, but in a more learned way than the representative of the World Health Organisation.

So, we have the predictions. This is why they tell us: why are you curtailing shift allowance? You have an agenda? Annual leave, scheduled sectors, Employment Relations Act, Bank of Mauritius, Pharmacy Act, all this is whitewash because 2 is equal 0.1! And that is the theory of the Opposition! And we are removing workers' rights. But there is one thing, Mr Speaker, Sir. We were the ones to introduce these measures: Negative Income Tax, old age pensions, minimum wage. And then we withdraw? We have explained that this is a time where temporary measures must be taken. I take the opportunity of denying in the strongest terms possible the allegations made by the First Member for Constituency No. 3, that I was the one to insist on the provisions of the workers' rights and I wrote it myself. I think the Prime Minister has nothing to do with it. The Prime Minister works and I have been working with him. I worked with three Prime Ministers. He works in consultation with his team and I have learned a lot from this method of working. These two Bills - in fact, so many others - were discussed, everybody put his contribution and we came with the Bills which are there. There is an agenda, of course, behind what the hon. Member said. I am surprised, however, that he got support from a very unexpected quarter, the hon. Member for Constituency No. 12, who said: 'Oh no, that has been written by the DPM because he wants the employees of CWA to lose their jobs!' I do not know where he got it from. I hope he is not blindly following what his colleague is telling him, his party colleague is following, and I hope he did it in the true spirit of demagogy which we have seen in the course of these debates and, if that is so, it is thoroughly excusable. That is also not true.

I have given sufficient guarantees on water sector reform to be able to spare myself an explanation on this matter. Nothing has happened since February? The whole world is tumbling down! But, as the hon. First Member for No. 19 has said, the whole population was disciplined, they supported us, our actions, except for two or three. I call them 'the two wonder boys' who tried to distil dissatisfaction in the population.

Quarantine period - I remember the Minister of Health, when we started this issue, was amazed of the extent of his powers under the Quarantine Act, which is still in force

today, as I speak. The persons in charge were accountable to nobody. Now, it is public and transparent. First of all, the Minister must make an order which is published in the Government Gazette as a General Notice, which is subject to a Motion of Disallowance but which is also subject to Judicial Review or whatever legal action which may be undertaken.

Yes, we can go to Court and challenge the decision and bring hon. Mohamed as an expert witness to explain that R is equal to only .01. And if the Court believes him and does not follow what our experts Dr. Gaud, Dr. Joomaye and Dr. Gujadhur are saying, so be it! There will be a Judge to decide, and we also have a Quarantine Officer who is a doctor; he will be in charge of people who are put in quarantine. I come to what has become the only argument which the Opposition has; too many powers, they say, put in the hands of Government.

Let us be clear. A quarantine person is not a person who is ill. A person who is ill goes to hospital, not to quarantine. So, he is a person who is not a very happy person to be stuck in a hotel. So, this person has a natural tendency, not all, a small number of people who become rowdy, and sometimes it gets out of hand. There is in sections 9 and 10 the duty to disclose information and to provide information.

Let us imagine, I am taking an hypothetical case, a person comes from abroad. He has the Coronavirus; he manages to go through the Ministry of Health at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Airport. He goes to see his family, his relatives, hugs them, kisses them, brings them gifts, goes to a supermarket in Rose Belle, takes a caddy, and goes back home. He knows he has it, because he is coughing, and he comes from England where people have been explaining what it is, but he does not say a word about it. He goes to see a doctor when he is ill. The doctor questions him and he says: 'No, I have never travelled.' The doctor lets him go and the doctor goes to meet other patients and other doctors, until four or five days later he starts having the symptoms, and he says: 'Oh my God! I have got it.'

This person, you finally take him, you bring him to Court, you tell him: 'Under the Quarantine Act, you have given an untrue answer'. What is the fine? Rs1,000? At that supermarket in Rose Belle, a young girl of 20 has gone there, she also bought her *ration*; she falls ill, she thinks she has the flu. When she goes to hospital, it is too late, she dies. The brother of this guy dies. So many people died because of him, and you give him Rs1,000 fine? Because that is the law today! Rs1,000 fine in 1953, as the hon. Attorney General was saying, at a time when a labourer was earning Rs20, Rs10 perhaps. But, of

course, it is a Court which will decide! This chap, he would go two years in prison because the law now punishes him. But, of course, if somebody has committed a very small offence, the Magistrate will give him Rs1,000/Rs2,000, but we need to give sufficient powers to our Courts of Law in order to empower our system of law and, as the Attorney General has explained, as my colleague, the hon. Minister for Transport has explained, there are no additional powers. I heard the First Member for Constituency No. 19 say that. I heard hon. Uteem say that. No additional powers! The First Member for Constituency No. 3 was very careful not to mention it. Hon. Uteem thought perhaps that we did not know, but the Quarantine Act, for 60 years, Police have had the power to arrest a person without warrant. Let's say, if I am walking with hon. Toussaint, I see a man trying to snatch the purse of an old lady, I am not entitled, perhaps me, no, I wouldn't dare, but if I am with hon. Toussaint, I am courageous, I am brave, wouldn't I arrest this chap and bring him to the Police station? I have the power to do it! And the Police Officer does not have the power? This is demagogy. Unfortunately, there are some good honest people of this country who have fallen into that trap. But I hope that we are able to redress that balance and to explain that this is not what the Opposition tries to make us believe.

Very quickly, let me say one or two things. Homage to the young, yes, they have stayed indoors, they have not gone to school; they have not had their friends, except on Skype or whatever it is. No bicycle. It has been tough. *Pas d'entraînement*. We think of the young. We think of the women of this country, who have had to hold that household together for all this time. I listened to the speech of hon. Ms Anquetil; there is a particular situation on domestic violence. I am very impressed by the fact that she did a nonpartisan speech, but for a very specific cause. I talked to my colleague the Minister who is acutely aware of that situation. She has put a 24-hour service at her Ministry. There are two NGOs who have agreed to accept women in their shelters. Because how do they do that with Coronavirus, with social distancing? All this has to be done. I heard the hon. First Member for Constituency No.16 about visitation rights; universal problem. Let me congratulate her; it was her first intervention in Parliament. I do not like this term 'maiden', wholly inappropriate for her, especially. She has had a very happy event. Let me congratulate her and wish her many more to come. I hope that she will continue in that strain in our Parliament.

People are not upset, as hon. Bhagwan and hon. Mohamed try to make it out, that without the curfew, people would have been on the streets; that people are upset because they receive their pensions on their doorsteps! People are upset because Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo is

organising all these distributions of rations? People are upset because of vaccination? People are upset? I do not see that. Clearly, they are disconnected with their own Constituencies. That is the issue!

(Interruptions)

Now, we will not need any protective equipment; we will not require any protection; we will not require any helmet. Our protection is our sincerity. This is what is protecting us!

(Interruptions)

What we are doing, we are giving the front liners the powers, the means. We are giving the front liners, the means to protect themselves, to protect society, to protect our country in order for us to become a prosperous high economy country.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(4.50 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all thank all the hon. Members, from both sides of the House, who have taken the floor and have participated in the debate on what we consider to be two very important Bills that I have presented on Wednesday.

These Bills, Mr Speaker, Sir, are testimony to our resolve to win the battle against COVID-19 and its consequences both on the sanitary and the economic fronts. While the COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill aims at empowering our economy to weather the storm it is facing, save enterprises and jobs and build for a recovery over time, the Quarantine Bill aims at preventing the resurgence of COVID-19 infection and other such pandemics in the future.

In view of the deep, broad and long-lasting consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would have expected a patriotic and apolitical stance from the Opposition.

But I must say that I am quite disappointed at the level of the interventions from the Opposition side. They are totally out of tune with reality.

This was blatantly demonstrated at the beginning of the pandemic where the hon. Leader of the Opposition made the inflammatory statement that thousands of Mauritians were infected by the virus! Hon. Mohamed, on his part, at the beginning of the lockdown, posted on his Facebook page that there would be riots everywhere as the population was starving

whilst the Prime Minister had food at home. This, Mr Speaker, Sir, I consider to be an all-time low from hon. Mohamed.

