



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 23 JULY 2024

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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

Integration and International Trade

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

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Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Ashley Ittoo
Clerk of the National Assembly	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit, CSK
Deputy Clerk	Gopall, Mr Navin
Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 22 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 23 July 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS**SITTING 18 JULY 2024 – ELECTION OF SPEAKER – LEGALITY**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to report to the House as follows –

Prior to and during the proceedings of the Assembly at the Sitting of 18 July 2024, certain Members, all belonging to the Labour Party, the MMM and the Nouveaux Démocrates continually hindered the proceedings by screaming and making loud and noisy interruptions. Scandalous slogans and insults were proffered in an attempt to impugn the very legitimacy of the election of the Speaker and to hamper its due process. This behaviour was intended to undermine the integrity of the Constitutional Office of the Speaker and the dignity of the National Assembly as a whole. At the same time, these Members caused irredeemable damage to the image of the nation in the eyes of the world.

Hon. Members, the election of the Speaker was conducted by the Clerk in accordance with sections 32(4) and 32(6) of the Constitution and the provisions of Standing Order 7(1) and (2).

Let me remind hon. Members that it is not the first time that the Office of Speaker has become vacant before the dissolution of the Assembly. It is a fact that this very procedure was the one adopted in electing to the Office of the Speaker –

First, Mr Iswurdeo Seetaram on 04 December 1990 following a motion by then Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Second, Sir Ramesh Jeewoolall on 23 January 1996 following a motion of Prime Minister Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Thirdly, Mr Abdool Razack Mahomed Ameen Peeroo on 24 July 2012 following a motion again by Prime Minister Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Members of Parliament know that the appropriate forum to challenge the legality of the election of the Speaker is neither for the House nor in the press, but the Supreme Court of Mauritius.

SITTING OF 18 JULY 2024 – SUSPENDED MEMBERS – BREACH OF STANDING ORDERS

I must also report to the House that Members of Parliament have disobeyed the order for suspension from the service of the Assembly imposed upon them, which is yet another unprecedented occurrence in our Parliament.

This House will certainly recall that –

- on 05 July 2024, hon. Rajesh Bhagwan was suspended for the day's Sitting and the ensuing five Sittings;
- on 09 July 2024, hon. Ehsan Juman was suspended for the day's Sitting and the ensuing six Sittings, and
- on 12 July 2024, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger was suspended for the day's Sitting and the ensuing three Sittings.

Despite their suspensions, at the Sitting of 18 July 2024, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, hon. Rajesh Bhagwan and hon. Ehsan Juman have forcefully made their way to the door of the Chamber, in breach of the Standing Orders, whilst they were not allowed to have access to any part of the precincts of the House, which includes all parts of the building, on a sitting day.

According to a report submitted by the Serjeant-At-Arms, when refused access, the three suspended hon. Members stated that they had received a convocation to attend the Sitting by e-mail from the Office of the Clerk. After verification, it has been confirmed that no such convocation had been addressed to them.

Hon. Members: Shame! *Manter!*

Mr Speaker: This gross disorderly conduct was aggravated by the fact that the hon. Members not only obstructed proceedings of the Assembly but also found it apt to insult the newly elected Speaker, in a language that has no place in Hansard. This occurred whilst I was making my way to my Office from the Chamber after I had suspended the Sitting by reason of the grave disorder that had paralysed the proceedings of the Assembly.

I leave this important matter to the appreciation of the House.

HON. MS J. BÉRENGER, HON. BHAGWAN & HON. JUMAN – WAIVING OF SUSPENSIONS

As my third announcement, I shall now address the issue of the waiving of suspensions of hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, hon. Rajesh Bhagwan and hon. Ehsan Juman, from the service of the Assembly.

One can only regret that the hon. Leader of Opposition has limited his endeavour to have the said suspensions waived, to mere statements made in the press, rather than by following established procedures, which are clearly laid down in our Standing Orders.

Let me remind the House that, the Speaker cannot, on his own volition, reverse or otherwise deal with the resolutions of the Assembly which suspended the said hon. Members from the service of the Assembly. The said suspensions may only be dealt with by resolution of the Assembly, following the appropriate motion being made in accordance with our Standing Orders. The onus is now on the hon. Members, who stand suspended from the service of the Assembly, to tender unreserved apologies to the House or for an appropriate motion to be made in the House by their colleagues.

I deplore the approach taken by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who has chosen to throw ultimatums on the House in the press, that is, that the Opposition shall abdicate from its role in the Assembly at today's Sitting, unless and until the suspension of hon. Members is lifted, whilst being oblivious to due process, established by Standing Orders and practice.

For Parliament to properly function, the participation of Members of the Opposition in the business of the Assembly is essential.

I will also leave that matter to the appreciation of the House.

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Hon. Members, I have taken cognizance of the announcement made by my predecessor on Tuesday 02 July 2024 regarding questions falling under the purview of local authorities.

I must emphasise that the former Speaker had, at no point in time, expressed the view that all questions regarding local authorities will de facto be disallowed.

However, being given the fact that the said ruling gave rise to confusion as to distinguish which questions fall within the category of national interest and which fall under the operational activities for which Municipalities and District Councils are endowed with sufficient autonomy to manage their own local affairs.

Nonetheless, I rule that, henceforth, all questions pertaining to local authorities would be allowed in line with past practice of the House.

**SUSPENDED MEMBERS – ASSEMBLY PRECINCTS – ACCESS ON NON-SITTING
DAYS**

Hon. Members, my last announcement relates to the access to the precincts of the Assembly by Members who are under suspension.

I have been informed that access was denied to those Members on days during which the Assembly was not sitting except, of course, when any of those Members was serving on any committee of the Assembly.

In that regard, my reading of the provisions of Standing Orders 49(5) and 49(6) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the Assembly is clear that Members who have been suspended from the service of the Assembly are precluded from the precincts of the House only on Sitting days.

I therefore rule that, henceforth, suspended Members shall be allowed to have access to the precincts of the Assembly on any day other than a Sitting day.

Moreover, I wish to apprise the House that it has been brought to my attention that some controversy has arisen concerning the modalities for the drawing of lots for determining the order of Parliamentary Questions.

I wish to inform the House that I will personally look into this matter to ensure that fairness and equity prevail at all times.

I thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

The Ag. Prime Minister (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

A. Prime Minister's Office**Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications**
Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the State Lands (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2024).
(In Original)

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

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Quality Assurance Authority for the year ended 30 June 2022.

C. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Bus Industry Employees Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)

D. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

The Social Contribution and Social Benefits (Child Allowance) Regulations 2024.
(Government Notice No. 118 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency for the year ended 30 June 2023.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/594 has been withdrawn. In the absence of hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha, I now call hon. Salim Abbas Mamode!

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT CLEANING AUTHORITY – CAMPAIGNS’ COST
– BOARD MEMBERS’ FEES**

(No. B/594) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the National Environment Cleaning Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the amount paid since its coming into operation to date in respect of the –

- (a) cleaning, embellishment and awareness campaigns and programmes undertaken;
- (b) fees paid to the Board members thereof, and
- (c) acquisition of vehicles, indicating in each case the make thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**DR. N. R., FORMER PRIME MINISTER – GOVERNMENT VEHICLES –
SERVICES OF VIPSU**

(No. B/596) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to government vehicles put at the disposal of Dr. N. R., GCSK, FRCP, former Prime Minister, since 2005 to 2014, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof, indicating their respective registration number plates and make, and
- (b) number of the said vehicles, if any, used by third parties, indicating if the services of Police officers were provided during the use thereof.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police, that for the period 2005 to 2014, 17 Government vehicles from the VIP Security Unit car pool were put at the disposal of Dr. N. R., G.C.S.K, F.R.C.P, former Prime Minister for his official and personal use, as well as for use by third parties.

In fact, six vehicles were put at the disposal of the former Prime Minister, for official and personal use, namely –

- (i) A Black BMW 760i, bearing Registration Number 442 FB 04;
- (ii) A Black BMW 760Li, bearing Registration Number 1607 MR 10;
- (iii) A Black BMW MS600, bearing Registration Number 2093 AP 11;
- (iv) A Black BMW 760Li, bearing Registration Number 8709 DC 13;
- (v) A Black Land Rover, bearing Registration Number 8190 DC 13; and
- (vi) A Black Land Rover, bearing Registration Number 3379 JU 10.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that two vehicles were used by Mrs V. R., spouse of Dr. N. R., namely –

- (i) A Black Jeep 5.7 Henri, bearing Registration Number 4007 JL 08, and
- (ii) A Black Mercedes E350, bearing Registration Number 1543 MR 11.

Two Black BMW 523i were used by Late Mr V. C. J., brother-in-law of Dr. N. R. and the in-laws of Dr. N. R., respectively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, one vehicle, namely, a BMW 735Li, Oxford green in colour, was put up for use by foreign eminent personalities, namely Mrs Stéphanie M. G., Princess of Monaco and Ms Marie Ségolène R., each time they visited Mauritius.

Two other vehicles as follows, were used by VIPs lodged at Belle Mare Plage Hotel –

- (i) A Beige Mercedes E280; and
- (ii) A Black Mercedes E230.

Furthermore, one vehicle, namely a BMW 523i, Garnet in colour, and bearing Registration Number 5517 SP 08 was put at the disposal of Mr Gilles Joseph F.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the above vehicle, that is, the BMW 523i, was also put at the disposal of Ms Stephanie S. A. F. and Mr Laurent O., in addition to –

- (i) a Black BMW 525D, used by Ms Stephanie S. A. F., and
- (ii) a Black BMW 540i, used by Mr Laurent O.

Finally, one vehicle, namely a Beige BMW, was used by Mr Charles Geoffrey C.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that all these vehicles were driven by Police Officers posted at the VIP Security Unit.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Ag. Prime Minister state whether one Nandane S., very close to the former Prime Minister, was also provided with a vehicle from the VIP Security Unit car pool driven by a VIPSU Officer?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not been provided with such information. However, I stand informed that there was a previous Parliamentary Question in this House, in the course of the Sitting of 01 September 2015, which was answered by late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, then Prime Minister, and the very same question was put as a supplementary, to which the then Prime Minister answered, ‘I understand that this is so’. Unfortunately, I have not been provided with such information.

In fact, I was surprised to learn that there was an inquiry carried out at some point in time before 2019 and that relevant information pertaining to the list of persons who had been allocated vehicles from the Police car pool together with the services of VIPSU drivers over the period July 2005 to 11 December 2014 were not fully available and there was suspicion that, that was intentional. Unfortunately, the missing information could not be retrieved.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Ag. Prime Minister state in what capacity was Mr Laurent O. provided with official cars driven by VIPSU Officers?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. gentleman will bear with me, I shall try to check whether such information has been provided to me. I believe that Mr Laurent O. would have been during that period, at least for some time during that period, from July 2005 up to 2014, attached to the Embassy of Mauritius in Paris, France, as an Adviser, but I do not have more information at hand, unfortunately.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Ms Tour!

**POLITICAL GATHERING, 01 MAY 2024 – MBC STAFF – ALLEGED MOLESTATION
CASE**

(No. B/597) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the alleged case of molesting of employees of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation at a political gathering in Port Louis on 01 May 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate if any arrest has been effected as at date.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Wednesday 01 May 2024, at 13.50 hours, one Mr Subham H., cameraman at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), called at the Central Criminal Investigation Department and reported a case of “Misbehaving at Public Gatherings”.

In his statement, Mr S. H. averred that on Wednesday 01 May 2024, at around 06.30 hours, he reported for duty at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation in Moka. There, he took cognizance that, together with seven of his colleagues from the MBC, he was assigned to cover the political gathering of the PTR/MMM/ND political alliance, which was held in front of the City Council Hall of Port Louis.

The team reached Port Louis at around 09.00 hours where the MBC staff was posted at different locations, and Mr S. H. was positioned near the podium to record a video with the MBC camera.

I am further informed that at that particular point in time, hon. Patrick A. was standing on the podium and using the microphone, ordering in a loud tone the MBC team to move away, to leave, while pointing his finger at Mr S. H.

Mr S. H. added that he felt fear and decided to leave the spot. However, while making his way through the crowd that had gathered, he was subjected to verbal abuse. He was, thereafter, surrounded by a group of hostile persons, and one of them ordered him in a threatening tone to reveal his identity and forced him to delete the video footage he had recorded. At the same time, he was prevented from leaving the place and held from behind.

I am informed that Police Officers, who were nearby, intervened and accompanied Mr S. H. and his colleagues to the MBC vehicle parked at La Poudrière Street.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the Commissioner of Police that in the course of the enquiry, the Police recorded statements from twenty-two persons.

On Monday 06 May 2024, the Police convened one Mr Ham Sharma K. for enquiry purposes. In his statement given in the presence of his barrister, he admitted having caught hold of the jacket of Mr Subham H., with a view to handing over the latter to the Police as he appeared to be suspicious.

