



SIXTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 03 MAY 2019

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MAURITIUS

Sixth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 05 of 2019

Sitting of 03 May 2019

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis at 3.30 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Curatelle (Amendment) Bill (No. VI of 2019). (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report of the Accountant-General and the Accounts of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for the financial year ended 30 June 2018.
- (c) The Excise (Amendment) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 72 of 2019)
- (d) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 73 of 2019)
- (e) The Statutory Bodies Pension Funds (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 74 of 2019)
- (f) The Income Tax (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 76 of 2019)
- (g) The Registration Duty (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 77 of 2019)
- (h) The Companies (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 79 of 2019)
- (i) The Investment Promotion (Property Development Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 80 of 2019)

B. Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis (Use of Information Technology) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 75 of 2019)

C. Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 70 of 2019)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 71 of 2019)
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 81 of 2019)

D. Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Institutional Reforms

- (a) The Courts (Determination of Prescribed Amount) (Amendment) Regulations 2019. (Government Notice No. 78 of 2019)
- (b) The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial statements of the Law Reform Commission for the year ended 30 June 2018.

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

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

Mr Hurreeram rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(3.06 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE –
ADVISORY OPINION**

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I have two statements to make. In my statement to the House on 26 March 2019, I had indicated that at the request of the British authorities, I had a meeting with the British Prime Minister, the Rt. hon. Theresa May on 18 March 2019 in London.

During that meeting, I underscored the need to rapidly implement the findings of the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of 25 February 2019 on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965. The British Prime Minister stated that the British authorities were still studying the Advisory Opinion and its implications for the UK Government. She also indicated that she would in the near future send a Foreign Office Minister to Mauritius to hold further discussions.

On 27 April 2019, the British High Commissioner called on me to hand over a letter addressed to me by the British Prime Minister. He also informed me that the UK had not yet been able to send a Minister to Mauritius because of discussions on Brexit in the UK, but still wished to do so. On the same day, I received a phone call from the Rt. hon. Jeremy Hunt, UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Both the British Prime Minister, in her letter, and the UK Foreign Secretary, during the phone conversation, conveyed to me that the UK cannot change its position on the Chagos Archipelago as long as it is required for defence purposes. They have both stressed the importance of the military base in Diego Garcia to keep people in Britain safe and for regional and global security.

During the phone conversation, the UK Foreign Secretary stressed that UK's sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago was essential for the continued operation of the base in Diego Garcia. He added that the US held the same view and that a similar message was going to be delivered to me by the US Government.

While expressing the hope that Mauritius and the UK could continue to enjoy good bilateral relations, notwithstanding the Chagos Archipelago issue, he intimated to me that if Mauritius were to proceed with action at the United Nations, this could adversely impact on relations between Mauritius and the UK.

I expressed my deep disappointment to the UK Foreign Secretary at the fact that the UK had gone back to the stand which it had prior to the Advisory Opinion despite the clear and near unanimous findings of the International Court of Justice. I also pointed out to him that Mauritius has on several occasions, including in its submissions to the International Court of Justice, reassured the UK that Mauritius was prepared to enter into a long-term arrangement to accommodate the defence and security needs of the US and the UK. I expressed disappointment that the UK did not consider that offer. I made it clear that, in the circumstances, Mauritius would proceed with the tabling of a draft resolution before the General Assembly.

Regarding our bilateral relations, I indicated to the UK Foreign Secretary that Mauritius was committed to consolidating its relationship with the UK.

The points raised by the UK Prime Minister in her letter and by the UK Foreign Secretary during his phone call have been reiterated in a statement which Sir Alan Duncan, Minister of State for Europe and Americas of the UK, made on 30 April 2019 to the UK House of Commons. That statement clearly shows that the UK Government has decided to ignore the Advisory Opinion. This is in stark contrast to what the UK Attorney General stated during the Brexit debate in the UK House of Commons on 12 March 2019, I quote –

“As an Attorney General I simply could not give countenance to the idea that this country would break its international legal obligations.”

On the same day as Sir Alan Duncan made the statement to the House of Commons, my Office issued a communiqué to condemn the stand of the UK Government.

Madam Speaker, the following points were highlighted in the communiqué –

- (a) Emanating from the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice is an authoritative statement of the law applicable to the conduct of the UK. The Court found that the UK is an unlawful colonizer of the territory of Mauritius, having illegally excised the Chagos Archipelago from the territory of Mauritius prior to its independence.
- (b) The International Court of Justice has clearly stated that the Chagos Archipelago is an integral part of the territory of the Republic of Mauritius, and that it is a legal situation which cannot be questioned or doubted under the rules and principles of international law. It is, therefore, undeniable that the Republic of Mauritius is the sole State lawfully entitled to exercise sovereignty and sovereign rights in relation to the Chagos Archipelago and its maritime zones. The UK cannot and does not have sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.
- (c) The UK Government's flagrant disregard for the Advisory Opinion is an affront to the rule of law, to the African continent and to the United Nations. It will also prevent the resettlement of Mauritians, particularly those of Chagossian origin, in the Chagos Archipelago, thereby perpetuating a historically wrongful act vis-à-vis the forcibly evicted inhabitants of those islands.
- (d) Government considers that the UK's claim in regard to defence and security is completely misplaced. Mauritius has confirmed on various occasions to the United Kingdom and the United States as well as to the United General Assembly and the International Court of Justice that it fully recognises the military base in Diego Garcia and will take no action that would impede its continued operation.
- (e) It is of the utmost importance for respect of international law and human rights that the findings of the International Court of Justice be promptly implemented by the UK Government. Otherwise, disregard for the assertions of the Court would be a dangerous precedence that can result in the total breakdown of international institutions that stand in support of peace and security in the world.

Madam Speaker, I am tabling a copy of the full communiqué.

Madam Speaker, on 01 May, in a letter addressed by the UK Leader of the Opposition to Prime Minister Theresa May and made public in the Guardian, the Leader of the Opposition has condemned the stand taken by the UK Government on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and has made it clear that a Labour Government will respect the findings of the Court.

I commend the UK Leader of the Opposition for his and his Party's commitment to the rule of law both in the UK and abroad, the International Court of Justice and the United Nations, and its commitment to respecting the Advisory Opinion in full.

Madam Speaker, the stand taken by the Labour Party in the UK clearly shows the divide in the country on the serious matter of respect for the rule of law and international institutions. This strengthens our resolve to pursue our struggle for the completion of our decolonisation.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius is working closely with other countries to table shortly before the United Nations General Assembly a draft resolution calling for the implementation of the findings of the International Court of Justice.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(3.17 p.m.)

IMF STAFF REPORT – 2019 ARTICLE IV CONSULTATION

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I have another statement to make.

The IMF Executive Board concluded the 2019 Article IV Consultation with Mauritius at its meeting held on Monday 22 April 2019.

The IMF Staff Report for the 2019 Article IV Consultation was published on 29 April 2019. The report made, *inter alia*, the following observations and recommendations –

First, economic growth momentum remains strong and inflationary pressures have receded. Economic activity is projected to continue at a steady pace.

Second, the fiscal outturn for Financial Year 2017/2018 was broadly in line with the budget.

Third, monetary policy remains accommodative and bank lending has continued to recover amid improving financial conditions.

Fourth, the current account deficit has widened, but the overall balance of payments has remained in surplus.

Fifth, official foreign exchange reserves have increased by about US\$1.4 billion between end-2016 and end-2018

Sixth, financial soundness indicators point to continued financial sector stability.

Seventh, initiatives to foster financial inclusion are underway.

Eighth, activity in the offshore global business sector has been broadly resilient. The vibrant global business sector is entering a transition phase.

Ninth, notable steps have been taken to meet the international anti-tax avoidance initiatives.

Tenth, the fiscal stance will remain expansionary, as several initiatives are undertaken to boost employment and growth.

Eleventh, while both Doing Business and global competitiveness indicators show that Mauritius has made considerable progress along various dimensions and continues to outperform regional peers and other international competitors, most notably in technological readiness, innovation, infrastructure, higher education and training, labour market efficiency, and institutional quality.

Twelfth, Mauritius aspires to become a regional hub for Fintech activities.

Thirteenth, improvements in fiscal transparency and public investment management will also help to preserve debt sustainability.

Fourteenth, the Debt Sustainability Analysis under the baseline scenario indicates that Mauritius' public debt level is sustainable.

According to the Report, several challenges confront Mauritius in meeting its ambitious goals. Efforts are underway to address these challenges.

The economic outlook is exposed to several types of risks. Being a small open economy, Mauritius is highly vulnerable to adverse external shocks. External imbalances are expected to widen in the near term.

Given Mauritius' extreme vulnerability to natural disasters, such as cyclones and floods and their potentially large and adverse impact on the economy, IMF staff gave assurances that adequate attention will be paid to this critical issue for next year.

According to the Report, reducing the level of debt is a challenge. On current policies, the public statutory debt target will be missed and considerations are being given to extending the deadline.

Gradual fiscal consolidation appears feasible to reach the revised debt target. Both revenue and expenditure-side measures can support consolidation. A decline in public debt over the medium term will help to safeguard macroeconomic stability and create room to respond to shocks.

I wish to point out that I received a letter from the Executive Director representing the African region on the Executive Board of Directors of the IMF in which he pointed out the significant progress made by Mauritius to strengthen the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) framework and, as a result, Mauritius has recently been upgraded by the Eastern and Southern African Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) on 12 recommendations. The Directors were reassured that important steps have been taken to align with international anti-tax avoidance standards, including the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project Action 5. They welcomed the steps taken to comply with the international anti-tax avoidance initiatives.

The Executive Director emphasised the authorities' strong commitment to enhance external competitiveness, notably through structural reforms aimed at improving the business climate, boosting productivity and enhancing labour market efficiency. In this context, new bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements are being negotiated, including negotiations with African States under the Government's Africa Strategy; vocational training and innovation are being promoted; and many initiatives were launched to support female workforce participation as well as to facilitate access to finance for Small and Medium Enterprises.

To conclude, the Executive Director has stated the following and I wish to quote, Madam Speaker –

“Excellency,

Let me take this opportunity to join other Executive Directors in congratulating you and the Mauritian authorities for the solid macroeconomic performance over the years and also for your continued effort to address structural bottlenecks.”

Thank you.

SCHOOL NET II PROJECT

The Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr Y. Sawmynaden): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a Statement to the House regarding the School Net II Project.

The School Net II project was initiated under the previous Government in 2014, with the objective of providing high speed internet access and wireless connectivity in 164 sites, to cover mainly secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Tenders for the project were launched on 22 July 2014 with the closing date of 30 September 2014 to receive bids. As at the closing date, four bids were received.

On 13 November 2014, under the then Government, the award of contract to Data Communication Ltd was approved for the total contract value of Rs122,457,992, inclusive of connectivity charges and VAT.

After notification procedures to all bidders, two bidders, namely Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecoms Ltd lodged a challenge at the Independent Review Panel on 03 December 2014. After hearing the case, the IRP set aside the representations of Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecom Ltd on 25 February 2015 and 06 August 2015 respectively and maintained the award.

Madam Speaker, the letter of award was issued to Data Communications Ltd on 25 September 2015 and the contract was subsequently signed on 24 December 2015 for the sum of Rs122, 457,992 (Inclusive of VAT). Variations to the contract, to the tune of Rs2,146,863.70 (Inclusive of VAT), were approved to cater for specific adjustments in some schools which required extra cabling works, cabinets, switches and labour. The new project value therefore amounts to Rs124,604,856.

As at date, a total amount of Rs81,783,169.70, out of Rs90,631,647.70, has been paid for equipment inclusive of the variation costs. As regard to rental of communication lines, Rs1,880,480 have been paid to date out of Rs33,973,208.

Consequently, only a total amount of Rs83,663,649.70, out of Rs124,604,856, has been paid as at today.

I wish to point out that as at today, 156 sites have been successfully commissioned and eight sites are pending with connectivity issues only, the hardware having already been installed. The eight remaining sites are as follows –

- (i) Modern College Flacq, which is under renovation, and
- (ii) Seven sites in Rodrigues comprising the Commission of Education and six secondary schools.

In view of the non-implementation of the project within the approved timeframe, liquidated damages at the rate of 1% of the contract value, up to a maximum of 10% is payable. This amounts to Rs12,245,799.20 if the maximum of 10% is applied.

As mentioned earlier, only Rs83,663,649.70, out of Rs124,604,856, has been paid to the company, as at date.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Curatelle (Amendment) Bill (No. VI of 2019) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE MAURITIUS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COUNCIL BILL

(NO. IV OF 2019)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr Y. Sawmynaden): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) Bill be read a second time.

Madam Speaker, it is a privilege and an honour for me to bring this Bill to the House today. The objective of the MRIC Bill is to provide for the replacement of the Mauritius Research Council Act, and pave the way for the establishment of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.

The House may recall that in the Budget Speech 2017/2018, the Government expressed its intention of fundamentally reviewing and restructuring the Mauritius Research

Council to transform it into the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) as announced by the Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Jugnauth.

The main objectives of this transformation is –

- to promote high quality applied research in Mauritius;
- to empower the Council to re-orient its resources and expertise towards building strong collaborative partnerships with the private sector, encompassing small and large organisations;
- to foster innovation as a major growth enabler towards making Mauritius a high-income and inclusive country in line with Vision 2030 of the Government, and
- to have more initiatives on social and inclusive innovation.

Extensive consultations as well as comparative exercises of similar Innovation Councils worldwide were carried out during the year, and this is how the draft Bill for the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council was worked out.

Madam Speaker, I will now talk on the existing legislation and its various loopholes, which prompted us to come with this new Bill.

The Mauritius Research Council was set up in 1992 as an apex body to promote applied research in Mauritius and coordinate Government investment in this field.

The MRC was also mandated to –

- advise Government on science and technology;
- advise Government on social and economic issues;
- encourage strategic partnerships, and
- influence the direction of innovation by funding technological applied research projects in areas of national priority.

Over the years, the applied research and innovation landscape has evolved in Mauritius.

Although a number of organisations, such as universities, are engaged in applied research, their focus does not necessarily involve consideration of the opportunities for business innovation and commercialisation.

In order to strengthen the mandate of the Council, the MRC Act was amended in 2014. The amendment was, however, limited to the introduction of a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee.

Since then, further changes have occurred. Although engagement with enterprises and business has increased, there is still a disparity in terms of private sector participation in applied research and innovation, as opposed to what can be observed in other countries, where advances are driven largely by the private sector.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for appropriate structures and mechanisms to ensure more effective coordination and synergy between Government and the private sector in the field of applied research to address priority areas of the country.

It is, therefore, important that the Council focuses on the following strategic axes –

- Knowledge Prioritisation;
- Knowledge Generation;
- Knowledge Management;
- Knowledge Transformation;
- Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange, and
- the efficient use of knowledge by innovators and entrepreneurs.

All within a framework equipped with the tools for measuring, evaluating progress.