Perhaps I was a little too optimistic in believing that they would have the wisdom to rise above partisan politics over such a serious matter of national interest and look at the Bills in a dispassionate and objective manner and, of course, come up with constructive and realistic counter-proposals. They still seem to be lost in the sauce of politicking. Instead of an honest and candid debate, we were served with the typical empty rhetoric of the frustrated demagogues and doomsayers, appealing to people's emotions and fear, rather than inspiring and motivating people towards national unity and solidarity in this time of crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been comments made to the effect that I did not meet or consult Members of the Opposition in relation to the measures that we have been taking as a Government. I fail to understand such remarks, as I have conferred with the hon. Leader of the Opposition on several occasions and I consider him to be the rightful representative of the Parliamentary Opposition in its entirety.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members from this side of the House have already given convincing rebuttals to the arguments coming from the Opposition side and, therefore, I do not like to repeat so many of them, but, nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to and take a few points that have been raised, not by many Members but particularly by the Leader of the Opposition, because we need to set the records straight. The Leader of the Opposition stated that this Government is fleecing the population and he went on to accuse us of ditching out public money in favour of the big earners of the private sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is a fact and history bears testimony to what had already been done in the past, that the Labour-PMSD Government were the ones which fleeced the population so much so that they delivered absolute poverty in this country. Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition how in 2006/2007 the Rupee was massively depreciated by 20% and this impacted dramatically on commodity prices and inflation. The purchasing power of the population was depleted and instead of redressing the situation through adequate salary compensation based on the rate of inflation, what they did, Mr Speaker, Sir, was that they came forward with what I call a gimmick called the National Pay Council to deprive workers and employees of their dues. I do not want to dwell more on this, but suffice it to say it was a gimmick. First of all, there was no discussion at all. There was - probably hon. Mohamed would remember - a formula that was applied to divide inflation by two, and that

was done by an officer of the National Pay Council. This is what we call tripartite, version of Labour-PMSD.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, they came up with anti-worker labour laws that gave employers the power to fire '*sans vergogne*'. The Minister of Labour explained in his speech how the rights of workers were squashed, be it in terms of the right to strike or in the advent of redundancy and with regard to payments of overtime and shift work. And this came at a time when the country was not even facing any such crisis, not a crisis like that we are facing today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritians have certainly not forgotten the repressive taxes that the Labour-PMSD Government introduced during their tenure. I am here referring to the National Residential Property Tax, tax on interests, tax on cooperative societies, and so on.

At the same time, they were proclaiming that there was no other alternative. You remember the famous TINA? There is no alternative. And I proved them wrong, Mr Speaker, Sir, because thereafter I reintroduced the tripartite mechanism to determine salary compensation based on the rate of inflation. As Minister of Finance, during my various mandates, we have been paying yearly salary compensations well above the rate of inflation. I also abolished all the taxes that they had introduced. We amended the Labour laws to redress the miseries that were caused to workers and employees and to establish their rights. We introduced the Minimum Wage to ensure that no full-time worker earns less than Rs9,000, and now Rs10,200. We introduced the Negative Income Tax allocation and subsistence allowance, and so many other measures. We have increased the Basic Retirement Pension to Rs5,000, and now it has reached Rs9,400, and all these were intended to support our most vulnerable citizens. And now they are saying that we are anti those who are vulnerable.

Let me refresh the memory of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and refer him to a correspondence of the then Member of Parliament of the Labour Party, Nita Deerpalsing, who was also Vice-Chairperson of the *Commission pour la Démocratisation de l'Économie*. She sent a letter to the then Prime Minister. Let me quote what she said –

“Since this Government - the Labour-PMSD Government - took office, it has been a one-way street towards the economic elite in terms of hand-outs”.

A member of their own party, can you imagine, writing to their Prime Minister, saying that the Government is looking in only one direction, towards the economic elite! And they are pointing fingers at us now! Let me request the Leader of the Opposition to be cautious while

levelling the accusations against us because the truth about the Labour-PMSD Government is on record to demonstrate how they skewed their policies to favour the economic elite as stated by MP Deerpalsing.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition alleged, in his superficial reckoning, our lack of consideration for the rights of our people during the curfew period.

I would say these are really baseless allegations, and let me again remind the Leader of the Opposition that the Government has all along been very sensitive to the adverse impacts of COVID-19 and of the resulting drastic economic downturn, particularly on the most vulnerable families. In order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and of the containment measures on the population and to reduce their hardship, Government has come up with a host of measures which included, and it is good that I repeat them again –

- (i) maintaining all essential services;
- (ii) distribution of basic food items to shelters, homes, charitable institutions and to families who are on the Social Register of Mauritius;
- (iii) allowing people to go out during the curfew to avail themselves of urgent medical treatment, essential supplies, foodstuff and medical and other items essential for their subsistence of livelihood;
- (iv) introduction of COVID-19 Wage Support Scheme to provide financial support to employees becoming technically unemployed on a temporary basis;
- (v) introduction of the Self-employed Assistance Scheme for those in the informal sector - and I am not going to repeat what has happened. In fact, hon. Ganoo clearly spoke about this the other day with regard to Stimulus Package.
- (vi) opening of supermarkets, hypermarkets and retail shops, with shopping allowed in alphabetical order and subject to strict sanitary conditions;
- (vii) operation of online platforms for purchase of limited goods from authorised dealers;
- (viii) setting up of COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to finance projects and programmes that are related to COVID-19 and to provide also financial support to persons and organisations that have been affected by COVID-19;
- (ix) introduction of price control on hand sanitizers, respirators, masks and on

certain identified essential food items and sanitary products;

- (x) ensuring adequate supply of basic commodities by the Agricultural Marketing Board;
- (xi) use of distance and online media for schooling purposes;
- (xii) payment of child allowance to all families on the Social Register of Mauritius;
- (xiii) arrangements for carers looking after elderly and persons with disabilities to also provide them with amenities, including food items and medicines; and
- (xiv) payment of old age pension, beneficiaries of social aid, including persons with disabilities, pension to ex-Service men at the place of residence of the beneficiaries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these measures have been widely acclaimed by the population. That is the plain and simple truth. People recognise that we have once again demonstrated that we are a caring Government. This is in sharp contrast with the actions of the Labour-PMSD Government which did not give a single cent as financial support to the informal sector in two Stimulus Packages that were presented in 2008 and 2009, and today the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Xavier Duval and hon. Shakeel Mohamed dare to point their fingers at us!

Mr Speaker, Sir, their blatant demagogy is saddening for our democracy. Hon. Duval and hon. Mohamed also accused Government of exposing workers to health risks by requiring them to attend work during the curfew period without taking adequate preventive measures at the workplace.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I must say, appropriate instructions were issued to all public sector organisations to implement the recommended preventive measures so as to protect the health of all employees at the workplace, as recommended by the International Labour Organisation. Similar sanitary protocol approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness has also been implemented in the private sector.

And in addition, the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms has issued a comprehensive circular to all Ministries and Departments, providing guidance for the phased resumption of activities, including sanitary rules to be followed at the workplace and the setting up of COVID-19 Dedicated Response Team in all Ministries/Departments with view to protecting the health of all employees.

Let me also reassure all workers that a regulation under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2005 is currently being finalised. This regulation aims at ensuring that sanitary and safety and health measures are put in place by employers for the prevention and management of COVID-19 at workplaces. In case of non-compliance, employers may be subject to prosecution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Duval also said that this Government is putting excessive penalties on people spitting. I firmly condemn this statement and I am shocked by the irresponsibility of the hon. Member. I hope he has taken cognizance of the fact that in the UK, a person died of COVID-19 infection after somebody spat on her a few days earlier. And at any rate, Mr Speaker, Sir, spitting in public is an extremely unhygienic habit and harmful for public health.

In a similar vein, four hon. Members sent to me a letter on behalf of the Labour party, requesting that people be allowed to meet for prayers. As you said earlier to one intervener - I will not go deep into it. But suffice to say that it is in blatant contradiction with the Leader of the Opposition's stance in such matters and sends a very confused message from the opposite side of the House. It also makes me wonder, Mr Speaker, Sir, if some Members of the Opposition really understand the seriousness of COVID-19 virus and how best to tackle it. And these are the very people claiming that they would have done a much better job. I think Labour and PMSD do not have a brilliant track record on crisis management.

The disaster which ensued as a result of the 1999 riots, when the then Prime Minister disappeared for 72 hours is still, I think, fresh in our minds!

(Interruptions)

He was in confinement? Already?