On the same day, Mr Ham Sharma K. was arrested and provisionally charged with the offence of “Misbehaving at Public Gatherings” before the District Magistrate of Port Louis Court. The Police did not object to his release on bail and he was bailed out after having furnished a surety of Rs1,000 and recognizance of Rs5,000. His next court appearance stands fixed to Wednesday 14 August 2024.

Additionally, on Thursday 09 May 2024, one Mr Kevin G. was also convened for enquiry. He gave his statement in the presence of his barrister and denied the allegations levelled against him by the declarant. He stated that he is the Assistant Communication Manager of the Labour Party and was responsible for issuing access passes to the media to enable them to cover the political gathering held by the PTR/MMM/ND alliance on 01 May 2024.

On the same day, Mr Kevin G. was arrested and was provisionally charged with the offence of “Misbehaving at Public Gatherings” before the District Magistrate of Port Louis Court. The Police did not object to his release on bail, and he was bailed out after having

furnished a surety of Rs1,000 and recognizance of Rs5,000. His next court appearance has been fixed to Wednesday 14 August 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that the hon. Patrick A. was convened at the CCID for purposes of enquiry on Monday 20 May 2024. He was assisted by his Legal Advisers. During his interview, he availed himself of his right to silence to all the questions put to him, and when confronted with the video footages, he opted not to view the footage.

The enquiry into the case has been completed on 18 July 2024.

I stand informed that the case will be forwarded to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice shortly.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Ag. Prime Minister provide information on the number of Police Officers deployed on 01 May 2024 for that political gathering?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the number of MBC personnel, but, unfortunately, I do not have the number of Police Officers present at the gathering. I have the number of officers having volunteered a statement to the CID, but, unfortunately, I do not have the information requested by the hon. lady.

Mr Speaker: Any additional supplementary, Ms Tour? Hon. Abbas Mamode!

MR A. B. & MS D. D. M. – ALLEGED DRUG DEALING CASE – INQUIRIES

(No. B/599) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the alleged cases of drug dealing against Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiries initiated thereinto.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies given to Parliamentary Questions B/806, B/808 and B/816 provided by the hon. Prime Minister at the Sitting of 27 June 2023 relating to the same subject matter.

As the hon. Prime Minister then informed the House, Mr Akil B. and Ms Doomila D. M. were both arrested on 19 August 2022 and were provisionally charged with the offence of 'Drug Dealing' following seizure of suspected dangerous drugs at the residence of Ms Doomila D. M. as follows –

- (i) 19.7 grams in one parcel secured from a bedroom;
- (ii) 2.15 grams in another parcel secured from a wooden drawer;
- (iii) 28.12 grams found in two parcels secured from a shoulder bag;
- (iv) particles of leaf matter found in a pair of jeans trousers;
- (v) residues of leaf matter found in the toilet, and
- (vi) 3.09 grams from six parcels found in a manhole.

Mr Akil B. and Ms Doomila D. M. were bailed out on 06 and 07 September 2022, respectively.

On 12 and 19 September 2022, Ms D. D. M. and Mr A. B., respectively reported a complaint to the Police alleging that the contents of the mobile phone of Ms D. D. M. secured as exhibit in the case were shared on social media platform.

On 20 September 2022, Police referred the complaints to the Independent Police Complaints Commission for investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I stand informed that on 06 December 2022, a motion to strike out the provisional charge for drug dealing was made by the panel of counsels of both Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M. The Police objected to the motion, but on 28 March 2023, the provisional charge was struck out following a ruling delivered by the District Magistrate of Bambous District Court.

Subsequently, upon completion of the enquiry, the file relating to both Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M. regarding the case of drug dealing was referred to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions with recommendations for prosecution, and that was on 10 April 2023. However, on 24 May 2023, the case file was returned to the Police with certain queries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the queries were attended to by the Police. On 07 August 2023, the case file was resubmitted to the Director of

Public Prosecutions. However, on 08 August 2023, the case file was referred back to the Police with additional queries. I am informed that after addressing these queries, the case file was, on 08 September 2023, again forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

However, on 14 September 2023, the Director of Public Prosecutions returned the case file to the Police with instructions to review the Safe City footages and provide a report thereon. That footage was viewed and a report thereon was enclosed in the case file which was sent anew on 21 September 2023 to the DPP.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 21 May 2024, the Director of Public Prosecutions returned the case file to the Police with instructions to follow up with the Independent Police Complaints Commission on the status of complaints made by Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M. against the Police Officers. The Director of Public Prosecutions also highlighted that the outcome of those complaints was relevant to the alleged case involving drug dealing.

Subsequently, the Independent Police Complaints Commission was, on 22 May 2024, contacted by the Police and the Police were informed that the investigation was still in progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 04 July 2024, the Police again contacted the Independent Police Complaints Commission to ascertain the status of the investigation into the said complaints. The Independent Police Complaints Commission thereupon informed the Police that the investigations had been completed and the reports had already been forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 11 June 2024.

In view thereof, on 05 July 2024, the Police submitted the case file of Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M. anew to the Director of Public Prosecutions along with the reply obtained from the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that in view of the seriousness of the offence implicating the accused parties, the Police have, on 11 July 2024, approached the Director of Public Prosecutions for an early advice. In response, on 15 July 2024, the Director of Public Prosecutions informed the Police that the case was still under consideration.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Ag. Prime Minister state whether there is any objection to departure with regard to Mr A. B. and Ms D. D. M.?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not hold such information. I do know, as I stated earlier, that the provisional charges have been struck out. So, I would presume that there is no objection to departure, but I have no further information in that regard.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQs B/611 and B/617 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection.

PQs B/600, B/605, B/608, B/610, B/611, B/614, B/617 and B/618 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha being absent, I call Mr Léopold.

NATIONAL PROPERTY FUND LTD – ASSETS & LIABILITIES – FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

(No. B/600) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the National Property Fund Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the actual value of the assets and liabilities thereof, and
- (b) if the audited financial statements for the financial years ended 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2024 have been published and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

CYBER MERCENARIES – REPORTED CASES – ACTION TAKEN

(No. B/602) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to cyber

mercenaries, he will state if any case thereof has been reported at his Ministry and, if so, indicate the action taken in relation thereto.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius (CERT-MU), a department operating under my Ministry, that there is no case of cyber mercenaries that has been reported so far to either the CERT-MU directly or on the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System, MAUCORS platform, which is a national online system that allows the public to report cybercrimes occurring on social media securely.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Can the hon. Minister inform the House on how many cases of cyber bullying has been reported through his Ministry?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is very specific on cyber mercenaries; however, bear with me for a moment, I can just check if I have the information. Mr Speaker, Sir, for the year 2024, January to date, there have been more than 2,500 incidents reported and specifically on – if I am not mistaken the hon. Member mentioned online harassment – so specifically on online harassment: 640 out of those 2,500 cases are for online harassment on social media and online.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Is there any cases reported from Rodrigues on your register?