The existing legislation reveals a number of areas which are currently not addressed and which need to be considered through a more appropriate framework. They are –

- increasing private sector participation in applied research and innovation to propel our country further;
- having better budgetary control at the national level on applied research and innovation to improve how financial resources are allocated, in a way leading to commercialisation. Today, there is a limited scope in the Council's ability to encourage commercial utilisation of the results produced. An improved framework will allow for a decrease in the time needed for new products and services to appear on the market, and
- ensuring that inventors own all intellectual property derived from their work. The existing legislation creates some uncertainty in who owns the IP of any product or service developed, and this sometimes makes the private sector

reluctant to engage in the use of the Council's funds. By ensuring that ownership of intellectual property remains with the inventor, a strong signal will be sent to encourage private sector investment in applied research, research & development and innovation.

Madam Speaker, allow me to delve on the objectives of the new legislation. With a view to modernising the applied research and innovative landscape in Mauritius, the proposed MRIC Bill will establish the necessary legal framework to achieve the following –

- reinforce the position of the MRIC as the apex body advising Government on all matters concerning applied research and innovation;
- emphasise the links between applied research, innovation, intellectual property and entrepreneurship;
- catalyse private sector involvement in applied research and innovation that will address the scientific, technological, social and economic needs and challenges of the country, and
- promote international networking of the innovative people of Mauritius with like-minded people from other countries.

For the achievement of the above objectives, the MRIC will, as set out in Clause 4 of the Bill, specially engage in –

- (a) promoting and coordinating applied research and innovation according to the needs of the country and improve the quality of life of our citizens;
- (b) fostering an applied research, innovation and entrepreneurship culture;
- (c) encouraging the development and application of advanced innovative technology to meet the needs of the industries;
- (d) enhancing private sector participation in applied research and innovation, and
- (e) promoting commercial utilisation of the results of applied research and innovation in the national interest.

Madam Speaker, the new legislation gives a new impulse to innovation. Rationalism and pragmatism demand that we understand that the future is not a completely unknown territory into which we step, but an extension of the present that we can shape by thoughtful and proactive decisions and actions.

In this connection, the new legislation charts the pathway of the MRIC's role in helping to shape the country's future.

The changes brought through Clause 5(a) of the new legislation will set the national direction in terms of developing policies and strategies for applied research and innovation involving private sector collaboration and the creation of funding initiatives that strengthen applied research and scientific capabilities, while at the same time maintaining a strong focus on achieving economic and national impact.

In parallel, these efforts will also improve the country's competitive position internationally. The MRIC Bill will, therefore, be business oriented, as set out at Clause 4(d) of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, for the private sector to invest further in applied research and innovation, it needs to have confidence that the overarching aims of the new Council will include its interests within the national dimension.

Among the core issues being addressed by this Bill are the development of the appropriate Performance Metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), all of which will play a key role in the national innovation strategy and in determining the success of our knowledge economy.

Further, the Council will be shifting from an advisory role to having a more direct hand in steering collaborative applied research, aligned with the country's increased emphasis on innovation for driving the economy, as set out at Clause 5(b) of the Bill.

Building on earlier achievements, the focus of the MRIC will be targeted to growing private sector applied research capabilities and, through collaborative efforts, encourage the emergence of high growth innovative enterprises which fully leverage technology.

These investments will then turn into new products, new services, new solutions that create better economic and societal outcomes for all citizens and all tourists visiting Mauritius every year.

It is clear that value-creation will increasingly cut across traditional boundaries. Consequently, collaborative efforts between Government and the private sector, will most likely be influenced by multi-disciplinary trends in areas such as –

- agritech;
- the use of blockchain in fintech;

- high-tech manufacturing and engineering;
- health and biomedical sciences;
- the ocean economy, and
- of course, the digital economy and the ICT sector in general.

In adopting a strong business focus, the MRIC will be able to drive innovation within existing organisations and start-ups and thus will assist creative people, wherever they are, to launch, build and grow successful businesses.

As a key objective of the Council enunciated at Clause 4(e) of the MRIC Bill, promoting commercial utilisation of the results of applied research and innovation in the national interest will make the MRIC a focal point for technology transfer.

The Council will work closely with economic agencies and provide guidance and training for industry and their applied research partners to commercialise their products and services.

The support will also extend to early stage collaborative projects, which could include proof-of-concept or prototyping activities. Such projects will improve the readiness level of the technology to a stage where it could be more easily understood, developed and then deployed by industry.

To encourage international collaboration and exchange, Clause 5(k) of the MRIC Bill makes provision to deepen and diversify the international connections of our people and enterprises to their counterparts in global markets who are at the forefront of innovation and technology. This will facilitate the exchange of ideas and increase collaboration opportunities in the region and beyond.

Madam Speaker, at this point, allow me to talk about a very important and innovative project currently being undertaken by the MRC and which the MRIC will have to complete. I am, of course, referring to the MIR-SAT1 project, the first Mauritian satellite expected to be launched by the end of this year.

One year ago, a multi-institutional team, led by the MRC submitted a proposal under the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) KiboCUBE Programme 2018, for the design and build of the first Mauritius cube satellite.

The Mauritian proposal, called MIR-SAT1, was retained by the JAXA/UNOOSA as the best submission from a developing country in 2018 and consequently Mauritius has been offered the opportunity, for the first time in its history, to build and deploy a Mauritian Nano Satellite in space.

Concretely, MIR-SAT1 is currently being assembled at this moment by AAC-Clyde Space in the UK, based on designs created by the team led by the MRC. The assembly and testing will be finished by September this year and the cube satellite will then be transported to Japan to be, subsequently, sent to space, aboard a rocket. MIR-SAT1 will then reach the International Space Station (ISS) and, after some time, will be launched in space from the ISS. This will happen before the end of this year.

As soon as it starts operating, MIR-SAT1 will collect images of Mauritius and surrounding regions using a long wave infrared thermal camera. The data from the satellite will be collected by a main ground station situated in the MRC premises.

The data collected from the cube satellite will be used for capacity building, applied research and innovation in areas pertinent to national problems.

Having our own Nano-satellite orbiting planet Earth will be a major achievement for a small island nation such as Mauritius. It is not only about having a satellite, but it is also about fostering collaboration between Government, associations and private companies to leverage the data coming from space.

It is also about inspiring a whole new generation of young Mauritians to embark on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) studies in order to become the space engineers and space explorers of tomorrow.

MIR-SAT1 is also going to pave the way towards the establishment of a Space Agency in Mauritius in the long run.

I am sure that everyone in this august Assembly will understand that the future is bright for the young people of Mauritius with a Government which has a strong Vision into making Mauritius a better country and making sure that this Vision becomes reality.

Madam Speaker, allow me to come back to the new legislation which will ensure that the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council operates through a strengthened legal instrument for applied research and innovation in line with the Government strategies and budgetary measures.

Clause 5(j) will allow the reinforcement of the role of the Council as the national innovation agency and enhance its ability to implement applied research and innovation programs, including those under the National Innovation Framework.

This Framework places emphasis on the need to increase the efficiency of applied research and innovation by local enterprises within a setting that accommodates a wide spectrum of relationships between industry and academia, as set out in Clause 5 subsection (b) of the Bill.

In view of the aims and objectives of the MRIC, the composition of the Council, as laid down in Clause 7 of the Bill, is designed to ensure that the members have, between them, significant direct experience in the development and exploitation of science, technology, innovation as well as in industrial, commercial and financial matters.

It is vital that the interests of applied research and innovation are properly balanced by person with experience in industry who are used to taking risks in the commercial world.

The Council will have the responsibility for leading in overall strategic direction and crosscutting decision-making, as well as ensuring close working relationships with a wide range of key stakeholders.

The Council composition proposed in the MRIC Bill, therefore, delivers a membership which is able to think and act entrepreneurially in the interests of applied research, innovation, the economy and society.

Madam Speaker, the dynamism of the eventual MRIC will depend on its deliverables, the main ones of which are as follows –

- (a) implementing the National Innovation Framework;
- (b) devising new collaborative grant schemes to promote innovation in the private sector;
- (c) building strong public-private and industry-academia partnerships;
- (d) improving products, services and business processes through proof-of-concept support;
- (e) setting up incubators with the participation of private companies, and
- (f) organising Innovator-Business Forums.

The MRIC will help support growth of the economy of Mauritius through applied research and innovation by –

- reinforcing commitments to strategic thrusts, including driving applied research and innovation excellence through competition;
- ensuring impact through public-private collaborations, industry-oriented applied research and development and commercialisation;
- exploring new and emerging technologies such as Internet of Things, Data Science, Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain, and
- developing talent and expertise in Mauritius.

The key to Mauritius remaining competitive in a fast-changing world with global and regional economies stepping up their development is for our enterprises and applied research institutions to build deep capabilities, and work in partnership with one another to seize opportunities.

Effective communication will be of utmost importance. In this respect, the Bill emphasises not only the need for mechanics of collaboration, but also that of a culture where public and private organisations work together.

To ensure meaningful and rewarding collaboration between private sector and academia, this new legislation aims to promote the right culture and environment to ensure that these two sectors do not just have a sense of working together but see themselves as partners in a very important endeavour.

Madam Speaker, allow me to highlight the major features that are being brought in this Bill.

Clause 13 of the Bill relates to the establishment of a National Research and Innovation Fund. The linkages between applied research, innovation and business should be nurtured and this fund will serve to encourage the development of innovative products, processes and services. The fund will also help to increase investment by the public and private sectors towards addressing the scientific, technological, social and economic needs and challenges of the country.

With this approach, the MRIC will be able to bring the applied research base and industry together in a more purposeful way to encourage the creation of jobs and the growth of businesses.

If we are to have a successful knowledge economy, it will be through the successful implementation of this fund to create an environment that is conducive to the commercialisation of new products and new services.

Clause 14 of the Bill relates to the administration of National Research and Innovation Fund which will be subject to monitoring systems, determined through a Committee set up by the Council. Such monitoring systems could include, for example, setting and tracking of KPIs and Value-For-Money (VFM) Reviews. These systems will seek to improve performance and ensure accountability of projects, schemes, events and other initiatives financed through the Fund.

On the setting and tracking of KPIs, it is envisaged that projects, schemes, events and other initiatives will have their output and outcome KPIs set prior to their funding approval and disbursement of funds. Before the end of the funding period, the Committee will review the progress of each of the initiatives to assess if they are on track to meet their KPIs. Funding will be reviewed where necessary. At the end of the funding period, the Committee will review the outcomes of the projects and other initiatives. KPIs will be re-established for funding of a new cycle and these projects and other initiatives will be revised if necessary.

For the Value-For-Money (VFM) Reviews, the Committee will assess the cost-effectiveness of projects, schemes, events and other initiatives; identify potential areas for improvement and provide recommendations. These findings, along with the achievement of KPIs, will be factored into the review of subsequent projects and other initiatives at the end of the funding cycle.

Madam Speaker, at Clause 16, the Bill provides for significant changes in the way intellectual property is managed. Promotion of applied research and innovation in various sectors, and the support being provided to enterprises as they engage with academia, are all dependent on a successful intellectual property framework.

Intellectual property is the sum of a person's or a business's creativity or unique knowledge and gives ownership to all artefacts created.

It is vital for the economic prosperity of Mauritius and is the foundation from which people can derive value from their innovation and investments. This will be of crucial importance if we are to transit to a high-income economy.

Whereas the previous approach was for intellectual property to be retained by the Council, the MRIC Bill brings in a marked shift in enabling intellectual property to be owned by the innovator.

This is a revolutionary step towards a modern Mauritius and is fully in line with the Vision of our Prime Minister, to transform Mauritius in a high-income and inclusive country well before 2030.

This approach is the same as that adopted for the management of intellectual property by the vast majority of applied research councils across the world, where the emphasis lies in encouraging use of the intellectual property by enterprises as a lever to boost business growth.

Intellectual property rights and intellectual property-supported business will be at the heart of many new trade arrangements Mauritius will have with other countries throughout the world. It is therefore important that the provisions of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill are in consonance with these trends and are aligned with the needs of private and public collaborating partners engaging in applied research and innovation.

It is useful to understand that intellectual property can exist in various forms, for example, industrial designs, patents, trademarks and copyright.

Similarly, the number and quality of start-ups being created out of the intellectual property developed by these applied research partnerships can be of an important metric to determine how innovative Mauritius is.

As the size of projects taken on by industry-academia partnerships grow, indicators such as the number of collaborations, number of intellectual property registrations, number of intellectual property licences and licence revenues can serve to measure the rate of successful commercialisation.

Accordingly, the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill will help to create strategic links between applied research and innovation, intellectual property and other components of the knowledge economy and promote collaboration with the Industrial Property Office of Mauritius.

Our intellectual property framework is evolving, and in anticipation of the new intellectual property legislation, the provisions of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill will allow flexibility in identifying ownership in cases where innovation arises from the use of resources managed by the Council, from resources shared by private enterprises, or from work commissioned from the Council.

As any revamped legislation, the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill at clause 24 relates to savings and transitional provisions in view of the emergence of an organisation with a new identity. This will, among others, ensure that the terms and conditions of persons employed on the permanent and pensionable establishment of the MRC shall be not less favourable when they will be transferred to the new Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.

I strongly believe that the new Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill will go a long way in creating a more conducive and enabling environment for applied research and innovation, which will definitely have a high incidence on socio-economic development of the country.

Madam Speaker, before ending my speech, allow me to point out that my attention has been drawn to a typing error in the Explanatory Memorandum where the word “Innovative” should in fact read “Innovation”, and also at clause 7 subsection 2 where it should add the word ‘Member of the National Assembly’ instead of ‘Member of the Assembly’. Further, I propose to bring a minor amendment to clause 24 at Committee Stage.

“Aujourd’hui, Madame la présidente, Maurice est un vaste chantier”.

It is clear that the Government, under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, is doing everything which is needed to transform the lives of all our citizens.

Works on the first phase of the Metro Express will be completed in five months and major enhancements to our road and water infrastructure are currently being done and will be completed soon and we will have our own satellite orbiting planet Earth by the end of the year!

Today, with this Bill, we are paving the way towards the full collaboration between Government and the private sector in applied research and innovation to make Mauritius a better country.

With these words, Madam Speaker, I would like to commend this Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Mr Roopun rose and seconded.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ms Sewocksingh!

(3.55 p.m.)

Ms M. Sewocksingh (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we all agree that it is high time to repeal the Mauritius Research Council Act dated almost 27 years back and to create a new body known as the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council 2019.

We are living in a new era, Madam Speaker, a digital and sustainable era, *un monde 4.0*. Innovation is the gateway to the economic development of the country. It is important and crucial at this crossroad to take up challenges and create a flourishing environment for innovation. This will pose the need for a national innovation system which is a set of functioning institutions, organisations and policies that will interact constructively in the pursuit of a common set of social and economic goals and objectives. This is why, Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation today is of great importance.