I would have expected - because I see the hon. Leader of the Opposition is telling me that he has been writing to me. Yes, I received his letter. I have been seeing what he has been writing - the former Prime Minister, who is a Doctor, to walk his talk, and engage himself actively in some way in the war against the virus. He chose instead to remain in his comfort zone and just criticised. That also reminds me how the former Prime Minister and Doctor who took the Hippocratic Oath did not stop his car when passing by the site of a fatal road accident that involved a bus on 03 May 2013 that caused 10 deaths.

(Interruptions)

Yes, the Leader of the Opposition had stopped, had given a helping hand. There is testimony of

that.

(Interruptions)

But he is giving lessons from home! We also know how the Labour-PMSD Government acted irresponsibly when the region of Port Louis was submerged by a flash flood on 30 March 2013 causing as many as 11 deaths and they failed utterly, and that is the bare truth that cannot be denied. I shudder at the thought of what our country would have had to endure had they been at its helm now. There would no doubt have been a chorus of ‘Cry my Beloved Country!’

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition also alleged that the Government failed to give due attention to Mauritians stranded abroad during the curfew period. Let me here and now restate that the Government has all along been very sensitive to the plight of all our compatriots who were stranded abroad and has acted with much foresight. In fact, Mauritius was one of the first countries to have repatriated its citizens from Wuhan on Sunday 02 February 2020, with the precious assistance of the Chinese and the French authorities. It is pertinent to remind that we did it well before the COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. And as at date, we have already repatriated 1,195 Mauritians from different parts of the world.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been a huge outcry from the Opposition about the supposed repressive nature of the Quarantine Bill and the arrest also of one Ms Seenauth.

Regarding the former, we heard Members from the other side expressing their concerns about clause 11 of the Quarantine Bill, which is empowering a Police Officer to enter premises and arrest, without a warrant, a person whom he has reasonable cause to believe has committed an offence under the Act.

I must say that their fear and concerns are totally unjustified as has been abundantly demonstrated by both the Attorney General and the Deputy Prime Minister. So, I shall not dwell further on that because we all know that, under the Police Act, the Police already have the power of arrest without warrant. As has been stated, a normal citizen also has such power when an offence is being committed.

Let us be honest, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Police Act and the District and Intermediate Courts Act have outlived successive Governments. As I said before, provisions of arrests without warrant exist since many decades. Yet, I had not heard any Member of the Opposition till this week saying that we had a Police State in Mauritius. Either they are aware of the provisions of the law but are deliberately being demagogic or they are ignorant but still are trying to fuel false information in an attempt to poison the minds of the people.

Concerning the arrest of Ms Seenauth, Members of the Opposition declared that this was arbitrary as she was making a joke. Let me table the post - maybe some of you have not read - of that lady for the hon. Members' perusal, and I specifically draw their attention to the last line of the post. And I am sure that no one in his right mind would find it funny to be treated as such.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that our front liners deserve our gratitude and respect for their outstanding work during this crisis. Our Police Force must be the biggest upholders of the law and civil liberties, but they must also have some degree of protection whilst carrying out their duties.

Hon. Mohamed put to shame the hard work and dedication of nurses, doctors and non-medical staff when he said that there was no treatment for the COVID-19, thus implying that the contribution of these front liners was nil. All those patients, even those who came out of the ICU, recovered as if without any treatment. What a shame, Mr Speaker, Sir!

It is clear that this Opposition spares no one in its dirty attacks, not even front liners. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of the MMM should think twice before pretending to be the biggest proponents of human rights. Let me remind them that their leader, during his brief spell as Prime Minister, sent the SMF to counter helpless women workers in the Export Processing Zone who were voicing out their grudges at their workplace together with their trade union representatives. Hon. Bérenger then said, I quote –

“Riot Unit pas là pou prepar biberon.”

(Interruptions)

Regarding the rights of workers, several Members on the Opposition side have been stating that Government is curtailing the rights of workers. And I was asked by hon. Bérenger, today, to take a commitment that this is not going to be indefinite. Let me reassure all workers and employees of this country that the measures we are taking today on the labour front, with amendments to the labour laws, are temporary.

(Interruptions)

We are certainly not dismantling the rights of workers like the Labour-PMSD Government did in 2008 when even the Termination of Contracts Service Board was scrapped to allow employers to fire workers according to their whims and caprices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to the statement of hon. Mohamed with regard to the

Night Shift Allowance. I wonder whether the hon. Member is not suffering from selective amnesia. Allow me to refresh his memory. It is he, as the then Minister of Labour, who introduced a Night Shift Allowance of 10%, but he never cared to have that section of the law proclaimed. Can you imagine? It is only with the enactment of the Workers' Rights Act in 2019 by this Government that workers became eligible to a Night Shift Allowance of 15% for work performed at night.

Criticisms have also been levelled by Members of the Opposition on the measure relating to the reduction of workforce under section 72(a) of the Workers' Rights Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is unacceptable that hon. Members of the Opposition are attacking the integrity of the Redundancy Board, which is an independent institution. The Redundancy Board will determine all cases referred to under section 72(a) as any other case of reduction of workforce. We have not given a licence to terminate employment as was done in 2008. In fact, the Redundancy Board set up under the Workers' Rights Act is a safeguard against abusive termination of employment. We all remember how it used to be before. For economic reasons, you could fire.

Let me also remind Members of the Opposition that, far from what is being portrayed, the workers whose termination of employment would be considered as justified by the Board will not be paid only the 30 days' wages in lieu of notice. They will, in addition, be paid a pro-rated End of Year Bonus, remaining balance of annual leave and, Mr Speaker, Sir, their employers would have to pay, under the PRGF, the contribution of 4.5% remuneration to the MRA for their whole length of service. So, we should stop being demagogical and instilling poison in the minds of the people.

Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, the new measure regarding overtime will not penalise workers. They will either be paid overtime or be granted paid time off. In the event they have not been able to take their time off, the workers will be guaranteed payment of overtime at appropriate rate.

With regard to annual leave, I would like here to reiterate that all the workers who have worked during the confinement period will benefit from the totality of their annual leave entitlement. However, those who have not been working during the period of confinement will benefit 23 days annual leave from January 2020 to November 2021. The efforts which the workers are being called upon to make will be one of the determining factors that will also contribute to job preservation.

Concerning the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund (PRGF), I would like to point out that although the payment of contribution will be postponed - and I repeat again, it is being postponed - to a date to be prescribed, the employers will not be debarred from any of their obligations in respect of payment of gratuity on retirement or payment of contribution on cessation or termination of employment which may occur before the new date of contribution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, history is there to testify that when Sir Anerood Jugnauth as Prime Minister took bold and necessary measures in the national interest some people including the present leader of the MMM criticized him vehemently. But time has demonstrated that he was right and those decisions contributed in delivering the economic miracle that was acclaimed worldwide. Similarly, I am convinced that the efforts that we are asking everyone to make today, employers and employees alike, at this critical juncture, will go towards building a solid economy and society for the future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also been accused of not holding consultations with Trade Unions. I wish to inform Members of the Opposition that, in the spirit of social dialogue, as advocated by ILO, my colleague, the Minister of Labour did hold consultations with the Trade Unions on Tuesday 19 March and on Wednesday 29 April this year, and the Minister, together with four colleagues Ministers, met the representatives of workers again.

I would like to remind Members of the Opposition of severe criticisms by the Trade Unions in 2008 to the effect that there were no proper consultations before the Employment Rights Act was introduced in the National Assembly by the then Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding criticisms concerning the right to strike, I wish to refer hon. Mohamed to the provision of the Employment Relations Act enacted by the Labour and PMSD Government in 2008, regarding compulsory arbitration in some specific sectors.

I have also heard vociferous hue and cry regarding the proposed amendments to the Bank of Mauritius Act, whereby the Central Bank will contribute to the recovery of our economy. Mr Speaker, Sir, what is being proposed in the Bill is not a novelty. Many countries, including the United States of America, United Kingdom, India, Japan, Seychelles and South Africa have also resorted to similar measures to support the recovery of their economy from the Covid-19 shock.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is apposite to note that Central Banks have not only provided support to Government but also to households and private sector, for example:

- the Reserve Bank of India has taken several measures to ease the tax compliance burden across a range of sectors, including postponing some tax-filing and other compliance deadlines. It has also provided relief to both borrowers and lenders, by allowing companies a three-month moratorium on loan repayments and the Securities and Exchange Board of India has temporarily relaxed the norms related to debt default on rated instruments, and
- the Monetary Authority of Singapore is easing its exchange rate policy and has announced measures to help SMEs and individuals facing temporary cash-flow difficulties.