Mr Balgobin: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the question did not pertain to Rodrigues but again if I have the information I would be pleased to share to the hon. Member.

Yes, from Rodrigues, there are 8 cases reported and those 8 cases are mostly on fake ID that is identity theft, online harassment and cyber stalking.

Mr Speaker: Next question. Hon. Ms Tour!

ACADEMY OF DESIGN & INNOVATION – COURSES OFFERED

(No. B/604) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the

jewellery department at the Academy of Design and Innovation, she will state the number of courses offered thereat, indicating the –

- (a) eligibility criteria for admission;
- (b) number of students enrolled;
- (c) lecturers recruited during the last 3 years for the faculty, and
- (d) measures envisaged to improve the visibility and interest thereof among the secondary students population.

Ms Ramyad: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Academy of Design and Innovation that its Jewellery Department is currently offering two Full time Award Courses, of 1 year duration each, in the field of Jewellery Manufacturing & Design.

These courses are, namely, the National Certificate Level 3 (NC3) in Jewellery Manufacturing and Design, and the National Certificate Level 4 in Jewellery Design, Manufacturing and Stone Setting.

The awarding body for these two courses is the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES).

The eligibility criteria for admission to the NC3 in Jewellery Manufacturing and Design are, as follows –

- (a) the student should be at least 16 years old;
- (b) he/she should have completed Form III, i.e., 9th Grade of the Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education, or
- (c) has successfully completed Form II / 8th Grade of the Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education and has 2 years working experience in the field of Jewellery making, or
- (d) has successfully completed Form IV Pre-Vocational Education, or

- (e) possesses any other equivalent qualification and experience acceptable to the Institute.

In so far as admission to the second Award Course, that is, the National Certificate Level 4 in Jewellery Design, Manufacturing and Stone Setting is concerned, a student must have the basic eligibility criteria, which I have just highlighted for the NC3 course, and also, he must have successfully completed the NC3 in either Jewellery Manufacturing and Design or Jewellery Making, or alternatively, the student has any other equivalent qualification and experience acceptable to the Academy.

The House may wish to note that, in addition to these two Award Courses, the Jewellery Department also, on a yearly basis, offers to the public and, as per demand, Non-Awarded Credit Earned Short Courses in the field of Fancy Jewellery and Basic Stone Setting. Moreover, the Department also, in collaboration with the HRDC, under the National Training and Reskilling Scheme, runs courses on basic Jewellery Manufacturing and Basic Stone Setting, which are accredited by the MQA.

The House may equally wish to note that the Jewellery Department of the Academy also provides online courses in the fields of Basic Jewellery Design and Fancy Jewellery Making and Design, in collaboration with the “Commonwealth of Learning - Online platform” with content digitally converted and uploaded. It is to be noted that for the courses being run in collaboration with the HRDC, any person aged between 16 to 60 years old and is unemployed, may apply to follow the course. As for the other short courses, they are opened to persons who are at least 16 years old, with an interest in the subject matter or are from the Industry.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Academy of Design and Innovation that, since the In-Person Courses are fully practical courses and require hands-on training, in virtue of the course contents and, due to space restriction and availability of workbenches in the workshops, up to 12 participants per batch for each course can be admitted at one time. There are 12 workstations in the Jewellery workshop at the ADI and the intake per cohort is limited to up to a maximum of 12 students for both award and non-awarded courses.

The hon. Member may, in this context, wish to note that the number of students enrolled for NC3 Jewellery Manufacturing and Design course for Academic Year April 2024 to March 2025, is 13. As for NC4, the students enrolled are 6 for May 2023 to October 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in so far as part (c) of the question is concerned, I am informed by the ADI that the post of Lecturer in Jewellery Manufacturing and Design was advertised on at least four occasions over the past three years. However, the ADI has not been able to recruit a Lecturer holding a Master's Degree, as required under the Scheme of Service for the post. In the circumstances and with a view to ensuring the smooth running of the Jewellery Department, the ADI has recruited one Training Officer and four part-time Resource Persons for delivering training in specific subject matters. Furthermore, the ADI is proposing to recruit one additional Training Officer and four additional part-time Resource Persons in this Financial Year.

As regard the last part of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the ADI has taken a series of measures to improve the visibility of, and interest in jewellery courses among secondary students in Mauritius.

These measures include the following –

- (a) organisation of awareness campaigns, including in-house presentations in secondary schools to inform students on the various courses available;
- (b) partnership with local jewellery businesses to offer internships, apprenticeships and hands-on training to students;
- (c) development of online courses in collaboration with organisations like the Commonwealth of Learning with a view to making jewellery design and manufacturing more accessible and appealing to technology-savvy students. The courses comprise modules in Artificial Intelligence and 3D printing technologies to highlight modern techniques in jewellery creation, and lastly
- (d) running of a variety of short courses approved by the MQA in areas like fancy jewellery and basic stone setting.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Over and above local partnerships and the Commonwealth of Learning, can the hon. Minister state whether the Academy of Design and Innovation envisages any partnerships with foreign academic institutions so as to enhance jewellery education in Mauritius?

Ms Ramyad: Yes, the ADI has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Birmingham City University in the UK to enhance jewellery education in Mauritius and it has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NIIT in India.

Mr Speaker: Alright. Hon. Doolub, next question!

**LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL ACADEMY – ALLOCATED BUDGET – CURRENT
TRAINERS & PLAYERS**

(No. B/605) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to Liverpool Football Academy, he will, for the benefit for the House, obtain from the Mauritius Multisport Infrastructure Limited (MMIL), information as to the –

- (a) budget allocated thereto for financial years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25;
- (b) list of current trainers thereat, indicating their respective nationality, salaries and conditions of work, and
- (c) number of players thereof, gender-wise, who have signed a professional contract with a foreign club since 2019 to date.

(Withdrawn)

FISHERMEN CARDS – ISLAND-WISE DISTRIBUTION

(No. B/606) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to fishermen cards, he will state the total number thereof issued since April 2023 to date, island-wise, indicating the number thereof issued for the region of Mahebourg.