However, I can observe that, with the exception of good intentions, one fails to see what is so innovative in the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill 2019 from the existing MRC Act 1992. I squarely fail to see how this new Bill will bring the required performance in innovation required for Mauritius, especially as this Act is being brought at the end of the mandate of this Government. Even though the Government created a dedicated Ministry for innovation in 2014, nothing has been done in this field. Having at least four Ministers of Technology, Communication and Innovation, what has this Government been doing since then?

As per the Global Innovation Index Report, Madam Speaker, Mauritius has dropped sharply from 40th position to 75th in 2018. We have shifted by 35 in rank, Madam Speaker. This is the trend for the past five years in Mauritius in terms of innovation, policies and implementation of initiatives. In the same report, Madam Speaker, it is mentioned that among five African countries, namely Kenya, Rwanda, Malawi, Madagascar, they all stand out for being innovation achievers at least three times for the previous years, and we do not find Mauritius at all, Madam Speaker. Madagascar has been there for three years, we are not even in the league.

Madam Speaker, we are losing year-on-year momentum on innovation, and it seems like the syndrome - like hon. Sinatambou likes to say - *narien pas bon* seems to have gone viral in this field. What is worse, Madam Speaker, is that under this Government, a Ministry with the portfolio of innovation exists. This shows that...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Can I call you to order as well! Do you realise that you are disrupting the hon. Member?

(Interruptions)

Yes, but do not argue with me! Do not argue with me! You are disrupting the hon. Member. Next time, I will watch you.

Yes, please proceed!

(Interruptions)

Are you arguing with me?

(Interruptions)

Are you arguing with me?

(Interruptions)

You cannot argue with me, let me tell you. If you continue, then I will have to take sanctions against you.

(Interruptions)

Please proceed!

Ms Sewocksingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We can feel the embarrassment of the Government. Anyway! This shows that this Government is a Government of intentions only, *que de belles paroles*. My concern, Madam Speaker, will not the MRIC be a replica of the Mauritius Research Council or maybe even worse, as we cannot see any innovative clause?

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke lengthily on satellites, but one major component on innovation is missing in this new Act, that is, the artificial intelligence. There is no mention at all, Madam Speaker, of the artificial intelligence, not even in its definition. Artificial intelligence is a rapidly advanced technology that will soon have significant

impacts in our daily lives. We all remember the visit of Robot Sophia in Mauritius sometimes back last year. Artificial intelligence exists since a long time, but it is unfortunate that it is even not in the strategic vision of this Government.

Madam Speaker, coming directly to the functions of the Bill where it is mentioned on page 4, section 5, and I wish to quote –

“develop, every 5 years, a national strategy for research and development and innovation, based on the scientific, technological, social and economic needs and challenges of the country”

Madam Speaker, this is a completely missed target. Since technological developments are so rapid that developing a strategy on five years is simply not realistic and will not serve any purpose.

We all know how technology is moving fast. Technology runs our lives these days, smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc. In a very short lapse of time, technology has exploded in the market and now many people cannot imagine a life without it. We are now driven by automation, Madam Speaker. With only one device, our mobile phone, we are able to switch on lights, A/Cs, TVs, alarms in our house. In the past, everybody was delighted by virtual reality, last year it was. But, this year, 2019, we are switching to augmented reality. Technology moves at a very fast pace, Madam Speaker.

Let us take the example of the evolution of iPhone, which is a very common device. Year 2014, iPhone 6 was introduced; 2015: iPhone 6S and iPhone 6S Plus; 2016: iPhone 7 and iPhone 7 Plus; 2017: iPhone 8 and iPhone 8 Plus and iPhone X; 2018: iPhone XS and iPhone XR. At least, two upgrades every year, Madam Speaker.

Today, we all talk about cloud storage like iCloud, Google Drive, Dropbox, HTP sites. We are constantly seeing emerging media and new trends in technology to follow. Gartner, an analyst firm, speculates that there will be more than 26 billion connected devices by 2020. Hence, again, Madam Speaker, staying up to date will help to ensure we do not miss opportunities, become irrelevant and fall behind our competitors. I am more convinced if we create and follow an IT strategy based on five years, we are doomed to stay behind. By the way, Madam Speaker, in India the National Innovation Act makes provision for a National Annual Integrated Science and Technology Plan which is presented yearly, that is, every year.

Coming back to the Bill, Madam Speaker, in the same section, that is, Functions of Council, Section 5(c), and I wish to quote –

“(c) establish national, regional and international linkages with institutions having objectives similar to those of the Council;”

This seems to be a very motherhood statement, Madam Speaker. The question is: how will the hon. Minister/the Ministry go about it when the general election is soon, very soon? Even point (g) in the same section seems to be simply insufficient, Madam Speaker.

Concerning the object of the Council, Madam Speaker, and referring to page 5, Section 7 of the Bill, we find that the Board will consist of only eight members. As the Bill stands, there would be more Government officials than private sector representatives.

Madam Speaker, allow me here to say that we do not have any issues about Government officials on the Board. In fact, and it is a fact, that they do their best in their duties. But it is evident and the hon. Minister mentioned it several times in his speech, that private sectors are more inclined towards innovation and, therefore, a fair representation should be considered. So, we, on this side of the House, propose out of the five members that will be appointed by the Minister, why not four representatives from the private sectors are there? Of course, without forgetting gender parity.

Madam Speaker, I would even say, why not a Board consisting of the younger generation. This would be innovation, Madam Speaker. I am sure the younger generation will bring more *de l'eau à nos moulins*. Madam Speaker, these nominations could have been done through an Innovation Advisory Committee to show more fairness on knowledge, capability and *méritocracie* rather than some nominees here and there. A transparent nomination process should be seriously envisaged. Madam Speaker, the MRC Act 1992 Section 6A has provision for a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee, but in this new Act, this section has completely disappeared and has not even been replaced by any other alternative structure.

Madam Speaker, to end with appointment of the Board members, we propose that there is, at least, one representative from the Ministry of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives. We all know, Madam Speaker, that innovation is a driving force for entrepreneurs. The hon. Minister said it.

Madam Speaker, if we refer to the budgets allocated to the Mauritius Research Council over the recent years and its actual expenditures, one can only be disappointed. The

funding for the MRC for the Financial Year 2016-2017 was Rs87.4 m. out of which the actual amount spent, as published in the accounts of the Government document, is only to the tune of around Rs39.5 m. representing only some 50% of the budgeted amount. The amount funded for the MRC for period 2017-2018 was increased to Rs156 m. However, the funding of ex-MRC for 2018-2019 has drastically been reduced to only Rs61.6 m. All these figures, Madam Speaker, are from the budget estimates. It seems, Madam Speaker, that this Government is downgrading its own research organisation.

Madam Speaker, a new section, that is, Section 13 in the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill makes provision for a National Research and Innovation Fund. I fear that this Fund will not contribute much in improving over performance in the area of research and innovation since this Fund already exists under the purview of the concerned Ministries in various forms.

Madam Speaker, we all know that learning process starts at school. So, why not introduce innovation as a subject at school? Why not a scholarship innovation at HSC level? I am sure the hon. Minister of Education will give her views later on.

Madam Speaker, I would say that one fails to see how this new Bill will adequately respond to the rhetoric of this Government with respect to innovation. It is unfortunate to say that we have not even reached digitalisation, that is, from a paper to a paperless office system. We can find it everywhere; in many places, we can say that papers are being used.

Innovation, today, is not only a culture, Madam Speaker, but it is considered as a discipline, which requires the corporation of a multitude of actors and stakeholders, which will build the right eco-friendly system.

I would like to conclude by saying that this Government is bringing this legislation at the 11th hour of its mandate. Isn't it too late to see the output of any tangible results, Madam Speaker?

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

(4.11 p.m.)

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Madame la présidente, permettez-moi avec votre permission, avant d'élaborer sur le projet de loi, d'attirer l'attention de ma

collègue qui vient de prendre la parole, qu'en parlant d'*innovation ranking* dans le monde, je voudrais reprendre quelques lignes d'un rapport sur le *Global Innovation Ranking* qui fait mention que Kenya - que l'honorable membre vient de souligner, et devant l'île Maurice - *slightly improved its rank among the world's most innovative economies from 80 in 2017 to 78 this year while maintaining a third position in the Sub-Saharan Africa after South Africa and Mauritius.*

Ceci dit, Madame la présidente, je voudrais dès le départ faire mention de ma déception. Je dois dire que, quand on parle du pays, quand on parle de l'innovation, quand on parle de l'avancement du pays, je m'attendais à ce que des deux côtés de la Chambre on aurait eu quand même une symbiose, parce que nous sommes en train de parler de l'intérêt de notre pays, de l'avancement de notre pays, du progrès de notre pays. En parlant du fait que rien n'a été fait, je voudrais, encore une fois, attirer l'attention de ma collègue sur le fait que, deux mois de cela déjà, nous avons connecté Rodrigues à travers la fibre optique. Il y a tant de choses que ce gouvernement est en train de faire, et non seulement Rodrigues.

(Interruptions)

On m'informe que même Agaléga a été connecté. Alors, c'est triste de voir que, au lieu de venir dire, bravo, on est en train d'avancer, le pays progresse, on essaie de faire croire que rien ne marche - comme elle-même l'a fait souligner, que '*nanien na pas bon*'.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Nous sommes en train de vivre une époque du progrès. Madame la présidente, j'aimerais commencer mon intervention en félicitant mon collègue, l'honorable Yogida Sawmynaden, ministre de la Technologie et de la Communication et de l'Innovation pour l'introduction de ce projet de loi au Parlement, le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill*.

Permettez-moi également de souligner d'emblée l'importance et la pertinence de ce projet de loi à un moment où le développement économique soutenu de Maurice nécessite un renforcement de la recherche, de la technologie et de l'innovation, et ceci afin de contribuer à une prospérité économique accrue. La science, la technologie et l'innovation, communément appelées les *STIs*, sont universellement reconnues comme un moteur du développement. En effet, un accent accru sur la science, la technologie favorisera nos inspirations à transformer notre République en une *Knowledge Economy*.

Madam Speaker, we are meeting today to repeal the Mauritius Research Council Act and to usher in its wake the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill.

La Chambre notera qu'un bon nombre de pays ont mis en place ou sont en train de mettre en place et de créer des conseils nationaux pour la recherche et l'innovation. L'objectif principal de ces initiatives étant de répondre aux besoins de renforcer la coordination et l'inclusion, avec comme finalité une meilleure efficacité des politiques de recherche et d'innovation. C'est précisément la raison d'être même de ce nouveau projet de loi. La création d'un environnement plus propice aux travaux de recherche et d'innovation, ceci afin de permettre cette transformation de Maurice. This, Madam Speaker, will allow Mauritius to turn into a modern, developed and technology savvy nation. Innovation has now become the game changer and rightly so.

Permettez-moi, Madame la présidente, d'exposer brièvement la notion d'innovation et de son importance. Qu'est-ce qui motive l'innovation? What drives innovation, Madam Speaker? It is the pressure to reduce cost, to increase efficiency so that we do more with less, that we achieve more with less resource. The reduced lifetime of products also is resulting in rising customer expectations regarding service and quality, and hence demands stricter regulations and increased demand for accountability.

Madame la présidente, de par sa définition même, toute innovation doit amener un élément de nouveauté. C'est la créativité dont nous avons besoin pour faire face aux problèmes et aux défis de notre époque : changement climatique, sécurité alimentaire, approvisionnement en eau propre et douce, les maladies, besoin d'énergie renouvelable, pour ne citer que quelques exemples. Le monde entier comprend aujourd'hui l'importance qu'il nous faut attribuer à la science, à la technologie et à l'innovation pour s'attaquer à ces défis. Et cela, Madame la présidente, à un coût abordable et dans les délais raisonnables.

L'OCDE a été à l'avant-garde dans cette entreprise. Plus près de chez nous, sur le continent africain, l'*African Union Science Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024)* place la science, la technologie et l'innovation au cœur même du développement et de la croissance socio-économique de l'Afrique. La *STISA-2024* a pour mission d'accélérer la transition de l'Afrique vers une économie de connaissances axée sur l'innovation.

Madam Speaker, the achievement of this mission is based on improving the science technology and innovation readiness in Africa in terms of infrastructure, professional and

technical competence and entrepreneurial capacity. It also involves implementing specific policies and programmes in Science, Technology and Innovation to address societal needs in a holistic and sustainable way.

En effet, Madame la présidente, Maurice a besoin en toute urgence des solutions innovantes et durables pour relever ces principaux défis en matière de développement. De telles solutions contribueront à améliorer la qualité de vie des personnes, à réaliser un développement soutenable et équilibré et à rendre l'île Maurice plus attrayante.

Madam Speaker, since demand for novel solutions also lay the ground for future markets, innovation endeavours will be instrumental for long-term productivity development to generate growth, jobs and for future prosperity. The Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, therefore, is coming at the right time. *C'est vrai, à un moment opportun.* It will be mandated to formally look into the innovation issues. Indeed, the MRC has already devised various research schemes and collaborates greatly with the private sector in undertaking applied research with the ultimate aim of developing products. Madam Speaker, this would add pumps to the innovation index. I would like to draw the attention of the House that when we talk about the budget of the MRIC, when we say that this amount of money has been spent and we still have so much left, one must realise that research does not occur overnight, it takes time and when you have already decided to keep a certain amount of fund for a particular research, it is going to be dished out gradually as the research proceeds. So, it is wrong to come and say that the money has not been used, the money has already been earmarked for a particular project and the funding will come as we move on.

Madam Speaker, we were talking about the thrust that has to be brought to innovation. There is the accelerative thrust that will be given also to the commercialisation of current and future research findings. In this respect, it is noteworthy again to mention that there is already an array of research achievements under the MRC itself, which await a proper conducive operational and policy environment to be tuned into viable commercialisation initiatives. The new MRIC Act will certainly be instrumental to unleash the gathered and collective potential of these research outcomes.

Cela dit, Madame la présidente, nous devons également comprendre que l'innovation ne se produit pas du jour au lendemain. *It cannot occur overnight.* En premier lieu, c'est un exercice coûteux. Oui, ça coûte de l'argent. Comme nous le savons bien, le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council* finance déjà un certain nombre de projets à des fins

novatrices. Cela justifie clairement l'article 133 du présent projet de loi pour la création d'un fonds national de recherche et d'innovation. En second lieu, il est essentiel de créer l'écosystème approprié pour que l'innovation prospère, et que cet écosystème regroupe tous les acteurs publics, privés, universités, organismes de recherche, la communauté et les institutions internationales, entre autres. Le projet de loi indique clairement que la *MRIC* assurera les liens entre les diverses parties prenantes. Et cela ne devrait pas être difficile, étant donné qu'il existe une vision partagée par les *stakeholders* pour développer la recherche et l'innovation.

This Government is adopting a very coherent approach, not an *ad hoc* one. Nous mettons en place un écosystème propice à l'innovation et nous sommes en train de créer un environnement favorable aux partenariats locaux, régionaux et internationaux. C'est vraiment le carrefour de la connaissance en devenir.