Coming back to the situation in our country, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very strange that after so many years sitting in various governments hon. Duval has suddenly realised, and is protesting against the fact that the Bank of Mauritius is not accountable to the National Assembly. It is only now that he has discovered that.

Furthermore, hon. Duval has also seemingly forgotten that when he was Minister of Finance in October 2011, an amount of Rs1 billion was transferred from the Special Reserve Fund of the Bank of Mauritius to credit the Accountant General's account.

(Interruptions)

He was Leader of the Opposition. He put a PNQ to me. I had replied and you will see that that reply is contained in my answer and I am repeating it again today.

(Interruptions)

I will repeat again, Mr Speaker, Sir, because they are saying that the Bank of Mauritius has become a tool in the hands of the Government. He also nominated, when he was Minister of Finance, his advisor to sit on the Monetary Policy Committee. This was '*inedit*', Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

They should be the last persons to talk about the independence of the Bank of Mauritius.

I must say hon. Bérenger *ne fut pas non plus en reste*. In 2002, when he was Minister of Finance, although the profit of the Bank for that year was Rs1.2 billion, a higher amount of Rs1.5 billion was paid to Government by writing back an amount of Rs0.3 billion from the reserves.

Again, in 2003, an amount of Rs1.5 billion was paid, when the Bank had only made a profit of Rs750 m, again, by writing back an amount of Rs750 m out of the reserves of the Bank.

Mais la cerise sur le gâteau, M. le président, is the statement - it has been referred by hon. Padayachy earlier - made by Mr Rama Sithanen, the spokesperson of the Labour Party on economic matters. What did he say in the Mauritius Times' edition of 12 May, and I quote and it is worth quoting again: 'The Minister of Finance simply has no choice than to depend on the two reserves of the Central Bank and on its electronic money transfer machine to save the country from both an economic and a social crisis. All countries are doing it.' Unquote. I unquote here because those who have read the rest, it is even more, I would say, *épicé*.

Let me ask the Members of the Opposition once again to carefully weigh their accusations before making them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the scope and application of the proposed amendment to the Landlord and Tenant Act, as already explained by hon. Obeegadoo, the relief being provided by Clause 30 of the Bill will apply to all tenants of all premises, whether business or residential, let under the Act or any other enactment.

I shall propose an additional amendment to Clause 30 at Committee stage so as to bring further clarification on this matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that there has been a lack of transparency on the part of Government in the management of the crisis.

Really, the House is fully aware that my Government has all along been managing the crisis in a very transparent manner. We have been holding daily briefings to keep the population informed on the evolution of the COVID-19 situation both at national and international levels. Moreover, on several occasions, I addressed the Nation to inform the public of the evolution of the COVID-19 and of major decisions that were taken by Government to contain its spread. I have chaired the National Strategic Covid-19 committee on a daily basis and, Mr Speaker, Sir, Dr. Musango, the World Health Organisation Representative in Mauritius, towards whom hon. Duval has shown a shameful lack of respect and courtesy, attended all of these meetings and has assisted the Government in our handling of the crisis. I say thank you to Dr. Musango. He is a witness, in fact, to all government actions and decisions relating to the epidemic and has been relaying every information to the WHO.

Mr Speaker Sir, I also need to correct a statement made by hon. Duval who, in his intervention on Wednesday last, said that the Independent Police Complaints Commission is shut down at a time like this with no provision for it to hold meetings even by audio-visual means.

Let me say that this statement is totally false as the Commission has indeed been operating during the curfew period with a skeleton staff, yes, since Wednesday 08 April 2020, and has been attending to all cases and complaints referred to it. In fact, a total of 15 cases were received during the period Monday 20 April to Thursday 14 May 2020, out of which two have already been settled and investigation is ongoing on the remaining ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition alleging that, during the curfew period, the Government has been managing the affairs of the State by Regulations alone and that, therefore, there was a lack of accountability.

As the House is aware, all Regulations made by Ministers are already subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, as provided under section 122 of the Constitution and section 22 of the IGCA. In fact, in the past, this provision has often been used by the Opposition to challenge Regulations made by Ministers.

I would also like to add that all the Regulations that were made during the curfew period were premised on the parent Acts that is the Public Health Act and the Quarantine Act. Moreover, all Government actions were –

- (i) carried out in accordance with the law;
- (ii) respectful of the constitutional rights of our citizens;
- (iii) directed towards a legitimate objective of general interest;
- (iv) applied in a non-discriminatory manner, and
- (v) were limited in duration, and above all with a view to protecting the health of the people.

Now, *on a été reproché de ne pas avoir donné assez de temps pour que les membres de l'opposition puissent avoir le temps d'étudier les projets de loi et de consulter, etc.* M. le président, these are like times of war -, and I fail to understand whether the Opposition really does realise in what situation we were and we are still in. Not only us, the world - you put your rifle on the side, you sit down and you say, let us come and discuss and see what is happening. In the meantime, you find so many bullets already killing you. We are in a time

of war. We need to act fast. We do not have time for lengthy consultations, discussions and trying to get consensus, and then we have not had similar situations. I would not go into instances where Bills have been introduced and debated in very short period of time.

Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that on 09 April 2013, the Banking (Amendment) Act 2013 was rushed in all its stages within a day in the National Assembly. Within a day! And now, we are giving little time to debate on this. It is a lengthy Bill, yes, with so many clauses. But let me say, many of the clauses that are being amended are to give more time to people to do one thing, for people to be able to pay for bills and so on, for extension of licences. Many amendments are related to these issues. They are to the layback, yes, to income tax, insolvency. There are a number of provisions where, of course, we need to have an in-depth study. But when we look at what is being done in other countries, I must say here, there was – and I am not criticizing - I am just saying that there was, earlier, a request from the Opposition for Parliament to sit either here with limited numbers from both sides or elsewhere. We have been working - since hon. Speaker, you, yourself, you adjourned Parliament – to see to it how at the earliest Parliament can sit, and I must say, we on this side, we were more in favour of allowing each and every Member to be present because it is above all, first and foremost the right of every Member to be in the House to participate in the work of this august Assembly, and we managed to do it. I think, I understand that hon. Speaker, yourself, have had consultations with all parties and we have agreed with this present disposition.

So, we must be realistic and we must understand that we are not in a normal situation, otherwise, we will not be amending Standing Orders and sitting while addressing the Chair and wearing masks and keeping social distancing and so on. We have unjustly been accused, and not one time, of being afraid of calling Parliament and sitting. Well, I am not afraid. If we have to compare what has happened in the past, and I do not think we can forget that there was a time when the then Prime Minister and the then Leader of the Opposition, hon. Bérenger, had colluded for Parliament not to sit for nine months.

(Interruptions)

Nine months in a year, Mr Speaker, Sir! I hope that we are not being criticised for a situation which has arisen whereby Parliament could not sit, but I am happy that, at the earliest, we have been able to resume our work.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated in my second reading speech, I shall move for certain

amendments to the COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No I of 2020) at Committee stage. These changes relate to clauses 7, 8, 15, 24, 30, 47, 57 and 58.

These proposed amendments, including the additional amendments, have already been circulated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have come a long way since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and we have no doubt succeeded in our efforts to contain its spread. We have been doing everything we can and we could, as a responsible and truly caring Government, to protect the whole population, with particular attention, of course, to those most at risk. These two Bills demonstrate our concerns, commitment and determination to save lives and livelihoods in the face of this existential threat that is the COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I explained in my speech, the main object of these two Bills is to strengthen our preparedness for and response to COVID-19 and to any future pandemic. We are in an unprecedented situation facing an invisible killer virus. Exceptional circumstances require exceptional measures, and this is precisely what these two Bills purport to do. Our aim is to ensure that Mauritius has a modern and appropriate legal framework to cope with any future COVID-like situation and at the same time mitigate the hardship on the population and facilitate economic recovery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have successfully managed this COVID-19 crisis with the result that we have seen a consistent fall in the rate of infection to the point where we have not been having any new case for the past eighteen consecutive days. Moreover, we do not have any active case at the moment.

Our response to the pandemic has been guided by scientific advice and motivated by the sole and sincere wish to protect public health, which remains our priority. Government wants, at all costs, and by all means, to avoid a resurgence of the disease in guise of a second wave. Hence, the decision to extend the curfew and the progressive reopening of economic and other activities with the strict sanitary and other measures embodied in these two Bills and those that are to be prescribed by way of Regulations to be made after the passing of the COVID-19 Bill. I must also say that, although we have succeeded in keeping COVID-19 at bay, we are not yet out of the woods. A resurgence is not theoretical. It is not far-fetched and we must remain on high alert. Any relaxation in our vigilance may result in the loss of the gains we so painstakingly and laboriously achieved thanks to the curfew and other powerful measures.