Mr Maudhoo: M. le président, avant de répondre à la question de l'honorable Doolub, je souhaite saisir l'opportunité de vous féliciter pour votre prise de fonction en tant que *Speaker* de cette auguste Assemblée suite à un processus qui s'inscrit dans le plus grand respect de notre Constitution et de nos institutions.

Aussi, M. le président, la citation – « Passant, je ne suis pas mort, je fais semblant » était très chère pour votre feu grand-père, Sir Gaëtan Duval. J'y vois comme un signe du destin qu'aujourd'hui son petit-fils soit nommé à la prestigieuse fonction de président de notre

Assemblée. Je suis convaincu que vous ferez honneur à un des plus grands personnages de notre nation, ainsi qu'à notre démocratie parlementaire.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the priority of this Government under the prime ministership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth was to issue fishermen cards with the aim of reducing our dependency on seafood imports for the local market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to put it on record that this Government has promised to issue 1,000 fishermen cards. Today, this Government is proud to announce that we will reach our target by the end of September this year. It is a fact that when the Labour Party was in power, the issue of fishermen cards was the least of their concern. However, as rightly stated on different occasions by the hon. Prime Minister: *parole donnée, parole sacrée*, the MSM Government has fulfilled its promise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, in the budget speech of two financial years, namely, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, Government had announced the issue of 1,000 fishermen cards with priority to be given to active fishermen in the first instance. Accordingly, out of the 1,000 cards that were announced to be issued, 672 fishermen cards have been issued out of which 177 are from the region of Mahebourg as at 18 July 2024 which includes, of course, 85 fishermen cards for period April 2023 to date. The region-wise list is being tabled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the processing of fishermen cards is an ongoing exercise. If all goes as planned, the remaining 328 applicant fishers will receive their certificates and fishermen cards within the next two months. Thus, we shall achieve the target of allocation of 1,000 fisher cards which is indeed a great matter of pride for me and this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, also on 18 July, that is, a few days ago, 191 fishermen cards were issued. The House may wish to note that during the award ceremony which was graced by my two colleagues, Minister hon. Hurreeram and hon. Dr. Ramdhany, the fishermen community was highly appreciative of the fact that their contribution to the economy was being recognised and they expressed their gratitude to the Government for the number of schemes that have been put in place for them. This amply testifies that this Government has at heart the well-being of the fishermen community.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister confirm the number of fishermen who have retired on the ground of age as at now?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at date, 334 fishers have retired from fishing activities against a compensation under the provision of budgetary measures. Hence, my Ministry has an additional 334 fishermen cards, which will be allocated to next of kin of the retired fishers and also to new applicants.

MSAW – ANNUAL REPORT & AUDITED ACCOUNTS

(No. B/608) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if copy of the Annual Report and audited accounts thereof for financial years 2015 to date have been laid on the Table of the Assembly and, if not, the reasons thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MORCELLEMENT LA CONFIANCE, BEAU-BASSIN – EX-FOOTBALL GROUND – RESTORATION

(No. B/610) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the ex-football ground at Morcellement La Confiance, in Beau-Bassin put at the disposal of Metro Express Ltd., he will, for the benefit House, obtain from the Company, information as to when Larsen and Toubro Ltd., is proposing to vacate the site, indicating if –

- (a) the football pitch will be reinstated and, if so, by whom and when, and
- (b) he has received copy of a petition of the inhabitants in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the actions taken therefor.

(Withdrawn)

FREIGHT – COST REVIEW & REBATE SCHEME

(No. B/611) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether in regard to freight, he will state if –

- (a) consultations have been held with the main shipping lines with a view to reducing the cost thereof, and
- (b) consideration will be given for the introduction of a freight rebate scheme for the import of certain items of food and other basic necessities.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Ms Tour!

FERTILITY TREATMENT – INTRAUTERINE INSEMINATION PROCEDURE – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/612) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether in regard to fertility treatment, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation of the intrauterine insemination procedure to increase the odds of conception in Mauritius.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I join my colleague and all Members present in the House in congratulating you for your election as Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) is an assisted conception technique and a fertility treatment. It is a less invasive and more affordable option compared to other assisted reproductive technologies (ART) like In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) for selected patient population.

My Ministry recognises the growing demand for fertility treatments, including IUI due to various factors such as delayed childbearing and infertility issues.

Mauritius, like many countries worldwide, has experienced a decline in birth rates. The current birth rate for Mauritius in 2024 is 9.8 births per 1000 people, a 0.56% decline from 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 06 January 2024, the Fertility Clinic at SSRN Hospital has embarked on Intrauterine Insemination, also known as IUI procedure. As at date, 38 insemination samples have been processed for couples undergoing fertility treatment.

These couples have been selected according to the intra-uterine insemination guidelines of my Ministry, which have been formulated using international scientific evidence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that out of these 38 couples who underwent IUI treatment, two patients conceived. It is the first time that such innovative fertility treatment is available in our public hospital. This is an encouraging step for infertile couples wishing to conceive and who do not have the means to follow costly treatment in private or abroad.

Mr Speaker, Sir, ensuring healthcare personnel is crucial for the success of fertility treatment and IUI procedures. My Ministry has initiated specialised training programmes for gynaecologists and medical laboratory staff. These programmes are designed in collaboration with international fertility experts.

Thanks to the sponsorship of MERCK Foundation, two Medical Laboratory Technologists were selected and sent to Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India, for a certificate course in assisted reproduction from January 2023 to April 2023.

Additionally, two gynaecologists were also selected and sponsored to be trained in the basics of reproductive endocrinology and infertility at Indira Fertility Clinic in Udaipur, India.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of IUI procedures is progressing well. We remain committed to providing accessible, affordable and effective fertility treatments to support the reproductive health and well-being of our citizens. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House on the current status of the Assisted Human Regulation Bill?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the time being, the Ministry is engaged in the drafting phase of the Bill. Then, it will go to Cabinet. It is currently formulating a framework that addresses the ethical, legal and social considerations related to assisted human reproduction.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister state whether the Intrauterine Insemination Services would be extended island-wide?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this will require some financial investments. The Ministry is carrying out an in-depth cost analysis and in the light of the result, this service will be extended elsewhere.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Doolub!

DENGUE & CHOLERA OUTBREAK – PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE

(No. B/613) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether following the recent outbreaks of Dengue and Cholera in Africa and the neighbouring islands, he will state if the Public Health Emergency Operations Command in Mauritius has been activated for the surveillance thereof, giving details thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is in the process of establishing a Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) in line with WHO recommendations.