Madame la présidente, la création du *Council* sera un catalyseur pour stimuler la recherche appliquée. Les objectifs du projet de loi placent clairement l'accent sur le rôle concret que le *MRIC* sera appelé à jouer. Il sera chargé de promouvoir la recherche appliquée à des fins commerciales dans la mesure où un produit pourra être fabriqué et aussi breveté.

Madam Speaker, the objects of the Bill clearly point in that direction. Section 4(a) reads –

“promote and coordinate applied research, innovation and research and development according to the needs of the country and to improve the quality of life”

while 4 (c) states –

“encourage the development and application of advanced and innovative technology to meet the needs of industries.”

Je dois souligner le fait que les institutions de l'enseignement supérieur et des universités effectuent de la recherche scientifique en mettant peut-être davantage l'accent sur la recherche purement académique dont le résultat ne sera pas nécessairement de nature commerciale.

Madame la présidente, à l'université de Maurice, l'accent est surtout mis sur la recherche académique. Il est vrai, comme le dit le dicton populaire : sans sciences fondamentales, il n'y aura pas de sciences appliquées. Cela explique pourquoi, depuis le

début, nos universités publiques ont été encouragées à promouvoir une culture de recherche, de manière à élargir et à repousser des horizons de la connaissance.

En effet, l'un de nos plus grands défis a été de développer une culture de recherche plus dynamique. Nous avons maintenant parcouru un chemin en ce sens. Le gouvernement a financé le *Tertiary Education Commission* à la hauteur de R 50 millions au cours des deux dernières années en vue d'encourager les chercheurs universitaires à développer des projets de recherche et à constituer une masse critique de chercheurs, d'infrastructures et d'équipements propices à la recherche.

Pas plus tard que la semaine dernière, l'université de Maurice a tenu la 11^{ème} édition de la *research week*. Nous savons également que l'université de Maurice s'est engagée dans la création des pôles d'excellence en recherche. L'université de Maurice a vu croître les fonds de la recherche de R 23 millions à R 110 millions en trois ans. Ceci à travers la *Tertiary Education Commission*, le MRC, les agences internationales et d'autres partenaires étrangers.

Il faut aussi rappeler que l'université de Maurice a aussi mis sur pied the *Knowledge Transfer Office* qui a trois bras : *the University Industry Liaison Office; the Incubator Unit, and the Technology Transfer Office* pour s'assurer que les recherches qui sont effectuées au niveau de l'université, sont partagées avec l'industrie. D'autres universités s'y mettent aussi. L'université des Mascareignes organise les Assises de la recherche au mois de juin de cette année. Il est donc intéressant de noter un changement. De plus en plus d'universités s'engagent dans la recherche pour servir les intérêts de la communauté. Il est donc très important de noter que le projet de loi prévoit à ce que le MRIC ne fonctionne pas en isolation. Cela garantira la collaboration d'autres parties prenantes pour le développement de l'économie, comme l'a si bien souligné mon collègue, le ministre Sawmynaden.

Madame la présidente, je crois que maintenant que les bases de la capacité de la recherche fondamentale sont jetées, le rôle du *MRIC* sera facilité pour la recherche appliquée, ceci pour répondre aux besoins nationaux avec une incidence positive sur la qualité de vie de la population et aussi pour l'industrie qui sera, on l'espère, plus compétitive.

Madame la présidente, ce projet de loi aborde aussi une question fondamentale étroitement liée à la recherche et à l'innovation. C'est la question des droits de propriété intellectuelle. Les droits de propriété intellectuelle constituent une partie importante de l'infrastructure d'innovation, car elle garantit sa possibilité pour le développeur d'une idée ou d'une œuvre de création de protéger son droit et de rendre sa création profitable et rentable.

Les systèmes de droit de propriété intellectuelle facilitent également la diffusion de nouvelles solutions. La protection crée des droits qui peuvent être transférés et concédés sous licence. Nous savons tous à quel point une stratégie commerciale bien conçue pour la gestion de la propriété intellectuelle qui inclut la protection des droits des propriétés intellectuelles est particulièrement importante pour les petites et moyennes entreprises, les jeunes entreprises, sur un marché de plus en plus mondialisé.

Personnellement, je suis heureuse que les conditions relatives aux droits de propriété intellectuelle dans ce projet de loi diffèrent de celles qui existent sous la *MRC Act* de 92.

There, it was stated that all intellectual property arising out of the use of the Council resources had to be vested in the Council. The new legislation has precisely as one of its objects to reinforce the intellectual property. The Bill affords an ample provision to vest intellectual property to parties that are actually generating them. This flexibility is commended as it would create a more favourable environment to conduct research and development with emphasis of ownership of these rights within the scientific community.

Madame la présidente, le *MRIC Bill* contribuera à ouvrir la voie à une feuille de route efficace pour la recherche, le développement et l'innovation, répondant ainsi aux prévisions du gouvernement en matière d'innovation à l'horizon 2030. Il ne fera que rendre la République de Maurice plus compétente.

Materialising this vision would entail common determined measures to ensure a proper scientific base to promote innovation competence platforms, grow ecosystems and accrued international exchanges, but both short term and long-term measures will be necessary to achieve the goals. It goes without saying that flexibility will be needed to ensure that the vision is achieved even when the operating environment changes. This is where and why Mauritius would need more experts with novel skill sets. This certainly will make added demand upon the education system. A high level of education and competence will need to be achieved as a requirement for the purpose of sustainability. This stands as pillars for research and innovation. Already my Ministry is contributing towards the use of technology in education and the dissemination of knowledge for national development. We will be fully supportive to these measures and ensure an active participation in the innovation process, enhancing its contribution to productivity.

I am also certain that through this new Council, we will be able to strengthen public/private partnership and promote innovation among firms, universities and science-oriented agencies, research organisations and Ministries.

In addition, our country needs more and more talents and needs to retain talents. In promoting innovation, we should be better equipped with track high-level researchers and encourage our young graduates to embark on research.

Madame la présidente, notre pays dispose déjà d'individus dotés d'immenses talents et de compétences qui ne demandent qu'à être reconnus et valorisés. À titre d'exemple, le docteur Caussy a fondé *Partnering Robotics*, une entreprise de recherches et d'innovations qui a développé une première mondiale, le robot Diya One, qui dispose d'une intelligence artificielle à base de réseau de neurones. Cette innovation mondiale récompensée par 20 *awards* sur les différents continents permet à Diya One de détecter les pollutions de l'air, mais aussi de rétablir la qualité de l'air dans les environnements intérieurs larges et dynamiques. Le Docteur Caussy travaille actuellement sur un projet visant à implanter ces technologies à Maurice de façon à développer un centre de compétences et de formation en intelligence artificielle et robotique pour le pays. Maurice a vocation à développer son leadership en matière de technologie cognitive afin de créer de nouvelles opportunités d'emplois et de richesses en se basant sur les ressources du pays et là, Madame la présidente, je devrais faire mention que nous avons chez nous, à Maurice, des jeunes ayant beaucoup de talents et qui ont le potentiel de réussir d'une façon vraiment remarquable et il nous faudrait leur donner les possibilités et là quand je parle de ressources, je ne parle pas seulement de ressources humaines, il y a aussi des ressources que nous avons. Madame Sewocksingh vient de le dire, des millions de kms de ressources marines, d'océan. Nous avons à développer ce potentiel que nous avons. Il faut aussi dire que récemment, Maurice a eu l'honneur d'être nommée dans un article paru sur le site en ligne de *Newsweek* datant du 22 avril dernier et qu'on peut lire comme titre –

“Medicinal herbs from Indian Ocean Island found to stop growth of cancer cells.”

Et là, Madame la présidente, je trouve que c'est extraordinaire que l'île Maurice ait pu être remarquée dans le domaine de la recherche et dans la prévention du cancer. Des plantes présentes sur le sol Mauricien pouvant contribuer à lutter contre le cancer sont là, et c'est ce que relèvent les chercheurs du *Far Eastern Federal University* dans la revue médicale *Acta*

Naturae. Il s'agit notamment des plantes connues sous les noms scientifiques *Acalypha integrifolia* bois queue de rat et *Eugenia tinifolia* bois de nèfle. Citant le docteur Alexander Kagansky du *Center for Genomic and Regenerative Medicine of the School of Biomedicine*, la revue médicale souligne que Maurice compte des plantes médicinales qui ne sont pas exploitées d'une façon optimale. Maurice a une biodiversité qui pourrait être la clef du traitement de nombreuses maladies, et là ce qui a été trouvé, c'est que les substances venant de ces plantes peuvent guérir le cancer de l'œsophage, et cela, en arrêtant la division des cellules, c'est-à-dire, ces substances peuvent arrêter la prolifération des cellules cancéreuses et, de ce fait, permettent l'arrêt du cancer. Mais ce qui est important à noter aussi, Madame la présidente, c'est que la recherche permet des choses formidables. Du fait que j'ai été moi-même formée en biologie, je pense que c'est important pour moi ici de souligner l'importance de la recherche parce que la recherche permet beaucoup de choses.

Dans les années 50, par exemple, on avait appris que les gènes se trouvaient sur une molécule qui s'appelait l'ADN. Avec la recherche, 10 ans après, ils ont pu découvrir le code qui se trouve sur l'ADN, et dans 20 ans, ce qu'ils ont pu trouver, ils ont pu déchiffrer le code et par la suite, dans une autre décennie, ils ont commencé à synthétiser ces molécules d'ADN.

Aujourd'hui, à travers la biosynthèse, c'est-à-dire, la production de l'ADN, nous sommes en train de faire des choses vraiment remarquables. Le *DNA testing*, le test de l'ADN, mais aussi, on est en train d'utiliser l'ADN qui se trouve dans des morceaux d'os qu'on retrouve et on est en train de penser qu'on peut même reformer le génome des animaux qui sont *extinct*, par exemple, notre Dodo. Alors le travail sur l'os de ces animaux peut maintenant nous permet de reconstruire l'ADN. Alors, pour cela, je dois dire qu'il nous faut vraiment miser sur la recherche et on ne peut oublier tout ce qu'on peut faire à travers la MRIC.

Madame la présidente, il est important pour nous à ce stade de dire que l'île Maurice a un futur vraiment extraordinaire et a le potentiel de réussir d'une façon extrêmement remarquable. Nous avons pu dans le passé démontrer notre capacité dans plusieurs domaines. La recherche à la *MSIRI* a prouvé que l'île Maurice peut être un leader dans le monde de l'agriculture. Maintenant, avec le *MRIC*, je suis persuadée que nous allons pouvoir aller encore plus loin. Je suis certaine que le *MRIC* avec son nouveau mandat pourra effectivement contribuer à la réalisation de nombreux objectifs et d'attentes que nous avons, et ensemble, nous devons veiller à ce que la participation à l'innovation ne soit pas une exception, mais une raison de notre survie et de notre mode de vie une norme à part entière.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Bholah!

(4.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Madame la présidente, permettez-moi de féliciter mon collègue, l'honorable ministre Sawmynaden qui a introduit ce projet de loi, c'est-à-dire, le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill*.

Ce texte de loi vise à abroger le *Mauritius Research Council Act 1992* pour ensuite établir le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council*.

C'est un fait : La science, la technologie et l'innovation peuvent jouer un rôle moteur dans l'amélioration de la productivité et la croissance économique. Pour créer les conditions favorables pour stimuler la recherche et l'innovation, il faut qu'il y ait des efforts résolus qui sont consentis par le gouvernement.

Et c'est justement dans ce but que mon collègue Ministre vient aujourd'hui présenter ce texte de loi qui vise à repenser tous les aspects qui sont liés à la recherche et à l'innovation. Car, figurez-vous, créé en 1992, le MRC mérite une réorganisation avec de nouvelles attributions et un mandat bien plus élargi pour répondre aux défis majeurs.

Madame la Présidente, le monde est en pleine mutation. Le pays fait face à des changements rapides et profonds, avec des enjeux sociaux, environnementaux et économiques, tout à fait inédits.

Face à ces transformations, il devient nécessaire d'investir massivement dans la formation, la recherche et l'innovation. Et l'intermédiaire qui est utilisé pour promouvoir les piliers susmentionnés, dans ce cas, le MRC, doit se réinventer et son fonctionnement doit être à la hauteur de nos aspirations.

Madame la présidente, les Mauriciens attendent beaucoup, eux aussi, de leurs universités, de leurs écoles et de leurs centres de recherche pour protéger, développer et transmettre leur capital de connaissances et aussi pour soutenir l'économie. D'ailleurs, notre avenir dépend de nos savoirs.

Le Gouvernement veut donner à la recherche et à l'innovation une place essentielle dans le redressement du pays. Nos ambitions sont multiples. Il s'agit à la fois –

- d'élever le niveau général de connaissances;

- de renforcer les synergies;
- de bâtir un écosystème qui favorise la création de nouvelles entreprises ou qui permet à celles existantes de se réinventer;
- de gérer nos ressources d'une manière plus efficace;
- de créer une société innovante et inclusive qui s'adapte aux changements, et
- de rehausser la qualité de vie de nos citoyens.

En somme, nous voulons offrir à notre pays de belles opportunités de réussite à travers la recherche et l'innovation. Nous sommes en bonne voie, car, en sus du National Innovation Framework 2018-2030 lancé par le ministère de la Technologie, de la Communication et de l'Innovation, il est essentiel d'avoir une instance avant-gardiste comme le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council* pour réaliser les mesures préconisées dans ce plan d'action.

Madame la Présidente, l'actuelle loi, la *MRC Act* de 1992, ne contient aucun chapitre sur l'entrepreneuriat. De ce fait, je pense que le projet de loi, le *MRIC Bill*, fait désormais la part belle à l'innovation et à l'entrepreneuriat. Ce sont deux piliers qui sont étroitement liés. Je vais d'abord élaborer certains aspects concernant l'innovation avant d'en venir à l'entrepreneuriat.

Madam Speaker, in November last year, the African Union Commission launched the *African Scientific, Research and Innovation Council* in Nigeria. This Council is a platform for promoting dialogue and voice of the scientific community and allows scientists, research and other key stakeholders to be involved in the science, technology and innovation programmes of the continent. The Council is in line with the implementation of Africa's transformative Agenda 2063, out of which a major component is the AU's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024. This strategy rests on four pillars, namely –

- building and upgrading research infrastructures;
- enhancing professional and technical competencies;
- promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, and
- providing an enabling environment for research and innovation.

While going through the MRIC Bill, I have realised and it is worth mentioning that Mauritius is fully committed to the transformation of the African Continent.

Madam Speaker, in a conference in Beijing last year, the World Bank's Vice President for Africa, Mr Makhtar Diop voiced an old joke in economics, which I would like to share here. An economist was walking down the street with a friend and the latter sees a \$20 bill. The economist's friend turns to him and says, "look, a \$20 bill!" The economist keeps walking, saying, "that is impossible. If there were a \$20 bill on the ground, someone would have picked it up." In other words, economists tend to believe that if there is a profitable investment opportunity, then someone will take advantage of it. Not driving the economy towards innovation is like a massive lost opportunity as innovation has the potential to spur investment which can drive economic growth.