The measures we have proposed in these Bills are vital for our survival as a nation. It is extremely important that we manage the transition from the curfew very carefully by strengthening our surveillance control and health system preparedness. This is precisely what the Bills purport to achieve. I am sure that hon. Members are aware that some countries, which under-estimated the killer virus and eased their lockdown prematurely, are today paying a very heavy price in terms of the fatalities resulting from a resurgence of the disease and in terms also of the impact on their economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, the global phenomenon of COVID-19 poses an enormous challenge for and to all of us. Our public policy response to COVID-19 has been quite instructive. We had to make quick decisions and work ceaselessly and tirelessly to finally succeed in staving-off the spread of the virus in our country. And we have gained in experience to further improve our level of preparedness for a pandemic, and these have precisely been embodied in the two Bills we have been discussing in the past two days. Some other preparedness measures will be included in the Public Health Bill which, as I indicated, is in the pipeline.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the economic cost of the COVID-19 is very high indeed, but that was inevitable. Recovery will depend to some extent on how the COVID-19 situation evolves in our main markets.

Our fellow citizens from Rodrigues and Agaléga were thankfully spared from this virus. However, economic activities also stopped as they have also been under the curfew order until 15 April 2020. This is why we extended the Wage Assistance Scheme and the Self Employed Assistance Scheme to them up to that date.

COVID-19 has drastically changed our way of life. Old habits will have to make way for the new 'normal'. The adjustments we have had to make in the National Assembly, as I said, constitute an example of such changes. We have to be realistic and pragmatic in our approach and policy response while respecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of all our citizens. I dare say that our country more than ever does neither need nor does it wish to heed prophets of doom, from whichever quarter, who are not, and can never be, at heart's ease to witness a responsible and caring Government at work in the national interest and for the common good.

Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, the impact of the pandemic on the global economy has also been on an unprecedented scale. In fact, it is qualified as being worse than the 2008 financial

crisis, and even greater than the “Great Depression” of the 1930’s.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to once again thank our frontliners in the war against COVID-19. Their precious work will be recognised in due course.

We cannot also forget those of our fellow citizens who lost their lives due to the deadly virus. They will be remembered through a Memorial and Mr Speaker, Sir, the Flacq hospital will be named in memory of late Dr. Bruno Cheong.

(Applause)

Dr. Bruno Cheong has shown his selflessness as a dedicated medical professional.

Mr Speaker Sir, since the very beginning of my political career and well before I became Prime Minister, my primary concern has always been to act in the interest of our country and all its people. Now, faced with this unprecedented situation I have an even stronger resolve to bring us all out of this dire situation and I am determined to succeed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now is not the time for hate speeches and petty squabbles. We must all rise to the occasion for our people and our country. We must work together as one people and one as nation.

Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Applause)

Question put and agreed to.

Bills read a second time and committed.

Mr Speaker: At this stage, I suspend the sitting for some 45 minutes. We have received some amendments.

At 5.52 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 7.06 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE COVID-19 (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

(No. I of 2020)

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 (Companies Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the following amendment –

“in clause 7, in paragraph (b), by deleting subparagraph (i) and replacing it by the following subparagraph –

(i) in subsection (1), by repealing paragraph (b) and replacing it by the following paragraph –

(b) after the balance sheet date of the company not later than 9 months, or not later than such further period as the Registrar may, after the COVID-19 period lapses, determine; and”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 8, in paragraph (b), in the new proposed section 30B, in subsection (1), by deleting the words “section 30B” and replacing them by the words “section 30A”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 to 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15 (Employment Relations Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 15, in paragraph (a), in the proposed new subsection (4), by inserting, after the words “President of the Commission”, the words “, during the COVID-19 period or such further period as may be prescribed,”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 16 to 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24 (Income Tax Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 24 –

(i) in paragraph (c), in the proposed new Sub-part BE –

(A) in section 111Z, by deleting subsections (1), (2) and (3) and replacing them by the following subsections –

(1) Subject to this section, every employer who has benefited from an allowance under the Wage Assistance Scheme shall be liable to pay to the Director-General, in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020, 1 July 2021 or 1 July 2022, as the case may be, the levy specified in subsection (3).

(2) Where the employer referred to in subsection (1) is –

(a) (i) an individual;

(ii) a resident *société*; or

(iii) a company whose accounting period ends on any date during the period starting on 1 May 2020 and ending on 31 December 2020, and starting on 1 May 2021 and ending on 31 December 2021,

the levy shall be payable in respect of the years of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020 and 1 July 2021; or

(b) a company whose accounting period ends on any date during the period starting on 1 January

2021 and ending on 30 April 2021, and starting on 1 January 2022 and ending on 30 April 2022, the levy shall be payable in respect of the years of assessment commencing on 1 July 2021 and 1 July 2022.

(3) (a) In the case of an employer who is an individual, the levy payable under subsection (1) shall –

(i) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme; or

(B) 15 per cent of the gross income derived by him under section 10(1)(b), (c) and (g) after deduction of any expenditure allowable under sections 18, 19 and 24,

whichever is lower; and

(ii) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2021, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme as reduced by the amount of levy payable for the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020; or

(B) 15 per cent of the gross income derived by him under section

10(1)(b), (c) and (g) after deduction of any expenditure allowable under sections 18, 19 and 24,

whichever is lower.

(b) In the case of an employer who is a resident *société* or company referred to in subsection (2)(a)(ii) and (iii), the levy payable under subsection (1) shall –

(i) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme; or

(B) 15 per cent of his chargeable income for levy,

whichever is lower; and

(ii) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2021, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme as reduced by the amount of levy payable for the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2020; or

(B) 15 per cent of his chargeable income for levy,

whichever is lower.

(c) In the case of an employer who is a company referred to in subsection (2)(b), the levy payable under subsection (1) shall –

(i) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2021, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme; or

(B) 15 per cent of his chargeable income for levy,

whichever is lower; and

(ii) in respect of the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2022, be equivalent to –

(A) the total amount paid to him under the Wage Assistance Scheme as reduced by the amount of levy payable for the year of assessment commencing on 1 July 2021; or

(B) 15 per cent of his chargeable income for levy,

whichever is lower.

(B) in section 111ZA, in subsection (1)(b), by deleting the word “tax”;

(ii) in paragraph (f) –

(A) in the proposed new Part XIIB, in section 150B, in subsection (6)(a), by deleting the words “subsection (5)” and replacing them by the words “subsection (4)”;

- (B) in the proposed new Part XIIC, in section 150C, in subsection (1), in the definition of “self-employed”, in paragraph (a)(iv), by deleting the words “trade person” and replacing them by the word “tradesperson”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 24, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 25 to 29 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 30 (Landlord and Tenant Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 30 –

- (i) in paragraph (a), by deleting the proposed new subsection (2A) and replacing it by the following new subsection –

(2A) (a) Notwithstanding this Act, any other enactment or any other agreement, and subject to paragraph (b), non-payment of rent in respect of premises for the months of March 2020, April 2020, May 2020, June 2020, July 2020, August 2020 and such other subsequent month as may be prescribed shall not constitute a breach of a tenancy agreement, provided that the rent for the months of March 2020, April 2020, May 2020, June 2020, July 2020, August 2020 and such other subsequent month as may be prescribed is fully paid, in instalments, by 31 December 2021 or such other date as may be prescribed.

(b) Paragraph (a) shall apply to all premises, whether business or residential premises, let under this Act or under any other enactment.