The setting up of the PHEOC is critical in fulfilling the country's obligations under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) and is one of the core functions of the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR).

The PHEOC will constitute a hub for effective harmonisation of information and resources during emergencies. This command centre will be called upon to bring together multi-sectoral

and multidisciplinary experts to coordinate preparedness and response efforts to disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has thus extended its support in the form of consultancy services from September to December 2023 to lay the foundation for the setting up of the PHEOC. An assessment of the PHEOC capacities was conducted and an implementation plan for the setting up of the PHEOC was developed.

PHEOC is expected to reinforce health resilience against emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. Provision has, accordingly, been made in the budget for the operationalization and day to day running of the PHEOC which is expected to be operational by the end of December 2024.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House about the budget allocation of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, WHO is providing support for the training of staff and will also provide IT equipment. The allocated budget covers the following key areas –

- salaries and allowances for the dedicated team of professionals, that is, those who will be operating the PHEOC;
- day to day operational expenses, including utilities, maintenance of equipment and supplies necessary for smooth running of the PHEOC, and also
- a contingency fund to be utilised for immediate response activities in the event of a public health emergency.

The budget allocated in this year is Rs2.6 m. Thank you.

**CANADA & AUSTRALIA – MAURITIAN TRAVELLERS – VISA-EXEMPT
CATEGORY**

(No. B/614) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether in regard to Mauritians travelling to Canada and Australia, he will state the initiatives being undertaken by our respective Embassies to allow Mauritian travellers to be eligible to travel thereto under the Visa-Exempt Travellers category.

(Withdrawn)

ELECTRIC CABLES – CONFORMITY CERTIFICATES – STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATIONS

(No. B/617) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the proposed recognition of conformity certificates for electric cables as announced in the Annex to the Budget Speech 2024-2025, she will state if consultation has been held with the Mauritius Standards Bureau and other stakeholders in relation thereto, indicating the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MASA – OFFICER IN CHARGE – APPOINTMENT & QUALIFICATION

(No. B/618) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Mauritius Society of Authors (MASA), he will state the name of the current Officer in Charge thereof, indicating the –

- (a) date of nomination, scope of work, salary and other benefits paid thereto;
- (b) mode of selection thereof, and
- (c) academic and technical qualifications thereof.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

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

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

(12.31 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First of all, let me also join my colleagues in congratulating you in your appointment as Speaker of the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission and for the benefit the House, I would like to make a statement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The recent developments unfolding in Gaza, wherein the situation has reached an appalling level of suffering and destruction, are a matter of grave concern.

According to recent reports, more than 38,000 Palestinians have been reportedly killed in the Gaza strip, including innocent children, and around 89,000 Palestinians have been injured since the conflict between Hamas and Israel started on 07 October last year.

According to the World Health Organisation, a multitude of attacks have been recorded in the occupied Palestinian territory since 07 October 2023 and the Palestinian health system continues to be severely overstretched.

On Friday 19 July 2024, Israel launched an air raid against the port city of Hodeidah in Yemen in retaliation to a drone attack by the Houthis on Tel Aviv. We are dismayed by the fact that this conflict is still ongoing despite the adoption of a Resolution by the UN Security Council on 10 June 2024, urging both parties to implement a cease fire agreement without further delay.

We reiterate our appeal to both sides to exercise restraint so as not to derail the ongoing peace talks. In parallel, we are witnessing a deplorable situation of dim prospect for a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. The Parliament in Israel has passed a resolution on 18 July 2024 that overwhelmingly rejected the establishment of the Palestinian State.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice delivered a landmark advisory opinion wherein it is mentioned that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and should be ended as rapidly as possible. The International Court of Justice also expressed the opinion that and I quote –

“All states are under an obligation not to recognise as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

In its advisory opinion, the Court concludes that the State of Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful. The State of Israel is under an obligation to bring an end to its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as rapidly as possible. The State of Israel is under an obligation to cease immediately all new settlement activities and to evacuate all settlers from the occupied Palestinian territory.

The State of Israel has the obligation to make reparation for the damaged caused to all the natural or legal persons concerned in the occupied Palestinian territory. All States are under an obligation not to recognise as legal, the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.

International organisations, including the United Nations, are under an obligation not to recognise as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the

occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations and especially the General Assembly which requested opinion and the Security Council should consider the precise modalities and further actions that are required to bring an end as rapidly as possible to the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The House would recall that on 09 July 2024, in an answer to PQ B/571, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, stated that on 22 February 2024, Mauritius participated in the oral hearings at the ICJ on the request for an advisory opinion pursuant to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/247. Pertaining to the question of Palestine, Mauritius took a very proactive stand on this issue and was among the 57 States which made a written submission to the ICJ.

Mauritius has for decades lent its unflinching support to the cause of the Palestinian people. We have always called for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. We have consistently supported the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State alongside Israel for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

In line with our longstanding and affirm position, Mauritius has always voted in favour of all UN Resolutions on the question of Palestine and that emphasised the importance and urgency of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the establishment of an independent State of Palestine leading side by side with Israel in line with the two-state solution.

We, therefore, welcome and fully support the advisory opinion delivered by the International Court of Justice. Mauritius calls for the full implementation of the ICJ advisory opinion, calls on Israel to adhere to its international obligations and to respect international law and urges the international community to fulfil its obligations in addressing Israel's illegal practices.

I also wish to reassure the House that Mauritius will maintain its commitment to support all initiatives at the level of the General Assembly of the United Nations that will call on Israel to unconditionally withdraw its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory in line with the advisory opinion recently delivered by the ICJ. We also firmly believe that the two-state solution is the viable option that can bring along lasting peace to the region. In this regard, Mauritius supports all initiatives to bring this enduring conflict to an end and promote the Israeli-

Palestinian peace process, including our support for an immediate cease fire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the unimpeded access of humanitarian assistance.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the State Lands (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2024) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

(NO. X OF 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

(12.40 p.m.)

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy):
Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first congratulate you for your appointment as Speaker of the House and I move that the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024) be read a second time.

The Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024) provides for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2024-2025 and its Annex, and for matters connected, consequential or incidental to it.

The Bill brings amendments to 94 enactments which cover the 3 themes of the Budget, namely –

- (a) Fostering Economic Dynamism;
- (b) Working towards a sustainable and inclusive Mauritius, and
- (c) Building our Future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main amendments contained in the Bill will be explained.

I will now speak on the main amendments which relate to fostering economic dynamism.

Clause 6 amends the Bank of Mauritius Act to further strengthen the operational independence of the Central Bank to deliver on its mandate of monetary policy, and financial stability.