Therefore, we note that a lot of emphasis is being laid on innovation in the MRIC Bill. Clause 4 of the Bill which concerns the 5 objects of the Council provides clear-cut aims which I believe are of utmost importance to transform the country, and I quote –

“Innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity - not a threat”

as rightly pointed out by Steve Jobs, the American business magnate. And for innovations to take place, research should be undertaken.

This Government is of the view that Mauritius needs a stronger, more dynamic and sustainable research and innovation industry that is important to its economy and the society. Broadening the functions of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council will provide an appropriate platform for scientists, academics, researchers, funding agencies, the private sector, civil society, and entrepreneurs, amongst others, to thrive.

Madam Speaker, I will now touch upon some points pertaining to clause 5(g) where it is mentioned, and I quote –

“adopt a strong business to drive entrepreneurship and growth to facilitate start-ups and assist innovators to launch, build and grow successful businesses with the participation of the private sector.”

I have listened to hon. Ms Sewocksingh making a plea to have one representative of my Ministry on the Council. In fact, at clause 7(1) (e) –

“7. Constitution of Council

(1) The Council shall consist of –

- (e) 5 persons, including 2 representatives from private sector organisations, having knowledge and wide experience in the field of innovation, to be appointed by the Minister.”

I have received assurance from hon. Sawmynaden that, in fact, one officer of my Ministry will be on the Council. Regarding entrepreneurship, it is worth also mentioning that the speed of connectivity has increased for the benefit of SMEs at no additional cost under this Government.

Right now, across the developing world, there are not enough jobs for the young people coming out of school, regardless of the quality of the education. According to the World Bank, low and middle-income countries around the world will need 520 million new jobs for youth coming out of school by 2030, and the current estimates are that 460 million will be created. This implies that 60 million young people might be left without formal jobs.

So, new jobs need to be created. Currently, a lot of job is being generated through the creation of start-ups. And one way to create more jobs is through innovation. Innovation is simply introducing a change of some kind that adds new value. When it comes to innovation, it is about ideas, not just commercial outcomes. Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is more commercially driven. It typically refers to a person who has a drive to build or make something that delivers commercial benefits to them, while also adding value to the broader world. Entrepreneurship leverages innovation to create value.

Madam Speaker, to create a successful innovation economy, we need both the capability to create new value and the ability to take that value into the business environment and commercialise it. Every day, innovative technologies are introduced that provide significant value to society. However, if they are not backed by entrepreneurial talent or awareness, those innovations will never achieve their commercial potential. This is why focus must be laid on the intersection. This Bill before this House goes specifically in that direction by bringing together both innovators and entrepreneurs.

I must add that the provisions of the MRIC Bill are fully compatible with the actions initiated by my Ministry and SME Mauritius Ltd in the context of the implementation of the 10-Year SME Master Plan. The focus of the Master Plan is to accelerate SME innovation and growth. In fact one of the six thrusts of the Master Plan is to improve design and value addition by supporting SMEs in research and development, innovation and brand identity to

move into niche markets. Hence, we are targeting the transformation of SMEs into sustainable and value creation entities.

Added to the desire for collaboration with innovation labs, the present Bill will clearly establish bases for the development of linkages, so necessary for cross fertilisation of ideas and cluster development crucial to the development of SMEs in our country.

Madam Speaker, by dint of our geography and demography, Mauritius, as a market, has its limitations. Therefore, international visibility and competitiveness is key to the development and sustainable growth of our SMEs. Start-Ups, by the very nature of their activity, are more susceptible to global competition as they need to keep pace with the quick technological evolution. This can be a daunting task for any young entrepreneur.

Clause 5 (k), subsection 3 specifies that the Council will –

“engage in a process of internationalisation to –

- (i) access and make use of globally dispersed knowledge and technology;
- (ii) connect with research and innovation hubs, and
- (iii) attract aspiring entrepreneurs globally;”

This is a reassurance for our SMEs and start-ups so that they can safely thrive in a globalised context.

During recent years, we have witnessed an increase of entrepreneurial activities in the field of agri-business, hydroponics projects and poultry farming, as testified by the amount of loans being allocated to SMEs in the abovementioned categories. I hope with the coming into operation of the Council, there will be a disruptive trend so that we can have SMEs in new emerging sectors.

I note with satisfaction that the MRIC also aims to attract aspiring entrepreneurs globally. Allow me to quote one specific observation from the 10-Year SME Master Plan again with regard to enticing foreign entrepreneurs to choose Mauritius for their business activities, and I quote –

“These SMEs can act as powerful levers to transform the domestic SME ecosystem and uplift the innovativeness and competitiveness of Mauritian SMEs through emulation and cooperation.”

On this note, I would like to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister who has brought forward the Business Facilitation Act and for having come up with numerous budgetary

measures. These steps have allowed Mauritius to consolidate and to accentuate its lead as number one in Africa for the Ease of Doing Business and to progress five places worldwide to take the 20th place among 190 countries according to the World Bank's Doing Business 2019 Report.

It is heartening therefore to note that the present MRIC Bill sets the basis for collaboration and building on collective synergy to promote internationalisation in the interest of the SME sector and the country.

While we expect to welcome new players, new innovators and new entrepreneurs, I also believe that research and innovation should emerge from existing businesses as well. Many business leaders agree that innovation is critical to their company's long-term success and that through innovative practices they will have comparative advantages. However, they do not have the strategies in place to get the results they want and they feel lost at times. The fear of failure and lack of support often prevent them to tread new paths. Hence, I believe that the MRIC Bill is an appropriate framework which aims at establishing the appropriate conditions to support businesses to implement innovative processes and products.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to clause 5(a), which specifies that the Council shall develop, every five years, a national strategy for research and development and innovation. We are, in fact, operating in a globalised world increasingly in need of knowledge and technologies to overcome societal and economic challenges. The strategy paper will highlight areas in which the country should focus its investment and at the same time, it will ensure coherence between policies, priorities and action.

As opposed to the MRC Act 1992, which makes provision for the establishment of a General Fund, the new MRIC Bill has a new element with regard to the creation of a National Research and Innovation Fund as stated in Clause 13. The fact that this Fund will serve the public as well as the private sector research initiatives, grants much scope to our public bodies to step up and integrate a culture of research to drive and accompany efforts of the private sector.

Such a Fund will be a definite risk mitigator for SMEs as well which are often hesitant to take the plunge in research and innovation-based business activities by themselves.

The Fund will also serve as pull factor for our diaspora to inject their know-how into establishing start-ups in Mauritius, thus fostering an innovative business eco-system enabling

knowledge and skills transfer and consequentially leading to a multiplication of start-ups, and other collaborative and innovative business and facilitation models.

Another positive step enunciated in the MRIC Bill is at Clause 16, which makes provision for the person or company creating a product, service or process to himself being entitled to holding the Intellectual Property Rights despite being funded by the resources of the Council. This demonstrates the commitment of the Government to acknowledge, to value and to reward the intellect and researches of our local expertise and capabilities.

Madam Speaker, through the presentation of the MRIC Bill, this Government proves once again that it is all set to implement actions which are “Game Changer” for the nation and for the betterment of our population.

We are gathered here, in this august Assembly, to set the ball rolling for the adoption of the MRIC Bill which I think is part of our unwavering efforts to create strong and functional science, technology, research and innovation systems for tackling our development challenges and deliver on the rising aspirations of our citizens.

We will recall that in November last year, Mauritius hosted the World Artificial Intelligence (AI) Show and World Blockchain Summit. The AI Show featured humanoid robot, Sophia, developed by Hong Kong-based Company Hanson Robotics, and named the United Nations Development Programme's first ever non-human Innovation Champion. With the necessary bases being set to create a new generation of technopreneurs, backed by the new MRIC, I sincerely hope that one day Mauritius will be able to develop its own humanoid robot.

Nothing is worse than missing an opportunity which could have changed our lives. This is what the new Council will aim to achieve: creating opportunities which make a difference.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I suspend the sitting for half an hour.

At 4.57 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.42 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Hon. François!

(5.40 p.m.)

Mr F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you. Madam Speaker, I stand in support of this Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill (No. IV of 2019).

This MRIC Bill is all about the future of science and innovation and its commercialisation to help economic growth and social development in our Republic for the benefit of one and all. The first object of the Bill, is to –

“promote and coordinate applied research, innovation and research and development according to the needs of the country and to improve the quality of life”.

Before going further, one first thing, I would like to know, what is Government and private sector investment in research and development today, as a percentage of our GDP? Madam speaker, with the advent of the fourth Industrial Revolution, we are required to alter our understanding of innovation. This is where in our present Education Reform for all our children to benefit, they must be taught to think more in a scientific and disciplined way to push the innovation-driven development process in our Republic.

Madam Speaker, today, a new round of scientific, technological and industrial revolutions is reshaping the world domain of innovation and global economic structure. Allow me to refer to developing nations, such as China and India, which, understand with unquestioned certainty, that inventive international science and technology are the keys to socioeconomic well-being and prosperity.

Madam Speaker, in September last, I had the opportunity with other Parliamentary colleagues of both sides of the House, hon. Dr. A. Boolell, hon. Joe Lesjongard, hon. Thierry Henry and others, to participate in the Third-Interregional Seminar on the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for Parliament of Developing Countries, held in Beijing, China, by the International Parliamentarian Union (IPU). We had the opportunity to experience part of the innovation-driven development of China, ideas and policies, for example, the Belt and Road Initiative, the Yangtze River Economic Belt and Coordinated Scientific and Technological Innovation, Innovative Development and People’s Livelihood Benefit, such as clean drinking water and sanitary facility, economical and sustainable clean energy, and so on.

Let me quote President Xi Jinping, from the 19th China People’s Congress, where he defines –

“Innovation is the primary force driving development, and it is the strategic underpinning for building a modernised economy, through high quality science and technology”.

He also stressed on the importance of fostering a “Culture of Innovation, to turn China into a Nation of Innovators”.

Madam Speaker, this will be my inspiration to comment on this MRIC Bill, which provides to promote high quality research, foster innovation in our national interest. Chinese innovation is visible in internet business models, Clean Tech, Telecommunications, software, artificial intelligence, Fintech (Financial Technology), new materials, consumer products, high-end equipment, and green technologies. We all know or use, or heard of products from innovative Chinese companies, such as Huawei, Alibaba, Haier, Baidu and other social communication ecosystem.

Madam Speaker, here, the valuable lesson in that regard, is that strong entrepreneurship, combined with Government support and guidance, explains why China is advancing high in innovation and competitiveness today by making ideas from research commercially viable.

Clause 4 (b) of the objects of this Bill, is –

“to foster research, innovation and entrepreneurship culture;”

which guides us here, in the same direction as China. I believe that an in-depth Mauritius/China Research Strategy Cooperation and Capacity Building with regard to innovations could be envisaged in various defined priority field to meet clause 5 (k) of the Bill. If China can do it in terms of innovation, here, in Mauritius also, we can do it as well. We cannot afford to lag behind or try to do innovation behind our closed doors. The experience of others counts, and surely should allow us to promote same as per clause 4 (e) of the Bill. Here, I have to say, I value the Mauritius/Japan satellite projects, as pointed out by the Minister Sawmynaden. This is a revolutionary project with regard to data and others. However, an important term, which is not defined but quite important, is the term ‘Innovation Economics’, which recognises the reality of a global, knowledge-based economy, which requires a new approach to national economic policy, based less on capital accumulation, budget surpluses, or social spending, and more on smart support for the building blocks of private sector growth and innovation. I have to admit that this is a challenge today to open up

economic policy in our local context, to include a new doctrine of innovation economics instead of favoring macroeconomic issues, such as tax cuts or social spending.

Madam Speaker, Clause 4 (d) of the object of Bill, is to –

“enhance private sector participation in research and development and innovation;”.

I believe that, to achieve this objective, we should primarily start by considering our public sector as an agent for renewal and innovation. Our public sector will have to, amongst others,

–

- (a) ensure that the basic preconditions of an operating environment are in place to guarantee a favourable setting up for new research and innovation initiatives, and
- (b) our public sector should speed up innovation activities, create demand for innovations and support market and business development, part being mentioned by my colleagues, hon. Minister Bholah, as well as hon. Sawmynaden and hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun

Why I said so, Madam Speaker, because this is where Government, as a vehicle of innovation, will have to provide incentives for public servants to improve their innovation ability and the efficiency of their operations to meet clause 5 (b) of the Bill.

Madam speaker, the modern public sector trend today, is that, it has to be partly turning from a service provider into a coordinator that promotes the development of an innovative market - we are talking about innovation. For example, we all know the hurdles in our Procurement System. Here, I refer to my own observations made at the level of the NDU, as PPS, for delay caused by lengthy procedures for the implementation of projects. And I have cited as per the Annual Procurement Report 2017/2018, the total value of public procurements which is considerable, amounting to some Rs18.74 billion. GDP at current retail prices is Rs471 billion. Value of contracts as a percentage of GDP is 3.98%.

Madam Speaker, let's say, if only two to three per cent were spent on procuring innovative solutions, this could provide a significant additional incentive for private companies and complement public support for research, development and innovation. Only two to three per cent.

What we all expect is that public procurements innovation should help to guide private companies towards participating in the development of new solutions to social problems and deploying new operating methods and technologies.

Madam Speaker, to benchmark on regional and international platform, clause 5(k)(ii) of the function of the Bill, states –

“the engagement in a process of internationalisation to connect with research and innovation hubs”.

Here, I would like to refer to three crucial international forums, namely SIDS, COP21 and International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) for our engagement in these international forums and cooperation. For IRENA, I will not comment on it, as the DPM, hon. Collendavelloo brilliantly spelt out last week, the advancement for clean energy development, and innovation process for our Republic through MARENA

However, at COP21 in 2015, Mauritius presented his Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), where Mauritius requested international access and support in its efforts to transition towards a low-carbon development path through greater utilisation of renewable sources of energy, for example, biomass, solar and wind, and to adapt to the negative impacts of climate change that affect several sectors of the economy. This substantiates Clause 5(k) of the functions of this present Bill.

Madam Speaker, in 2017, in COP23, the World Health Organisation launched a Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This is fostering SIDS to elaborate a Research Agenda - very important - on Climate Change and Health.

The Initiative recognises that SIDS, that is, including Mauritius, are in the frontline facing a range of acute and long-term risks, including extreme floods, storms, drought and sea level rise, and increased risks of water, vector and foodborne diseases. We are actually facing the problem of Dengue.

Madam Speaker, SIDS Samoa SDGs Conference in 2014, reference was made for the progress of Sustainable Development Goal for the Ocean.

Hon. Dr. Boolell will certainly recall what he raised during this conference, and I quote –

“The next frontier of development for SIDS is the Oceans, which will be the key to food, energy and water security, and fuel innovation. Oceans must be at the forefront of SIDS research agendas.”