- (ii) in paragraph (b)(ii), in the proposed new subsection (2), by deleting the words “, the Court shall not make an order under section 16” and replacing them by the words “and any other enactment, a Court shall not make an order under section 16 or under any other enactment”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 30, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 31 to 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 47 (Public Procurement Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 47, in the proposed new subsection (6), by deleting the word “Board” and replacing it by the words “Policy Office”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 47, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 48 to 56 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 57 (Workers’ Rights Act 2019 amended)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in clause 57 –

- (i) by inserting, after paragraph (a), the following new paragraph –
 - (aa) in section 3, in subsection (2)(d), by inserting, after the words “an atypical worker”, the words “and a worker who works from home”;
- (ii) in paragraph (d), by deleting the proposed new subsection (7) and replacing it by the following new subsection –
 - (7) Notwithstanding subsection (6), a worker who is employed on shift work shall, from the commencement of this subsection and until such further period as may be prescribed, not be entitled to any allowance for work performed on night shift.
- (iii) in paragraph (e), in the proposed new section 24A, in subsection (1), by deleting the words “during the COVID-19 period or” and replacing them by the words “from the commencement of this section and until”;

- (iv) in paragraph (f), in the proposed new subsection (12), by deleting paragraph (b) and replacing it by the following paragraph –

(b) Paragraph (a) shall not apply to a worker who has, for the COVID-19 period, performed work during such days as required by his employer.

- (v) by deleting paragraph (l) and replacing it by the following paragraph –

(l) in section 84, in subsection (1) –

(i) in subparagraph (a)(ii), by inserting, after the words “section 64(1),”, the words “(1A),”;

(ii) by inserting, after paragraph (b), the following new paragraph –

(ba) where he proceeds on leave without pay pursuant to an order made by the Board under section 72A(5) and he has not taken any other employment during that period of leave without pay;

- (vi) by inserting, after paragraph (o), the following new paragraph –

(oa) in section 127, by inserting, after subsection (6), the following new subsection –

(6A) (a) Where a worker retires or dies on or after 1 January 2020 and where no contribution is made in respect of the worker by his employer under section 94, 95, 96 or 97, as applicable, any gratuity to the worker or to his legal heirs shall, notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, be paid by his employer and the amount of such gratuity shall be calculated in such manner as may be prescribed.

(b) Where a worker resigns, or the employment of a worker is terminated, on or after 1 January 2020, and where no contribution is made in respect of the worker by his employer under section 94, 95, 96 or 97, as applicable, any contribution to be made by his employer to the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund shall be calculated at such rate as may be prescribed.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 57, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 58 (Commencement)

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“by deleting clause 58 and replacing it by the following clause –

58. Commencement

(1) Sections 2 to 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 to 20, 21(a)(ii), 22, 23, 24 except for sections 150B(12) and 150C(9), 25 to 30, 32 to 40, 42, 44, 46(b), 47, 48, 50 to 52, 53(b) and (c), 54, 55, and 57(a) to (c), (f) to (n) and (p) shall be deemed to have come into operation on 23 March 2020.

(2) Sections 12 and 56 shall be deemed to have come into operation on 24 March 2020.

(3) Section 14(a), (b), (c)(i) and (d) shall be deemed to have come into operation on 19 March 2020.

(4) Section 21(a)(i) and (b) shall be deemed to have come into operation on 1 May 2020.

(5) Section 57(oa) shall be deemed to have come into operation on 1 January 2020.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 58, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

First Schedule

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“in the First Schedule, in the proposed Fifth Schedule, in paragraph 1, by inserting, after the words “5 ,6,”, the words “7,”;”

Amendment agreed to.

First Schedule, as amended, was agreed to.

Second Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Third Schedule

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

The Prime Minister: I move for the following amendment –

“by deleting the Third Schedule and replacing it by the following Third Schedule –

THIRD SCHEDULE

[Section 15(e)]

THIRD SCHEDULE

[Sections 70 and 81]

PART I

Air traffic control

Air transport services

Civil aviation and airport, including ground handling and ancillary services

Health

Hospital

Port, including cargo handling services and other related activities in the ports including loading, unloading, shifting, storage, receipt and delivery, transportation and distribution, as specified in section 36 of the Ports Act

PART II

Air traffic control

Air transport services

Civil aviation and airport, including ground handling and ancillary services

Customs

Electricity

Health

Hotel services

Hospital

Port, including cargo handling services and other related activities in the ports including loading, unloading, shifting, storage, receipt and delivery, transportation and distribution, as specified in section 36 of the Ports Act

Radio and television

Refuse disposal

Telephone

Transport of passengers and goods

Water supply

Third Schedule, as amended, was agreed to.

Fourth Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

THE QUARANTINE BILL

(NO. II OF 2020)

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Quarantine Bill (No. II of 2020) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. 1 of 2020) was read a third time and passed.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move for a division.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I object to this motion as there is no necessity to move because the ayes have it and, therefore, it is going to be a waste of time for the House.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: The objection by the Prime Minister does not stand good according to Standing Orders. Our request is very straightforward and nowhere does the Standing Order say that he can object to it on that particular ground. It is not for him to object.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may. I refer to Standing Order 51(2), and I read –

“If Mr Speaker or the Chairman is of opinion that (...).”

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I am making my point. So...

Mr Mohamed: You are scared!

The Prime Minister: Of you?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let us listen!

The Prime Minister: So, I am referring to section 51(2) –

“If the Speaker or the Chairperson is of opinion that a division is unnecessarily claimed, he or she may, as soon as the division bells have ceased to ring, take the votes of the Assembly by calling successively upon those Members who support and upon the Members who challenge his or her decision to rise in their places, and may thereupon, as he or she thinks fit, either declare the determination of the Assembly or direct the Clerk to proceed as in sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph (1) of this Order.”

Mr Speaker: So, the ayes can stand up and we will see what is the majority.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, before you decide on this particular issue, there is another reason why the division of votes is sought for. And the reason why it is sought for is the following, and after you have heard our arguments, you have heard the hon. Prime Minister, then you can decide. The only reason ...

(Interruptions)

That is the Standing Orders. The other reason why we ask for a division of votes is very simple. It is that there are ...

(Interruptions)

I am making my point, why are you so afraid?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Go ahead with your point!

Mr Mohamed: There are two grounds. Number one, the Prime Minister has not been able to demonstrate in any way whatsoever why it is not required for the division of votes. He just simply read the Standing Orders and nothing more.

Secondly, there is within this particular legislation that is being passed, the Landlord and Tenant Act, and the Landlord and Tenant Act makes reference to certain amendments that require to bear in mind section 8 of the Constitution of Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

Let me go on. There is section 8 of the Constitution of Mauritius that states - it is about deprivation of property. So, therefore, in order for this legislation to pass, it requires to stand the Constitutional test, and to do so within the National Assembly, it has to go for the division of votes because, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you, as the person presiding over this session, later on another institution may be called upon to decide whether this particular law had obtained the necessary majority in order to satisfy the Constitutional test, hence the need for a division of votes. So, this is a very specific matter because of section 8 of the Constitution, because there is a deprivation of property.

Mr Speaker: Okay, you made your point, hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: That is the very reason. Now, if the other side...

Mr Speaker: You made your point already!

Mr Mohamed: I am not shocked!

Mr Speaker: You made your point! So, my ruling would be those in favour of the Bill just stand up and let me see the majority.

(Members rose in their places)

Please be seated! I am satisfied there is a majority.

The Ayes have it.

On motion made and seconded, the Quarantine Bill (No. II of 2020) was read a third time and passed.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move for a division.

Mr Speaker: There is a motion for a division of votes for the Quarantine Bill also. We will proceed the same way. Those in favour of this Bill please stand up and let me see the majority.

(Members rose in their places)

Please be seated! I am satisfied there is a majority.

The Ayes have it.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday 04 June 2020 at 5.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

(07.23 p.m.)

BAKERY & IRONMONGERY - ACCESS

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, merci de me donner la parole. Je voudrais soulever un point qui préoccupe une très grande majorité de Mauriciens. Il s'agit de la décision de permettre à la population d'aller à la

boulangerie et à la quincaillerie par ordre alphabétique. Cela causera de gros inconvénient surtout avec la reprise partielle des activités dans le pays depuis ce matin. En gros, le gouvernement demande à la population d'acheter du pain frais rien que deux fois la semaine. Comment doivent faire tous ces travailleurs surtout du secteur informel qui ont pour habitude de manger du pain à midi ? Doivent-ils M. le président, *mange du pain rassis* ?

Je fais une requête au gouvernement pour revoir cette décision et de permettre aux mauriciens de pouvoir acheter leur pain tous les matins. Et en même temps, les propriétaires des boulangeries ont la responsabilité, M. le président, de faire respecter impérativement la distanciation sociale de même que le port du masque. Dans la même foulée, je trouve aberrant de demander à la population de partir également à la quincaillerie par ordre alphabétique.