Clause 7 amends the Banking Act to, amongst others –

- (a) review the terms for the appointment of auditors for branches or subsidiaries of a foreign bank, and
- (b) remove the timeframe of at least 24 hours of notice to the public before the day on which an institution proposes to transact business with the public when that day is a bank holiday or a public holiday.

Clause 14 amends the Companies Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) require the Board of a company to notify the Registrar of Companies on the resignation of a director or that of the secretary from its company, and
- (b) provide for companies holding a Global Business Licence or an Authorised Company to comply with provisions of the Companies Act relating to prejudiced shareholders.

Clause 16 amends the Construction Industry Authority Act 2023 to, *inter-alia*, allow local contractors and consultants specialised in different fields to enter into joint ventures in order to enhance the competitiveness of the industry through increased participation in bidding exercises.

Clause 20 amends the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021 to enable Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius (CERT-MU) to, *inter-alia*, participate, provide assistance and conduct cybersecurity initiatives at national, regional and international levels.

Clause 23 amends the Economic Development Board Act to, *inter-alia* –

- (a) introduce a 10-year expert Occupation Permit to attract foreign talents in wealth management, family office, virtual assets and virtual tokens; and

- (b) reduce the threshold for Occupation Permits for professionals from Rs30,000 to Rs22,500.

Clause 25 amends the Employment Relations Act to –

- (a) provide that the period for determination of reinstatement cases be extended from 60 to 90 days to give the Employment Relations Tribunal ample time to process the cases.

Clause 31 amends the Finance and Audit Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide for every Department to table at the National Assembly its Annual Report on Performance, and
- (b) empower the Internal Control Cadre to exercise its internal audit functions.

Clause 33 amends the Financial Reporting Act to provide for the registration of public interest entities to the National Committee on Corporate Governance.

Clause 34 amends the Financial Services Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) introduce timeframes for the processing of licenses falling under the regulatory purview of the FSC, and
- (b) set the timeframe of 6 months after closure of its financial year for an authorised company to file with the FSC its financial summary, accounts, financial statements or returns;

Clause 35 amends the Fisheries Act to, *inter alia*, provide for an application for the grant, issue or renewal of a licence or an authorisation for any activity under the Fisheries Act to be made through NELS.

Clause 36 amends the Forests and Reserves Act to allow the removal of protected plants found on State Land or reserves, for national projects or in the interest of public safety, following authorisation from the Conservator of Forests.

Clause 37 amends the Freeport Act to –

- (a) allow a company to operate under both a Global Business licence issued by the Financial Services Commission and a Freeport certificate;

- (b) provide for the extension of the maximum period during which goods may be warehoused in a freeport zone by 3 years, and
- (c) authorise a Fulfilment Centre as a Freeport activity, provided that it does not include any manufacturing activity.

Clause 38 amends the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act to –

- (a) provide for quarterly payment facilities for Bookmaker licence conducting fixed odds betting on local race and Totalisator operator licence, and
- (b) make it mandatory for operators to keep all their gaming machines, limited payout machines, jackpot system powered on a 24/7 basis.

Clause 40 amends the Immigration Act to, amongst others, introduce a 10-year expert Occupation Permit to attract foreign talents in wealth management, family office, virtual assets and virtual tokens.

Clause 42 amends the Industrial Court Act to provide for the protection of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry responsible for the subject of labour from liability so that criminal or civil action cannot be instituted against him for any act done or omitted in good faith.

Clause 43 amends the Information and Communication Technologies Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide for the appointment process of the Chairperson or the Vice-Chairperson of the Information and Communication Technologies Appeal Tribunal; and
- (b) allow the authorised officer of Information and Communication Technologies Authority to seek assistance from the Police when conducting any inspection or any intervention, and

Clause 45 amends the Irrigation Authority Act to –

- (a) prohibit the construction of permanent structures within an irrigation area without the approval of the Irrigation Authority;
- (b) exempt owners of abandoned land in irrigation zone from payment of irrigation dues, and

- (c) allow an authorised officer of the Irrigation Authority to have access to any private-owned land on which sources of water used for irrigation purposes are found.

Clause 48 amends Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund Act to review the composition of the Board of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund.

Clause 49 amends the Local Government Act to, *inter alia* –

- (a) provide that every Council will be under the responsibility of either a Director-General or a Chief Executive;
- (b) allow the Valuation Department to use information obtained from various sources for the purpose of compiling and maintaining the Cadastral Database and determining the Cadastral Value of an immovable property, and
- (c) extend the validity period of Building and Land Use Permit from 2 years to 3 years.

Clause 50 amends the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act to allow for the wholesale of imported products in the National Wholesale Market.

Clause 51 amends the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority Act to, *inter alia*, regulate the transport charges paid by small planters for transportation of cane.

Clause 52 amends the Mauritius Deposit Insurance Scheme Act to enable banks and non-bank deposit taking institutions to effect an initial contribution to the Deposit Insurance Fund on such date as may be specified by the Board of the Mauritius Deposit Insurance Corporation Ltd.

Clause 55 amends the Merchant and Shipping Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) require the Superintendent of Shipping, where a death has occurred on board any foreign ship, to record the reported cause of death and report the matter to the country of registration of the ship, and
- (b) allow termination of registration of a ship in Mauritius in cases of non-compliance with prescribed norms and standards.

Clause 56 amends the Morcellement Act to, amongst others, provide that no person shall make an application for a morcellement permit unless the proposed morcellement has a green forest.

Clause 57 amends the National Agricultural Products Regulatory Office Act to exempt a person from applying for an export license for the export of tea below 2 kilograms.

Clause 60 amends the National Payment Systems Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) empower the BOM to grant in-principle approval to an applicant to operate a payment system, clearing system or settlement system or to act as a payment service provider;
- (b) extend the authority of the BOM to authorise a person to operate a clearing system or settlement system, and
- (c) enable the BOM to approve the extension of the appointment of a firm of auditors for an additional period not exceeding 2 years.

Clause 64 amends the Non-Citizens (Property Restriction) Act to allow a foreign entity to hold an immovable property by virtue of a non-renewable lease agreement for industrial or commercial purposes for a term not exceeding 30 years.

Clause 73 amends the Public Procurement Act to, amongst others –

- (a) provide for the setting up of a Project Management and Contract Administration Unit to, *inter alia*, –
 - (i) ensure that approved projects are implemented in a timely manner, and within approved costs; and
 - (ii) provide advice to public bodies on project management and contract administration; and
- (b) allow for the Independent Review Panel to require the Central Procurement Board to furnish all relevant information and attend any meeting.