Madam Speaker, today, I am glad to see that the Government of Mauritius has already embarked in that direction with an ambition to double the contribution of the Ocean Economy to our GDP, which is now at 10.5% in sectors such as Marine Biotechnology, Marine Renewable Energy and others. Certainly, hon. Koonjoo will be happy about that.

Madam speaker, a few weeks ago, the world followed the message of President Faure of Seychelles undersea water to protect the world’s seas and ocean ecosystems. This endeavour must foster us to join efforts as SIDS for more scientific activities and research alike in the interest of the Indian Ocean region.

Madam Speaker, truly, this is a very important Bill and we can go on and on, on many other issues in relation to research, development and innovation for our Republic.

But, for today, I will stop here but allow me to say a few words on the Bill and to be more specific in relation to Rodrigues.

Rodrigues has embarked on a restructuring process of its public administration and development process after 16 years of autonomy, and surely, research and innovation would have to be a key factor of that change.

Madam Speaker, the OPR Party vision, through the leadership of Serge Clair and his team, is to make Rodrigues a sustainable and ecological island, while progressing towards a new and modern economic perspective.

However, with the dynamics of change, we are bound to continue to look ahead by creating new opportunities for sustainable growth and the wellbeing of our local people, while keeping our authenticity and Rodrigues characteristics. This is our big challenge ahead.

Research, development and innovation activities should therefore contribute to a favourable evolution in this direction, as Rodrigues geographical isolation from the principal national growth centres, its smallness factor and not much of a diverse population is itself a Natural Research and Innovation Open Laboratory.

In Rodrigues, today’s societal and economic impact is being mainly influenced by the new era of technological digitalisation after its connection with the Under Seawater Marine

Sub-Cable MARS, as pointed out by hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun and the phenomena of climate change.

The digitalisation of the Rodriguan society and the economy, which is only at its initial steps, will significantly change the ways, in which we learn, work and act.

But that change and transformation will need new operating models, methods and structures, and one of these pressing requirements is research, development and innovation policy by promoting a new innovative and research culture in Rodrigues.

This will foster Rodrigues to improve local capacity and provide necessary resources to its development of research and innovation culture in our schools, Government bodies, Non-Government Organisations and the private sector. And here, I have to say I acknowledge that innovation has different meanings in different countries and cultures.

Having said so, innovation in Rodrigues will not have the same meaning as innovation, here, in Mauritius. Very important! Innovation has different meanings in different countries and cultures.

Clause 4(a) and clause 5(e) of the Bill will surely foster Research, Development & Innovation to become key drivers to address future priorities of Rodrigues promoting economic growth, and enhancing the quality of life of Rodrigues population or Rodrigues people.

It is noted that actually, Research in Rodrigues is being done in a stand-alone non-coordinated approach by a few public bodies and NGOs.

There is also a Mauritius Research Council Office in Rodrigues, since 2011, that has moved from two to four officers today, which should be restructured and well integrated in the new MRIC structure to meet the objects and functions of this Bill in Rodrigues.

This entails the new MRIC to determine the right structure and hierarchy within the Rodrigues Office to ensure an effective line of commands, to enable coordination and supervising of research at the level of Rodrigues.

The restructuring of the Rodrigues Office will thus allow Rodrigues, especially the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to fully collaborate and participate with the MRIC new endeavours, to contribute in the national efforts for fostering research and innovation within the whole of the Republic of Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, I have to say that I subscribe to the recommendations of the *Assises de la Recherche et de l'Innovation* to prepare a Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation for Rodrigues for 2015- 2020, held in Rodrigues in 2015 by the Mauritius Research Council in collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The Strategic Plan is approved by the RRA.

My question is, how they will proceed and what mechanism to put in place by the new MRIC to implement same.

The recommendations of the *Assises* have also defined the challenges and needs for a new Research and Innovation direction for Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, I have to point out that the implementation of the Strategic Plan has earmarked five strategic directions for Rodrigues namely –

- (1) Identify Research and Innovation priorities;
- (2) Upgrade human competencies;
- (3) Upgrade the public and private research sector;
- (4) Enhance investment in Research and Innovation, and
- (5) Strengthen governance and ensuring sustainability.

This is an initial Road Map for Rodrigues Research & Innovation, but this will not become a reality unless necessary funds are clearly earmarked for same.

What is also suggested from the “*Assises*” is that Research and Innovation in Rodrigues must be clustered as a priority in three categories, namely –

- (i) Agro-Industry and Bio-Farming;
- (ii) Ocean and Marine Resources, Renewable Energy, and Water Resources, and
- (iii) ICT and Emerging Sector Cluster.

Madam Speaker, in as far as the cluster of Bio-Farming is concerned, Research & Innovation should concentrate on the issue of Rodrigues agricultural vocation and food security.

We recently faced the problem of foot and mouth diseases and today Fall Armyworms that landed suspiciously in Rodrigues causing much harm to us socially and economically.

I have to say that the isolation and natural quarantine aspect of Rodrigues is still raising a lot of doubtful questions about FMD and FAW. And I am glad I heard that all embargo have been waived on Rodrigues as from today, if I am not mistaken.

Further, Madam Speaker, more importantly, this is where bio-security for Rodrigues is a priority field for future applied research to improving our crop production techniques through Climate Change SMART and Resistant Agricultural Methods, mainstreaming Bio-Diversity and finding cure for pests or diseases, and right now it's cure for the Fall Armyworm attacks.

I understand that the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and FAO have developed the South-South Cooperation Programme entitled "Strengthening inter-regional cooperation for the sustainable management of Fall Armyworm (FAW) --through South-South Cooperation".

The programme is envisaged to facilitate the further development of Monitoring and Early Warning Systems (MEWS) and to enhance countries' capacities to manage FAW (Fall Armyworm) with biology-based means as response measures.

This is the kind of connection we required as per Clause 5 (k) (ii) of the Bill.

As regards to the cluster concerning Water Resources, I believe the critical concern for Rodrigues beyond increasing water production is the cropping issue of wastewater management.

Certainly, wastewater management will be one of the serious challenges, that Rodrigues will have to face in the near future while trying to achieve its ecological vision and its sustainability.

My appeal to both, central Government and regional Government, is to jointly look into the strategic planning of this major project where major development and research investments will be required and the sooner the better.

Madam Speaker, Development Research for Social Innovations, Rodrigues culture and way of life, *c'est à dire la culture et l'âme rodriguaise*, remains an avenue of future research, while we, Rodrigues' people, continue to pursue '*le Rêve Rodriguais*'.

For example, an interesting avenue is the question of why so many people today who yesterday were not interested with Rodrigues, suddenly there is a drastic change of attitudes

towards Rodrigues, let alone those who dishonestly want to politically conquer Rodrigues? What is the bearing of this change in attitude on the Rodriguan society? *Mo pou deplime zot!*

Madam Speaker, however, let me be very clear on one crucial point, Rodrigues do not want to be politically or socially polluted and, by all means, we will show our resilience to protect, preserve and cherish our fundamentals. Rodrigues people only value what is truthful and genuine.

This is a good social-science applied research avenue for our social development, while Rodrigues is positioning to strike the right balance between material progress, and cultural and ethical progress, the right balance between economic and social development.

Many research has been done in the past with regard to health sector, for example, the problem of high blood pressure, but today, there are other health concerns such as the high rate of cancer, the fluctuating life expectancy of the population requiring research in terms of what are the risk factors, for example, change in food habits.

Madam Speaker, allow me to share with the House the following - .my grandfather died at the age of 94 years old and listen to that...

(Interruptions)

He never had a dental problem; he only lost all his 32 teeth naturally on the eve of his death.

I am still perplexed about this phenomenon. I believe Rodrigues needs to carry out a research on our old age persons' way of life, food habits and its bearing on life expectancy and determinants of good health.

Another research area of priority is that Rodrigues can become a centre of Excellence in Ocean Research with all the richness that exists thereat and not yet fully exploited, for example, in our Marine Protected Area and its marine life.

I am aware that there is an actual research project by MRC for the improvement of scientific understanding of the ecological, physical technology and biomass around Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in Rodrigues to foster new fishing techniques in expanding our fishing industry.

In addition, our tourism industry depends also on diving activities which implies that more research should be carried out about the marine life around the island, mainly off-lagoon. There is need also for specific Research & Innovation Schemes for Rodrigues, namely for academic programs at tertiary level where more tertiary Rodriguan students

should be given the opportunity to undertake research in Rodrigues during their university studies. Cooperative Research Innovation SMEs, as pointed out by hon. Bholah earlier, Rodrigues Research and Innovation Grant Scheme, amongst others in strategic and priority field.

Rodrigues must ensure that capable people, experienced Rodriguans are valued, respected and put to use by stimulating them to come back to serve their country. Madam speaker, this is an opportune time with the coming budget to cater for, at least, the creation of a Rodrigues Research and Innovation Fund. This fund interconnected with RRA policies, should foster and promote research and innovation in all spheres of scientific, technological, social and economic activities and encourage commercial utilisation of innovation and research results in the local and national interest. I will suggest that this New MRIC, in line with the Regional Assembly vision, gives due consideration for the setting up of a New Research Regulatory body for Rodrigues in Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, our republic's future socio-economic and environmental prosperity will be underpinned by science, technology and innovation. Innovation will become a way of life for our people. Our public sector and private sector must be able to realise their potential as a major contributor to a global knowledge-based economy. Let us all collectively, through decision-making mechanisms, reinforce this new research & innovation vision for our Republic. Let us all rise up to the challenges ahead of us.

Madam speaker, on these notes, I congratulate the hon. Minister Sawmynaden for the introduction of this very fantastic Bill and wish it to be successful. I also commend the Bill to the House and I thank you for your kind attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(6.16 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Madam Speaker, if you had the choice to be earthbound or to be airlifted in a rocket, what would you have chosen? Although it could have been the most beautiful satellite orbiting the earth, I am sure you will have chosen to be earthbound. So, let us make a soft landing and look at issues which are practical and pragmatic.

Research, Development and Innovation is the key to our economy, the backbone of our economy. Before I unbundle the Bill, I will ask two simple questions: when will a full-

fledged National Strategic Paper on Innovation, Research and Development be circulated? What has been the output and outcome of the existing framework?

May I remind the House that on the sitting of 08 April 2014, the then Minister of Tertiary Education highlighted five features to give a new momentum to Research, Development and Innovation. The five features are prominent in the present Bill: the national strategy to be reviewed every five years to be based on economic, technological, social development needs of the country; the setting up of a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee; the setting up of a National Research and Innovation Fund; developing a regulatory framework for private sector participation and ownership of intellectual property.

This, in my humble opinion, the ownership of intellectual property is the most salient feature of the Bill, but easier said than done. I will come to it at a later stage. The new Mauritius Research and Innovation Council lays emphasis on applied research and, in my opinion, the composition of the Council is too selective. None of the major research institutions, be it FAREI, Mauritius Oceanography Institute or the Sugar Industry Research Institute nor their parent Ministry is there. The new MRIC Bill focusses on Industry and there is no representative of the Ministry responsible for Industry, and yet innovation involves synergy and collaboration.

The board has been done away with and in the main Act it guided the Council in terms of policies and strategies. The Bill refers to applied research. The MRC Act refers to research as a whole, including fundamental and applied research. There is no innovation system in the world which focuses only on one type of research. Both are important and should be considered in a holistic approach when a national innovation framework is being set up. This is reflected in most innovation policies of different countries. The right balance should be sought on a case to case basis, but focussing solely on applied research might lead us to missing a step in the innovation.

Now, I have not heard the Minister saying that the Bill has been widely circulated. I was told that it was on the website for a short spell of time. I am rather disappointed because there should have been wide discussion at the bar of public opinion. This is a Bill of major significance, and inviting input here and there from any specific quarter for a short spell does not do justice to the importance of this Bill. I do concur with what was stated earlier by the hon. Member when she intervened shortly after the Minister. Why is it that the Minister has waited for four years before this Bill should have been introduced? Why wait for four years?

Knowing perfectly well that it is the key to our economy, that research, development and innovation is the backbone of our economy. Four valuable years have been wasted and except for the setting up of the National Research Innovation Advisory Committee, none of the amendments of the Principal Act of 1992 brought in April 2014, was proclaimed. Consequently, there was no roadmap and the Mauritius Research Council was left stranded.

In spite of negligible support from the Minister, the MRC managed to prepare an innovation framework for years 2018/2030 and the Minister, unfortunately, has not deemed it fit to chair Committees to address relevant issues. In Singapore, Madam Speaker, it is the Prime Minister who, as and when required, chairs the Ministerial Committee on research, development and innovation. Research, development and innovation is the powerhouse of the economy. If it is the powerhouse of our economy, why is it that our existing and emerging sectors are becoming sunset sectors? It is, indeed, a big price to pay, Madam Speaker, for complacency. Government is largely responsible because there are missing links in the conveyor belt of research and development and innovation, as I pointed out in my opening remarks. Mention was made of Global Innovation Index, and hon. Ms Sewocksingh was unfairly taken to task. One of the intended consequences of poor investment in research and development is an absolute free-fall in the Global Innovation Index for Mauritius since 2015, both in terms of ranking and the index.

Let me refer to the ranking of Mauritius. From 2011, we were 53 in the innovation ranking; in 2017: 64 in the innovation ranking; 2018: 75 in the innovation ranking. Whether ten years ahead of us or we are behind South Africa is not too relevant. But the fact remains, Madam Speaker, that there is no clear coherent research in development strategy under this Government for our country. I will refer to the findings of a report submitted by the MCII, and which made it quite clear to Government not to set up schemes if the resources are not forthcoming. But, unfortunately, Government chooses to act in total disregard of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and proposals were made, sound proposals, for example, the setting up of innovation box regime in Mauritius to promote investment, local and foreign and productivity, which we should have given due consideration to, the measures to be set up to favour productive investment and innovation. And we were taken to task and rap on the knuckles when we were told what we already know, that expenditure on research and development represents less than 0.5 % of our GDP. In fact, it is 0.18 %.

So, I heard nothing of innovation box and if you want to attract innovative enterprises and improve economic performance, we have to set up these innovation boxes and look at

additional incentives that could be extended, for example, exemption for income derived from IP assets, such as patent and franchises.

Madam Speaker, there is an intricate link between research and development competitiveness and productivity. When you look at the two institutions, to some extent, MRC has delivered, but still has a long way to go, but one cannot do without the other. I don't understand why is it that our National Productivity and Competitiveness Council cannot deliver and be more responsive to the needs of entrepreneurs. Some people have even conveyed the idea and I think it is an idea that needs to be given serious thought as to why we cannot merge MRIC and the National Productivity Council, because productivity and competitiveness are the results of research and innovation. And it is very important that the right mechanism is put in place to capture data and information that relates to Mauritius on innovation. But, unfortunately, there is no organisation which can quantify innovation and tells us in terms of figures and facts how well we are doing and yet, this is crucial, and many countries are collecting relevant data to guide them in their innovation policies.