Par exemple, dans mon cas, si un robinet venait à se casser chez moi, si je dois me procurer du matériel en urgence, dois-je attendre que ce soit mon jour, et comment font ces plombiers, peintres et autres ouvriers qui se retrouvent à court de matériaux ? Doivent-ils rester sans bosser jusqu'à ce qu'ils puissent partir à la quincaillerie, M. le président ?

Donc, je fais un appel au bon sens du gouvernement afin de permettre aux mauriciennes et mauriciens d'avoir accès aux boulangeries et quincailleries, tous les jours, tout en respectant les consignes sanitaires.

Merci.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as it has been amply debated and said in this House, we are not in a normal situation. I think everybody who can reason out and who can see what is happening in Mauritius and elsewhere would realise that we started with a complete lockdown and then phases after phases we have started to relax a number of activities. *Boulangeries, quincailleries*, they now are able to start their economic activity. Although they were, like *boulangeries* they were already producing bread, but they were not able to sell at the place where they were manufacturing bread. They were able to deliver at certain specific places. Now, we have relaxed, but we have relaxed in a controlled manner so that we do not have too many people attending bakeries and going to buy their bread. Of course, it causes inconvenience and we all agree it does cause inconvenience. It did cause the inconvenience, when there was a complete lockdown, when people were not even able to go to the supermarket to buy food, but why did we do this? We did this because our priority was to protect the health of the people. And, therefore, this is the plan; we are relaxing in a

phased manner. There will come a time, of course, when people will be able to go at any time to the bakery or to *quincaillerie* or elsewhere; I hope so. I am very surprised that the hon. Member has not even understood this up to now.

(Interruptions)

This is why we need to spend time to continue to explain.

(Interruptions)

You have raised an issue at Adjournment Time and I am answering, and now, you are starting to argue. So, I hope there will come a time when you will realise that all those measures that we have put into place have brought results and that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, for 18 consecutive days now, we have not ...

(Interruptions)

19? Well, we are getting no positive cases, and there is hope. As I have said in my summing-up, no one knows whether this virus is still circulating in the community. No one knows! I do not want to go at length into debating again what we have been debating in this House, but, please, let us be careful. Some countries, from 'Staying at home', have now come to a slogan of 'Staying alert'. We are alert all the time and I request people to be conscious of the danger, of the risk. There will come a time, and hopefully, it is going to be sooner than later, when we shall start our normal activities, and normal life will resume.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(7.29 p.m.)

INKERMAN STREET/ARSENAL STREET – MOSQUITO PROLIFERATION

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): A request is addressed to the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change with regard to concerns of residents of Inkerman Street leading to Arsenal Street, which is on the leeward side of the Citadelle Fort, concerning proliferation of mosquitoes, flies due to outgrowth of wild grass and bushes behind their habitations, and the risks that pose to Dengue Fever.

I request the Minister to see to it that the relevant authorities can arrange for disinfection, fumigation, cutting and removal of the wild bushes and grass.

Thank you.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, je prendrai la question avec le département concerné, mais quand même je dois préciser pour la question de fumigation, cela relève de la compétence du ministère de la Santé. Donc, là, il y a tout un protocole qui est suivi. Le travail est déjà en cour dans la région de Port Louis et par le ministère de la Santé et par le *Local Government* et aussi par le ministère de l'Environnement.

De toute façon, je prendrai la question avec les départements concernés pour faire le nécessaire.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(7.30 p.m.)

COVID-19 - MEDICAL BOARD - APPOINTMENTS

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First and foremost, allow me to thank the hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for ensuring that the elderly people were vaccinated and received their pensions at their doorsteps. I would request the hon. Minister, if needful can be done for those who, due to COVID-19, unfortunately could not attend their appointments for the Medical Board and thus they could not benefit for a pension.

So, I request the hon. Minister to please look into the matter.

Thank you.

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may explain briefly. Due to the confinement period, my Ministry unfortunately has had to postpone all the Medical Boards. However, with regard to beneficiaries whose pensions were to be renewed during the confinement period, so as not to penalise them, an administrative decision has been taken to renew their pension on a month-to-month basis.

With regard to new applications, unfortunately, the needful will be done once the confinement is lifted.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - EDUCATORS - SALARIES

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wish to address myself to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. It has been brought to my knowledge that some 150 Educators of Private Secondary Schools have not yet received their salaries from the month of March to date. Most of them have been working for a year.

During a phone conversation that the Secretary of UPSEE had with the Director of the PSEA this morning, the latter replied that School Managers may have delayed or may not have sent the school timetable to justify the working periods of these Educators. He also said that he has to investigate on a case-to-case basis whether these Educators conducted online courses. It would appear that School Managers did send the timetable to the PSEA.

Regarding the issue of online teaching, Mr Speaker, Sir, as other sectors have been provided with wage assistance, it would be inhumane that these Educators be deprived of their salaries.

I am humbly requesting the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to look into the issue and to impress upon the PSEA so that the salaries be paid those Educators.

Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of this issue. In fact, Teachers are paid according to the entitlement of schools. Very often, Managers do not send the timetable in time and so the entitlement cannot be confirmed. But then, for the Teachers that have been mentioned here, the number is about 45.

The others having already been paid salaries have not been paid because it has not been cleared yet as to whether the entitlement of the school is okay or not, but I will certainly look into the matter.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

SHELTERS – RESIDENTS & EMPLOYEES – COVID-19 TEST

(7.33 p.m.)

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My issue is addressed to the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. Could the hon. Minister kindly advise whether provisions are being made to have residents and employees of shelters tested for COVID-19?

Thank you.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. D. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that, indeed, with the collaboration of my colleague Minister of Health and Wellness, the existing protocol for testing residents entering any shelter has now been enhanced to include the COVID-19 test to be carried out. Moreover, there has also been a request made to the Ministry of Health and Wellness to organise testing to be carried out to all employees and residents of all the shelters that fall were under the purview of my Ministry.

Thank you.

(7.35 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

SELF-EMPLOYED – WORK ACCESS PERMIT

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal): Je vous remercie, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au Premier ministre. Beaucoup de *self-employed* et de particuliers qui se sont enregistrés depuis ce lundi et pendant toute la semaine sur le nouveau système numérique ou à travers les CAB attendent leur *Work Access Permit*. Il y a beaucoup d'interrogations et de confusion comme, par exemple, est-ce qu'une personne qui se rend au travail et qui va déposer ses enfants chez leurs grands-parents qui habitent une autre région, auront-ils besoin d'un *WAP* ?

Aussi deuxième et dernière remarque que j'ai entendue. Les personnes qui ont des clients dans les différentes régions de l'île, comment vont-ils procéder ? Je voudrais interpellier le Premier ministre afin que la police, si possible, circule un communiqué pour clarifier ces interrogations.

Merci, M. le président.

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been guidelines which have been set for any applicant in regard to the Work Access Permit. The Permit allows the person to travel from home to the place of work and back home. Therefore, that person must be able

to provide sufficient information but I understand, from what the hon. Member is saying, that now there are cases – of course, there can be cases where there are children who probably have to be left at a relative's place. But it is difficult. How are you going to look into each case one by one and then try to give a permit in regard to each case when the person would be moving?

I shall relay this to the officer to look into it, and if there is any case in particular, let me know, we shall investigate and see. Otherwise, I must also say, because this was raised yesterday also, and I found out that there are a number of people who are not right now eligible to a WAP. Therefore, those applications, of course, are being turned down and those people are now obviously complaining and they have been in touch even with people at my Office, but when I looked at their case and also at a few communications from some people, which I have referred all of them, Mr Speaker, Sir, to my officer to see whether there is any genuine case. I must say that I have had a number of them who are not eligible at this time. So, that is also another category of people, but if you let me know if there is any deserving case, of course, I shall refer the matter to those who are processing the application and for them to see. But I must admit that there are difficult cases. There will be, but we must be able to put a system in place so that there is proper control and I say again that we have put this system in place, not for pleasure. In fact, it constitutes additional work and it is an additional burden on us, on the officers, but because the priority and the prime importance are, let me say again, for preserving and securing the health of the people.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger!

SIVANANDA STREET, VACOAS - DEVIATION

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal): Merci, M. le président. Ma question s'adresse à l'honorable ministre en charge du *Metro Express*. Si le gouvernement ne compte pas aller de l'avant de sitôt avec la Phase II de ce projet étant donné l'avenir économique sombre et incertain que nous prédit le FMI, considérant que ce projet pèse lourd sur la dette nationale, serait-il possible, avec le déconfinement en vue, d'enlever la déviation à l'Avenue Sivananda à Vacoas pour éviter l'accumulation de véhicules au niveau de So'Flo comme cela était le cas avant le confinement.

Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): The hon. Member is assuming that the fate of the Metro will be different from what it has been

predestined to be, Mr Speaker, Sir. As at now, the employees of Larsen and Toubro are already on the site and works will be starting shortly.

With regard to the second part of the complaint raised by the hon. Member, I will look into the matter and see to it if any correct remedy can be brought to this problem which has been raised by the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

ROUTE 15 – ROSE HILL-BELLE MARE – BUS SERVICE

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Alan Ganoo and it concerns the bus service on Route 15 serving Rose Hill to Belle Mare.

There are numerous complaints that buses do not terminate service at Belle Mare and stop at Central Flacq only and this is becoming a recurring issue causing much inconvenience and difficulties to the public, especially during this confinement period. I would thus request the hon. Minister to urgently and kindly look at this matter.

Thank you.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member for having raised the matter with me earlier on, Mr Speaker, Sir. As we are all aware, during the confinement period, the bus service was at a reduced level and as from today things have changed and I will certainly look into the matter and get in touch with the officers of the NLTA on Monday. I can assure the hon. Member that the issue will be looked into.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(7.41 p.m.)

MUNICIPALITY OF PORT LOUIS – SCAVENGERS – PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to raise an issue that concerns the Minister of Local Government but he is not here, but this could be an issue for the Minister of Health and Wellness as well because my request is pertaining to a public health hazard and it

has to do with the protective equipment that the scavengers, *les éboueurs de la municipalité de Port Louis* and I don't know whether elsewhere, are being given to use.

I have with me here the protective mask that the scavengers of the Municipality of Port Louis are still using. It is made of simple cloth, *tetron ou coton* that you buy from the shop and to me – I am not an expert – but this is not compliant to health and safety standards; It tantamounts to a mere eyewash. Earlier the hon. Prime Minister has said that the front liners deserve...

Mr Speaker: Raise the issue!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ... our respect and also no one can tell whether the virus is still around or not. So, my request to both Ministers is to look into this state of affairs and try to resolve this issue as soon as possible because we could be putting these front liners to risk.

Thank you.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, the basic precautions for everybody is mask, sanitising and distancing. We have to apply these universal precautions. There are no specific PPEs that municipality workers have to wear because the transmission is between people. So, it is not a question of having any special equipment for that.

(Interruptions)

I am referring to the WHO recommendation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

(7.43 p.m.)

TAXI DRIVERS – WORK ACCESS PERMIT

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Alan Ganoo. There are some taxi drivers who went to the CAB officers today to register themselves for a Work Access Permit as recommended and it was refused to them, whereas some others got their WAP. They would like to have some more clarification. Is that true that they form part of *services essentiels* as we say because some of them have been given their Work Access Permit whereas some others did not get them?

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I understand that some taxi drivers in different parts of the island have already applied for a Work Access Permit, Mr Speaker and some of them have obtained it.

I will see to it and I will ask my hon. friend to let me have the names of the taxi men in question and we will see how to bring a solution to their problem.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(7.45 p.m.)

FRONT LINERS – RISK ALLOWANCE

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

Given that the whole nation, including everyone sitting here, are utterly grateful to all our front liners for ensuring our well-being, will he consider a risk allowance or any other form of compensation he deems right to all the heroes and heroines who have shielded all of us against the virus.

Thank you, Sir.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, le Premier ministre, dans son discours, l'a précisé qu'on est en train de travailler sur une forme de gratification pour ceux qui ont été en première ligne. Donc, nous travaillions dessus et le Premier ministre va revenir dessus.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tour!

(7.46 p.m.)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 – ELDERLY - VACCINATION

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

My request is addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness. During the vaccination campaign to the elderly in my constituency number four, some bedridden could not be vaccinated.

I would humbly ask the Minister if he could arrange so that these have their vaccine done at home.

Thank you.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, the vaccination for those bedridden is being conducted by the Ministry of Social Security. This is a campaign that is being done every year and it is going on.

I am going to pass on the message.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

(7.46 p.m.)

COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE – CRITICISMS AGAINST OPPOSITION MPS

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to draw the attention of the Prime Minister. Since yesterday evening, we have observed that the Communication Committee provided by your adviser has started making unwarranted attacks on Members of the Opposition. I have seen myself. You can have a copy of the MBC TV.

So, may we know from the Prime Minister whether this Committee set up for COVID, which has done a lot of work communicating, has now been converted into a political platform attacking us, Members of Parliament?

So, the Ministers are supposed to come and explain the different measures taken by Government. I consider it very serious. We are Members of Parliament. I am considering seriously looking at the Standing Orders to come at the next sitting for a motion of privilege according to the Standing Orders. But you cannot have a Committee where you have Ministers which have powers, but also an adviser...

(Interruptions)

I am finishing. I know you are not so I am finishing.

Mr Speaker: Raise the issue.

Mr Bhagwan: I am raising the issue with respect to you. So, I am asking the Prime Minister if you can give directives that Committee to stick to their normal routing, to the work which it has been assigned explaining to the population the different measures of Government not coming criticising us, Members of Parliament unjustly on TV.

So, the Prime Minister can go and verify what has been, I would say, broadcasted on the MBC TV.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now, you are challenging, come on. You are wasting the time.

Mr Bhagwan: I am not wasting the time.

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, it depends how the hon. Member looks at it. I must say that sometimes the truth might be interpreted as if it were an attack. So, the communication cell is here to give as many details as possible, as much information as possible to the public. I take it that we have been communicating to the public all these information that is required. It has been very helpful for people generally to know in what direction we are moving, what are the precautions that have to be taken and also informing the people about the legislation that we are passing, explaining to them why such legislation is required now.

So, I think we have to bear in mind that as much as we can we are providing information and we should not take it as a criticism against any Member of the Opposition.

Mr Bhagwan: *Ena enn finn dimann excuse tout.*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(7.49 p.m.)

MALHERBES - LAND - CLEANING

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

My request is addressed to hon. Dr. Husnood, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management, but he is not here.

I have received many complaints from the inhabitants of Malherbes. There is a land nearby the sports complex of the Ministry of Sports at Malherbes on which bushes have grown and causing inconvenience to the inhabitants with proliferation of rodents and mosquitoes.

I would request the Minister if he could urge the Municipality to clean the land.

Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): I will inform my colleague on this issue.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Foo Kune!

(7.50 p.m.)

PUBLIC TRANSPORT – SOCIAL DISTANCING

Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member of Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, M. le président.

J'aimerais attirer l'attention de l'honorable ministre du transport concernant le transport public en ces temps de reprise partielle. Dans certains endroits, soit les bus sont bondés et les mesures de distanciation sociale ne sont pas respectées, soit dans d'autres les passagers attendent longtemps pour pouvoir rentrer dans un bus qui puisse les accommoder à cause des besoins de distanciation sociale et le nombre de bus est insuffisant.

J'aimerais demander au ministre de bien vouloir faire le nécessaire pour augmenter le nombre de bus et aussi d'assurer que les règles sanitaires sont respectées à tout instant.

Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Speaker.

Everything has been done with regard to the phased resumption of activities as from today, Mr Speaker. In fact, the regulations will be published tomorrow concerning the light rail and the bus transport also.

So, I do not want to go into the details, but I can assure the hon. Member that the NLTA has been in touch with all the operators responsible for the bus service in the country.

It has been explained to them what are their obligations, what are their responsibilities. In fact, the operators have been asked to provide sanitizer and the crew of all public transport will be wearing masks and social distancing in the buses. Stickers have been placed in all the buses where the passengers should not be sitting, and such is the case for the light rail, the right light rail stations and also the best stations, Mr Speaker.

Now, it is a question of enforcing. In the regulations, we have also provided that authorised officers would be allowed to see to it that all these measures are respected. Since today has been the first day, probably in some buses, the sanitary measures have not been affected. Probably, also, it will be mostly in the case of individual operators.

But, as far as NTC and the other bus operators, they are very aware of the situation and, in the coming days, I am sure, the measures will be respected for the security, for the protection of the *public voyageur* and also especially for the crew, for the drivers and the conductors.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, if you would give me one second, since we are live to make an appeal to the public also that they should respect the sanitary measures, that they should know that, as from today, we are living in a different situation and we have to behave differently and be respectful of the *consignes*.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

At 7.54 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Thursday 04 June 2020 at 5.00 p.m.