The MRIC has to establish a strong arm to do so, and this will help the country to identify innovation gaps and formulate relevant strategies. Only proper and relevant data can lead to evidence-based innovation policies, and this should be the heart of the new organisation.

Madam Speaker, there is mention of a research repository. But where is the database? It was a budget measure announced by the Prime Minister in his speech for the financial year, the setting up of a research repository. Work has been initiated for all MRC reports to be made available on the database and other institutions are supposed to follow suit once the system would be put in place. At one time, we were even seeking the support of an expert to set up the research repository because today, and we have said it over and over again, access to information is a right and not a privilege.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, the Budget Speech also pledged that the Intellectual Property Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would move to the MRC. In my humble opinion, this is a piecemeal approach. In a world of cutthroat competition, we need to have cutting edge and not go for a hit-and-run policy. I will invite the EDB and the MRIC to conduct studies of how South Korea, Israel and New Zealand are constantly reinventing themselves to be breakout nations. Israel, built largely on desert land, is today exporting water to neighbouring countries and is helping South Africa to address its water shortage.

New Zealand has the best cooperative society in the world, Fonterra is a great success story and a major supplier of dairy products to many countries. It was established in October 2001, following the merger of the country's two largest dairies. The MRIC should have a strong structure to allow the organisation to start on the right step. The structure should be strategic and in line with the functions of the Council.

Madam Speaker, if Mauritius as a Small Island Developing State is to be a breakout nation, Government should be involved peripherally. Government has the moral and legal obligations to widen the circle of opportunities for start-up and to earmark funds to annually finance the cost of twenty of our best brains to do Postgraduate studies, PhD or Postdoctoral level in relevant fields in the best universities of the world. Our objective is to move from generic to field of specialisation. Our level of preparedness is essential to make the quantum leap from middle income to high-income status. All the hype, Madam Speaker, about FinTech, AI, Crypto currency is thin talk unless we have the skilled resources. We need a role model.

In Jamaica, everybody thinks he or she can become Bob Marley and rushes to the recording studio in expectation that he or she can make a breakthrough. I am not saying we should be as high-spirited as our Jamaican friends, but anybody who has an idea which is sound scientifically should be able to pollinate it, allow it to mature through research and development, make sure that his IP is protected to give his product the best commercial security. Ideas, Madam Speaker, are the best currencies of the 21st century. As I mentioned, Government should act as a facilitator and as an enabler. It has to safeguard our intellectual property rights and there should be no violation as is currently happening in Madagascar. You know what happened in Madagascar, Madam Speaker, US scientists made a breakthrough when they assessed the medicinal properties of a flower called Periwinkle, which they pluck at their own freewill, a medication which is used to lower blood pressure and is an effective chemotherapy in many types of cancer. However, no benefits have accrued to the Government of Malagasy.

The Bill makes no provision to ensure that endemic biodiversity remains the property of the Government of Mauritius. Beware of the greed of international partners, although we are going to enter into firm agreements, but make sure that they don't take us for a ride and become too overriding. In the same vein, where are the provisions for equitable sharing of data, results and IP, where there is public and private partnership? When India conducted hydrographic and bathymetric studies, there was an agreement to ensure equitable sharing of

all relevant data. But, between you and me, Madam Speaker, you know as well as I do, that not all relevant data has been shared, because they have to keep sensitive information for their own economic gains, and this is the law of the strong versus the weak, Madam Speaker, irrespective of how closely related one is to the other.

Madam Speaker, we have to brand Mauritius, and we can do it, and we have to rely upon our big companies to set up the research think-tank because they have the cash to invest in research and development. The project should include the notion of inclusive innovation. I am glad to note that Eclasia and ENL Group have taken the lead to pave the way for young budding entrepreneurs. But, as I say, there are many missing links and one of the missing links is that, as of now, there is no patent attorney, and I don't know of any law firm which has specialised in intellectual property rights. I hope, as the Minister has said, that a comprehensive IP legislation will be introduced as it is long overdue. It cannot forever remain in the pipeline; under the previous Government much ground was covered.

It is, indeed, a complex legislation but an important tool to protect the rights of innovators from predators. Many provisions of the 2002 IP legislation were not proclaimed, and there is no provision for geographical indication. Madam Speaker, you were in the vanguard of the Ministry of Agro-industry when we had to protect the IP rights of a flower grower who had produced a unique variety of Anthurium. The material had to be sent to Kew Garden to be expertised. I am sure you recall the controversy over the geographical indication of Demerara, the name of the river in Guyana. The Mauritius Sugar Syndicate was right to register the trade name in Mauritius; despite protests by Guyana, it could not register the name as its property because it was considered a generic product and not a registered trademark. I must say that, through good anticipation and some luck, nothing can stop the Sugar Syndicate to market our special sugar as Demerara. We have to understand that the days of a free lunch are over and there is no room for rent seekers, whether they are in the public or the private sectors.

An article in a daily written by Mr Chasteau de Balyon on the future of our sugar industry is a strong reminder that if we do not innovate, we die. Let me quote from an article written by a former Director of the Sugar Syndicate, which is shared by all stakeholders.

“Local is beautiful, it is the motto of the day and it should be applied to our main natural crop. Moving up the value chain is a prerequisite when industry which can no

longer rely on its current export strategy in the face of depressive prices and increased competition.”

Research and innovation into new products are necessary if the industry aims at moving up the value chain. By-products which can be developed on a commercial basis, Madam Speaker, are numerous and any new company like Tate & Lyle has developed and marketed a range of products obtained from sugar as a raw material. Today, the EU has no shortage of sugar; it is indeed a supplier to other European Countries. Gone are the days when Britain pleaded with Commonwealth sugar producing countries to boost export.

Madam Speaker, if I tell you that Brazil learned to manufacture quality sugar and downstream products, e.g. ethanol from molasses from Mauritius during the post-war years, would you be surprised. That was stated officially to an audience of world sugar producers by a delegate of Brazil attending an International Sugar Organisation Meeting held in London in 1998. Brazil is now a force to be reckoned with in the production of sugar and its by-products. Mauritius owes its success story in the pioneering work of research work in the sugar industry to many eminent scientists, but I will mention only a few, and the proposal by the Mauritius Academy of Science and Technology to honour many of those eminent scientists posthumously, I think is a wise decision.

I will also pay tribute to the late Mr Guéo and many others who have left a treasure trove of scientific papers at the MSIRI and the University of Mauritius. A database has to be set up to thoroughly evaluate the potential of those dissertations. And one of the reasons why we have taken a back seat in the Innovation Index, is precisely because we don't publish our papers. They are not published in international magazines, and we do not empower women in our social inclusion process.

Madam Speaker, there are indeed lessons to be learned from the experience of countries which have turned challenges and threats into opportunities. This Bill, unfortunately, is very telling of a Government which lacks scope, scale and depth. I would have expected Government to incentivise the corporate sector, not to invest in land speculation, but to think elsewhere. Research, development and innovation remain the backbone of our economy. And we have comparative and competitive advantages in many sectors. So, why not incentivise, give more facilities and more accompanying measures to make sure that investment goes into gainful sectors of the economy.

I stated earlier that we have to brand Mauritius, and I will make the point and give the reason as to why we have to encourage people to buy Mauritian products and make Mauritian products. And we can do it if we know how to reinvent ourselves. The recipe for success remains innovation, research and development. And the Economic Development Board should promote Mauritius as an Eldorado for research and development because we are a world in miniature with people of different origins, an island in the sun, but with different microclimatic conditions and soil type. We can become a better knowledge hub, a bio-factory, a centre for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) and, as you know, Madam Speaker, many surveys have been conducted and the latest updated one was submitted in 2015 and the conclusions and recommendations should be highlighted. The icing on the cake is, of course, our Ocean State status. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam used to say that Mauritians would wake up one day as ocean citizens. And this is the stark reality today. There is now a wakeup call to explore the potential of our EEZ and continental shelf because what is not obtainable on earth will be obtained on the floor of the ocean, Madam Speaker. I am talking of rare elements which can be used in high-tech industries.

Of course, there is a call for investment; there is a call for preparedness. We need to look at the role of universities, how to empower people at our level of preparedness, how much money should go into these sectors, which, of course, hold a lot of promises. But we cannot do it on our own. But we have to create the enabling environment; we have the resources, but we have to make sure that we are able to convey to the international community the relevance and importance of our bio-diversity, of our ocean economy, whether it is blue or green, Madam Speaker.

Let me highlight two success stories which are moving well on the conveyor belt. And I was very happy to read an interview given by a young scientist who is the Director of the Centre for Biomedical and Biomaterial Research. And I have also to pay tribute to Professor Dhanjay Jhurry because what the centre has demonstrated? It has demonstrated sustained progress. The ideas were there, they have pollinated the ideas, they have allowed the ideas to be matured into research and development and gradually, it is a product which is well on its way to be commercialised. They have obtained funding from the National Research Programme and they have asked it to build up its research infrastructure. And because of its potential and the commercial value that it will entail, funding is coming from other sources to drive its research and innovation thrust. And they are interacting with the department of health because the object is to go for drug delivery and nanotechnology. And

they have set up these units and these have been incorporated into the pole of innovation of the University of Mauritius for health. They are looking at two areas with respect to non-communicable diseases. They are looking at two non-communicable diseases rather: cancer and diabetes. And this centre has a track record in using biomaterials and scaffolds for human tissue generation which have entered the pre-clinical trial. And this centre is becoming a centre of excellence, forging new partnership and promoting the values of the University of Mauritius. They are collaborating with international organisations, excellent research institutions and this is the way forward. We might as well identify sectors where we can have a comparative and competitive advantage. But we need the human skills, we need the qualified personnel. This is why I made an appeal earlier. We might as well send 20 or 30 of our talented young graduates to the best universities to ensure that they are well-endowed academically and make sure that they invest in research and development with the support of relevant research organisations.

Madam Speaker, from genetic markers, science material, bio factory to sea mining opportunities are nothing. And I have been informed that a food processing company is working in close collaboration with MRC to widen the circle of opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Mauritius and Rodrigues in the harvesting and processing of algae. A project initiated in 2012 will soon be commercialised. The relevance of grassroot innovation as was stated by the hon. Member, hon. François, from Rodrigues and politics of inclusion, is very relevant. And the relevance of grassroot innovation and politics of inclusion should constantly be factored in. Rodrigues is an ideal location to conduct study on alternative agriculture. MRC jointly with FAREI will institute a programme of grants for research and educational activities to encourage the adoption of LISA approach and Rodrigues is an ideal location to promote *les produits terroirs*.

And I personally believe, and I will quote an opinion given by a good scientific officer and I read, and that is what the person says –

“I personally believe that if some efforts are made in the direction of social innovation, what could probably be useful is to include the notion of inclusive innovation. Inclusive innovation is a concept which places focus on all segments of the population, including the community.”

And the person went on to say –

“My personal feeling is that there is some leverage and innovation at industry level, but inclusion in terms of grassroot innovation and inclusion might have to be consolidated.”

In fact, if we think of Rodrigues and other outposts, there is no industry there and innovation in Rodrigues pertains a lot to sustainable development and small entrepreneur. Hence, again, the MRC should give attention to these. And it is noteworthy that the UN Sustainable Development Goal is about promotion of innovation. This link between sustainable development and innovation is crucial. The ranking of Mauritius in the Global Innovation Index is based on a number of indicators, and social inclusion is one of those indicators. One of these indicators is the percentage of women employed in advance degree. This is also about innovation from a gender attitude.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned it earlier and I will reiterate. The new apex body will have a major role to instil the culture of innovation in the nation. And the culture means youths and students should be sensitised as to start innovating at an early age. Start early so that once they are in the workplace, these young ones should have a creative and innovative mind. As of now, we do not have to wait for in years to come robots will take over routine jobs, but we need people who can think creatively, logically and laterally.

There was an excellent article Madam Speaker which appeared in the Economist of the 06 to 12 April 2019 on ‘Redesigning life’. When the Bill was introduced in 1992, nobody would have thought of using what we call synthetic biology to redesign life, and you know what are the merits of the synthetic biology let me just quote from the main article which appeared in the Economist –

“This week, Burger King introduced into some of his restaurant a beefless whopper that gets its meatiness from an engineered plant protein. Such innovation could greatly ease a shift to less environmentally taxing diet.”

I quote –

“The earliest stages of such “synthetic biology” are already changing many industrial processes, transforming medicine and beginning to reach into the consumer world.”

But, of course, it has its demerits and, unfortunately, I see nothing with respect to Ethics Committee. There is a call to set up an Ethics Committee. I know there are provisions for setting up different Committees, but you cannot invest into research and development and

move the process towards innovation if there is no Ethics Committee. It's very relevant to have an Ethics Committee.

Madam Speaker, what beats me and I can't understand much has been announced, a lot has been said sorry and a lot has been said about the technopole, but where is the technopole? It's neither here nor there so I don't want to be nasty, but I will say where is the seriousness of purpose.

There is an immaculate building which has remained idle for four years near the Cardiac Centre in Pamplemousses and, in my opinion, we could have used this building judiciously and converted it into a regional centre of excellence for cardiology and a regional centre for non-communicable diseases, but then there is a lot of hope of an expectation, but we need funding and funding of research and development and innovation under this regime is negligible due to mismanagement of the economy and rising debt. It is not its priority despite the fact, as I have stated on several occasions, that research and development and innovation is the backbone of our economy.

The previous Government made a pledge that 0.25 % of our GDP would be earmarked for investment in research and development, in line with the commitment given as a member of COMESA. At an ACP-EU ministerial meeting held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in 2009, 9 million euro from a total 13 million euro from the intra-ACP Fund was disbursed for research and development to finance projects conducted by MSRI for the benefits of sugarcane producing Member States. The MSRI, of course, obtained the lion share because we made a strong plea that it was a centre of repute. But MSRI is not delivering. To a large extent, it's not to be blamed, but the blame has to be shifted to the corporate sector because they don't have a sugar industry culture.

And had investment been made and used judiciously, the resources used judiciously, do you know the number of downstream products that could have been produced? I made a plea that MSRI has to stand on its own and be given a program-based budget and to ensure that they deliver. There is call for good surveillance and monitoring. It has also to raise funds and it has to work in close collaboration with the private sector. The Mauritius Research, Development and Innovation Council has to define its policies and these policies have to be clear and coherent.

For example, Madam Speaker, MSRI, as I said, has become complacent. There used to be an annual meeting of agricultural scientists; these meetings are no longer held, and I ask

the question: when was the last time there was an open day for small planters. I mean we are talking of key performance indicators, but we have to make sure that these key performance indicators are there to justify also the salary rise of some people in the corporate bodies.

Madam Speaker, I put the question at the beginning as to whether there were some achievements under the program, now I have been told that there was commitment of the private sector to invest over Rs100 m. in research and development. Commitment, pledges made, but not much was invested. There was a call for collaboration between the private sector and academia with over 20 such collaborations to be finalised, we don't know where we stand, and I hope the Minister will be able to inform the House accordingly. There are over 60 companies and research institutions collaborating with each other for development of new improved products, services, processes etc., but we have to be informed where matters stand? We do not even know when was the last report of the Mauritius Research Council submitted, Madam Speaker. So much is being said about multi-institutional effort with respect to ongoing project, but not a single project has been completed.

Madam Speaker, there is no point in coming with a legislation if there is no commitment and I impress upon the Minister to chair the Committee because policies cannot be defined unless there is clear direction from the Minister. As I said, in Singapore, as and when required the Prime Minister is called upon to chair the Singapore Research Council because it is the powerhouse of the economy and had we been forceful and responsive to the needs of sectors which are going through undue difficulties, we should have reinvented those sectors.

And to reinvent the sectors, investment in research and development and innovation is the key but not much has been done despite the fact that, prior to 2015, the previous Government came with appropriate amendments to give new thrust to Mauritius Research Council. Instead of build upon, the legacy that has been bequeathed by the previous Government they allow four years to go by and, in the meantime, those sectors have suffered huge setbacks because there was no clarity, no vision except a lot of hearsay and talk.

My appeal to Government despite this late hour and on the eleventh hour of the mandate, I hope that they also introduce the intellectual property legislation. If we want to re-engineer those sectors, we need to look at the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council and I make the plea because this is the information that has been parted to me that we need to bring together the Mauritius Research Council and the National Productivity and

Competitiveness Council. We cannot afford to waste time and resources. We have to build on existing resources, but we have to make sure that we use them judiciously.

So, let me conclude by saying that we may have the best ideas, but unless we pollinate those ideas; we allow them to mature through research and development, and we add value to the product through commercialisation, the idea is worthless. And we have a nation which has entrepreneurial values, we have a young budding nation which can think laterally, we have a system of education which constantly needs to reinvent itself. No one owes us a living, Madam Speaker. We are on our own and because we are on our own, we have to come together as a nation. Come with clear coherent policy, chalk out clear-cut policies, establish a road map so that we do not get lost in the oblivion.

Thank you very much.

Mr Gayan: Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 07 May 2019 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED

(7.03 p.m.)

MARE GRAVIER, BEAU BASSIN – DRAINS

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to make a request addressed to both the hon. Prime Minister, responsible for NDU and also the Minister of Local Government. My request comes from the

inhabitants of Tolaram Tulsidas Lane, Raoul Follereau Street, Mare Gravier, Beau Bassin behind the Tulsi Sham Temple. I would circulate the petition to the Deputy Prime Minister. Our attention has been drawn that during rainy seasons prevailing on several occasions, there has been a land drainage problem at the back of the Tulsi Sham Temple which is situated on the slope, at a low ground. Mostly all the rainy and muddy water accumulates there, around 6 inches deep, thus causing inconvenience to the inhabitants and also to people going to the temple.

So, I shall appreciate it if the Deputy Prime Minister can liaise with the NDU and forward this petition to the hon. Prime Minister and also to request the Minister of Local Government because these people have addressed the petition to the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose-Hill and several site visits were organised but in vain, no action has been taken. I appeal to the Deputy Prime Minister and to the Minister of Local Government to do the necessary with the authority. Thank you.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I will transmit the request.

(7.05 p.m.)

DR. A. G. JEETOO HOSPITAL – AUTOPSIES

Mr R. Uteem (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): I would like to raise an issue which is the source of considerable distress to family members in Port Louis whose close one has to undergo an autopsy. Madam Speaker, according to a notice issued by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life on 14 January 2008, autopsies are required to be carried out at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, *l'hôpital Civil*, up to 10 p.m. at night and after that, any other autopsy has to go to Victoria Hospital in Candos where autopsies are carried out until midnight.

Unfortunately, in Port Louis, they are not carrying out any autopsy, I do not know for what reason, not even until 22 hours. A few days ago, in my Constituency, there was a boy who passed away while playing football. He passed away at 7 o'clock in the morning, and they did the autopsy late in the afternoon and only after several people had to intervene. This is totally unacceptable. You cannot get people from Port Louis to go and fetch bodies in Candos and you cannot take so long to carry out autopsies when there is clearly a circular requiring doctors to carry out autopsies at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital until 10 p.m.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Health is not here, so, I would request whoever is replacing him to kindly ask him to look into the matter so that autopsies can be carried out at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital until 10 p.m. everyday.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall consult the hon. Minister of Health and Quality of Life on that matter.

(7.07 p.m.)

AVENUE CONDÉ NO. 6, MORCELLEMENT GUIBIES, PAILLES –

DRAINAGE

Mr V. Baloomoody (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will raise a matter concerning Avenue Condé, No. 6, Morcellement Guibies, Pailles. I am addressing myself to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government because the complaint has been raised several times with the Municipality of Port Louis. It is with regard to the state of the road itself, drainage, especially when it rains and now with the proliferation of mosquitoes. I am raising it today because of the urgency of the matter in view of the fact that Ramadan will start next week. When it rains, this road is not accessible even with motor cars and they have to go for prayers.

So, I am making a special appeal to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to look into the matter urgently so that, at least, these people can have access to the road to go for prayers during the Ramadan. Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Madam Speaker, I will look into it.

(7.08 p.m.)

ROCHE BOIS – MOTORWAY – BUS STOP

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Madam Speaker, the issue tonight I am raising will relate to the hon. Minister for Public Infrastructure. The problem is that there is a bus stop on the motorway of Roche Bois, opposite the Shell Filling Station. The bus stop is a very old one and there were cracks which have appeared on the roof of the bus stop and with time, rocks were falling on travellers and the MPI has already condemned the bus stop. But the problem is that there is only one bus stop there, people are still using it, and it is a hazard for the people there.

So, my appeal to the hon. Minister is that this bus stop be pulled down, and a new one be built as soon as possible. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha): Certainly, I will look into the matter. I would like to know if the bus stop is on the side of Shell or opposite Shell.

(Interruptions)

Thank you.

(7.09 p.m.)

RUE ALBATROS, MORCELLEMENT LA CONFIANCE, BEAU BASSIN –

ROAD HUMPS

Mr F. Quirin (Fourth Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, Madame la présidente. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse à l'honorable ministre des Infrastructures publiques, mais aussi à la ministre des collectivités locales et concerne, Madame la présidente, l'urgence d'installer des ralentisseurs à la rue Albatros, morcellement la confiance, Beau-Bassin.

Une année de cela, plus précisément le 24 avril 2018, j'avais ici même, dans cette Chambre, fait état du danger que représentent les véhicules qui empruntent la rue Albatros pour les résidents, en particulier les enfants et les personnes âgées. Récemment, cette rue a été ré-asphaltée et les automobilistes confondent souvent cette rue à un circuit de courses automobiles. Donc, la rue Albatros, au morcellement La Confiance, Madame la présidente, je dois le rappeler, est empruntée par des automobilistes comme raccourci afin d'éviter l'embouteillage au centre-ville de Beau Bassin en allant vers Port-Louis et aussi en sens inverse. Donc, l'installation des ralentisseurs est devenue plus qu'urgente et je compte sur les honorables ministres de faire le nécessaire rapidement avant qu'un drame ne survienne. Merci.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha): Ce n'est pas dans la politique du ministère d'installer les ralentisseurs, mais je vais peut-être essayer de trouver d'autres moyens pour gérer la circulation.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: The Minister will reply and then, there is no debate. Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(7.11 p.m.)

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF PORT LOUIS – ROADS – LIGHTING

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Ma requête s'adresse ce soir au ministre des Collectivités locales. Nous sommes à la veille du mois de Ramadan, je profite de cette occasion pour souhaiter à tous les parlementaires ainsi qu'à la population mauricienne un pieux mois de Ramadan.

La mairie de Port-Louis, ces derniers temps, est très réticente concernant les *overtimes*, mais je m'adresse à la ministre pour voir concernant les voies publiques, l'éclairage et le ramassage d'ordures. Malheureusement, il ne nous reste qu'un seul weekend avant le début du mois de Ramadan, demain et après-demain. Donc, si la ministre peut voir avec le lord-maire concernant la ville de Port-Louis, l'éclairage sur les voies menant aux différentes mosquées.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has chaired a Task Force to look into all these issues. So, I find it strange that all these issues have not been thrashed out up to now.

(Interruptions)

So, I will look into the matter, and see what can be done.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Lepoigneur!

(7.12 p.m.)

MARE GRAVIER, BEAU BASSIN – DRAINS

Mr G. Lepoigneur (Fifth Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, Madame la présidente. J'ai eu la même requête que l'honorable Bhagwan, concernant Mare Gravier à Beau-Bassin et à l'arrière du temple Tulsi Sham concernant les drains pour évacuer l'eau de pluie.

Cette requête a été faite depuis 2016. Il y a eu plusieurs *site visits*, mais, malheureusement, tout est resté pareil depuis 2016. C'est exactement au *corner* de la rue Raoul Follereau et Tolaram Tulsidas. Donc, il y a M. Emen Mandil qui avait fait une pétition

cosignée par 21 autres habitants de la région et il est à la disposition des autorités concernées. La pétition a été envoyée aux autorités concernées, la municipalité, NDU et autres. Donc, ce serait souhaitable que dans le prochain budget, ces problèmes soient pris en considération. Merci.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have taken note and will, of course, transmit to the hon. Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Thierry Henry!

(7.13 p.m.)

RESIDENCE LA TURQUOISE, MARE D'ALBERT – CLEANING

Mr T. Henry (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Merci, Madame la présidente. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de *Housing and Lands*, au ministre de *Local Government* et au ministre des Infrastructures publiques.

C'est au sujet d'un endroit dans ma circonscription, résidence La Turquoise, Mare d'Albert. C'est une résidence de la NHDC, dont mes deux collègues et moi-même et l'honorable Soodhun, avons fait l'inauguration. Mais, malheureusement, depuis l'inauguration, on a laissé cette résidence comme ça, à l'abandon. On avait promis qu'il y aurait une garderie et un centre, malheureusement, les terrains de la garderie et du centre, c'est comme un terrain en friche, juste à l'entrée de cette résidence. Donc, je demanderai au ministre de bien vouloir voir ça.

Et aussi, il y a un terrain de jeux pour enfants où l'herbe est plus longue que les enfants. Donc, je demanderai au ministre de *Housing and Lands* de bien vouloir faire le nécessaire.

RESIDENCE LA TURQUOISE, MARE D'ALBERT – TRANSPORT PROBLEM

Je m'adresse au ministre des Infrastructures publiques. Ils ont un gros problème de transport là-bas. Malheureusement, les autobus ne vont pas jusqu'à l'arrière là-bas, parce que ça se trouve au fond, derrière la piscine. Malheureusement, ils doivent marcher au moins pendant 15 à 20 minutes tous les matins pour aller prendre l'autobus, l'autobus ne passe pas là-bas. Donc, ils ont fait une requête : pourquoi ne pas faire l'autobus entrer jusqu'à là-bas ou avoir quelques taxis pour permettre aux gens d'aller au travail et aux enfants d'aller à l'école.

Je m'adresse à la ministre des Collectivités locales. Il y a eu un terrain de football...

Madam Speaker: No, hon. Thierry Henry!

Mr Henry: C'est le même endroit.

Madam Speaker: Even then, it is a different issue. It's not the same issue, it does not concern the same plot of land.

(Interruptions)

No, I am sorry! Please sit down, hon. Henry! One issue at a time.

(Interruptions)

Non.

(Interruptions)

Excuse me! What did you say?

(Interruptions)

Non, j'ai entendu le mot 'palabre'. Did you say that?

Mr Henry: Non!

Madam Speaker: Okay!

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr P. Jhugroo): Madam Speaker, with regard to NHDC, I will have a site visit with the officers of the NHDC and my colleagues. We are going to see what has been mentioned by the hon. Member. We will go on site because we often do site visits. So, don't worry. It is our constituency, we will look into it.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(Interruptions)

Order please!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Jhugroo!

(Interruptions)

Unfortunately, it's too late to take sanction against you.

(Interruptions)

Yes!

(7.16 p.m.)

LA PAIX STREET, PORT LOUIS – DRAINS

Mr Osman Mahomed (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you. My request to the hon. Prime Minister this evening concerns the ongoing construction of drains at La Paix Street in Port Louis between China and Dioré Streets by the NDU and for which the contractor is Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited.

The works started a couple of months ago along this main road where there are many shops, housing units and two mosques, the more so the arrival of the month of Ramadan next week and Eid-UI-Fitr a month later. At the moment, the road is closed and this is causing a lot of hardship, albeit the many deviations there are. The contractor seems to move at a very slow pace, as people living there have observed that there are apparently not enough workers. The workers finish work early and there does not seem to be enough equipment as well.

My plea this evening to the hon. Prime Minister is to request the NDU to impress upon Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society to speed up the construction of the drains at La Paix Street so as to shorten the period of hardship being faced by the residents there.

Thank you.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, of course, a drain is not built in a day, but I was present when the Prime Minister discussed this matter in the general context of that particular contractor. I know that the Prime Minister is watching over this and is monitoring, is asking that this be monitored. I am, of course, not making any promises on his name, but since I have witnessed a conversation on that particular matter, I know that he will take care of it.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Tarolah!

(7.18 p.m.)

TAGORE AVENUE, ERNEST FLORENT VILLAGE – ROAD – CONVERSION

Mr K. Tarolah (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My intervention tonight concerns hon. Minister Bodha. Several representations have been made by different stakeholders in order to convert the Avenue Tagore at Ernest Florent Village into a one-way access, mainly on school days. I hope the Minister will take this matter urgently.

Thank you.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha): Madam Speaker, I will ask the TRMSU to go on site and see what can be done.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Henry!

(7.19 p.m.)

RESIDENCE LA TURQUOISE, MARE D'ALBERT – FOOTBALL GROUND

Mr T. Henry (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Merci, Madame la présidente. Donc, ma requête va à la ministre de *Local Government*.

Il y a un terrain de foot synthétique que l'honorable ministre vient d'inaugurer à Mare d'Albert, juste à côté de la résidence La Turquoise. Mais malheureusement, il y a un problème. Depuis l'ouverture, le terrain de foot est resté pareil avec toutes les saletés de l'inauguration, avec les jeunes qui jouent dessous. Et le *District Council* avait dit qu'ils allaient laisser la lumière pour une ou deux semaines pour faire un test afin de voir combien de consommation d'électricité ils vont utiliser. Mais, malheureusement, jusqu'à l'heure, à 6 heures, ils ferment parce qu'il n'y a pas de lumière. La lumière est là, mais il n'y a personne pour allumer, ça reste fermé.

(Interruptions)

Donc, l'honorable ministre, peut-il faire le nécessaire parce que ces jeunes...

(Interruptions)

Bon, restez tranquille !

(Interruptions)

Ces gens-là ont besoin d'un terrain de foot, ils n'ont pas besoin d'un endroit pour aller boire. Si l'honorable ministre peut faire le nécessaire.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Madam Speaker, I will look into it.

At 7.21 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 07 May at 11.30 a.m.