Clause 81 amends the Securities Act to make it mandatory to seek the approval of the Financial Services Commission prior to appointment of an audit firm by a closed-end fund.

Clause 88 amends the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act to –

- (a) include a representative of the Ministry responsible for the subject of Land Drainage to be a member of the Land Conversion Committee; and
- (b) allow the Sugar Investment Trust to also sell land to Option Holders and the General Public.

Clause 89 amends the Sugar Insurance Fund Act to limit the period of tenure of office of Chairperson and members appointed by the Minister responsible for the subject of Agro Industry and Food Security to 1-year term and that they are eligible for re-appointment.

Clause 90 amends the Tourism Authority Act to, *inter alia*, align the validity period of a Tourist Accommodation Certificate with that of the Tourist Enterprise Licence.

Clause 94 amends the Virtual Asset and Initial Token Offering Services Act to impose a statutory obligation on a Virtual Asset Service Provider to appoint a Senior Executive at all times, duly approved by the FSC.

Clause 95 amends the Workers' Rights Act 2019 to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) provide that workers on maternity or paternity leave must not be discriminated against in respect of career development or opportunity of promotion and that termination of employment cannot be effected in such circumstances;
- (b) provide that a worker working from home and performing excessive hours of work has the right to disconnect;
- (c) provide for more flexible working arrangements by giving a worker the option of taking time-off instead of being paid overtime;
- (d) ease labour management at level of enterprises and to better protect the rights of workers. Consequential amendments are being made to Private Recruitment Agencies Act 2023;

- (e) extending the entitlement to an allowance paid during cyclone warning class III and IV to other circumstances where work is performed during heavy or torrential rainfall or period of safety bulletin;
- (f) provide for the refund of vacation leave;
- (g) increase the maternity leave from 14 to 16 weeks to give more time to the mother to recover and to look after her child; and
- (h) provide for a mother who give birth to twins or triplets or multiple births or to a pre-mature baby, a special two-week additional maternity leave, and
- (i) provide an increase in the length of paternity leave from 1 week to 4 weeks since the first days of parenthood is fundamental in building family bonds and in the development of the baby.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to the second theme which is about working towards a sustainable and inclusive Mauritius.

Clause 12 amends the Civil Status Act to *inter alia* –

- (a) provide for keeping records of the adoptive parents and certified extract of birth certificate in cases of *adoption plénière*, *adoption simple* and *légitimation par adoption*; and
- (b) specify in the recording of the birth entry of a child, the national identity card number of each parent as mentioned on their National Identity Card.

Clause 21 amends the Declaration of Assets Act to, amongst others, provide for the Financial Crimes Commission to monitor the assets and liabilities of any declarant, for the purpose of detecting and investigating corruption and money laundering offenses or unexplained wealth.

Clause 24 amends the Electricity Act 2005 to, amongst others –

- (a) regulate the installation of domestic battery energy storage system in order to avoid safety hazards during maintenance works carried out by the CEB; and
- (b) provide for determination of way leaves for installing or keeping installed electric lines, equipment and poles to facilitate the implementation of renewable energy projects.

Clause 26 amends the Energy Efficiency Act to allow for the development of a regulatory framework for Energy Performance Contracting.

Clause 32 amends the Financial Crimes Commission Act 2023 to, *inter alia*, align the Act with recommendation 38 of the Financial Action Task Force methodology, which requires confiscation of proceeds of crime and such property of corresponding value.

Clause 39 amends the Higher Education Act to implement Government's policy pertaining to infrastructural projects in the higher education sector.

Clause 47 amends the Law Practitioners Act to, *inter alia*, make it mandatory for any law practitioner or legal officer to every year participate in a Continuous Professional Development Programme for at least 12 hours, including 2 hours on ethics.

Consequential amendments are being made to, amongst others of the Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies Act.

Clauses 8 and 59 amend the Central Electricity Board Act and National Land Transport Authority Act respectively to provide for consequential amendments relating to the licensing of electric motor vehicle charging stations.

Clause 68 amends the Ports Act to, *inter alia*, deter vessels from staying idle in the port for a period exceeding 6 months.

Clause 70 amends the Private Pension Schemes Act to create an obligation for seeking the approval of the Financial Services Commission prior to a shift or conversion of a private pension scheme.

Clause 72 and 74 amend the Probation of Offenders Act and the Reform Institutions Act to provide that every member of the respective Committee to be paid such fees as may be determined by the responsible Minister.

Clause 79 amends the Road Traffic Act to –

- (a) review the definition of “classic or vintage motor car” as a car aged 40 years or more from its date of original registration in or outside Mauritius; and
- (b) provide for the licensing of electric motor vehicle charging stations.

Clause 80 amends the Roads Act to, *inter alia*, ensure that the provisions relating to the display and erection of advertisements and advertising structures are harmonised between in legislations.

Consequential amendments are being made to the Advertisements Regulation Act, Roads Act and Road Development Authority Act.

Clause 91 amends the University of Mauritius Act to provide for service of process, in legal proceedings, to be served to the Vice-Chancellor instead of the Registrar given that the former is the principal academic and administrative officer of the University of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now elaborate on the third theme of my speech which is about building our future.

Clause 4 amends the Animal Diseases Act to, *inter alia*, provide for the implementation of National Livestock Identification System for the registration of livestock establishments for traceability in the veterinary sector and disease surveillance.

Clause 5 amends the Ayurvedic and Other Traditional Medicines Act to facilitate the registration of specialists in the fields of Ayurvedic and other traditional medicines.

Clause 13 amends the Clinical Trials Act to, *inter alia*, provide for a sponsor to make an application for a trial license to the Clinical Research Regulatory Council through the National Electronic Licensing System.

Clause 15 amends the Competition Act to allow for the Executive Director to appeal to the Supreme Court against an order or direction, provided that the order or direction is in relation to a matter investigated by him or which he has caused to be investigated.

Clause 17 amends the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act to –

- (a) ensure a stronger legal framework in relation to e-commerce and digital market place. Similar provision is being made under the Fair Trading Act at Clause 30, and
- (b) ensure a stronger legal framework with regards to the display of prices.

Clause 18 amends the Customs Act, amongst others, to defer until 30 June 2026 the penalty provision, for failure by an importer to submit a Bill of Entry for the clearance of goods within 5 working days.

Clause 19 amends the Customs Tariff Act to –

- (a) allow a beneficiary of a duty exempted motor vehicle to benefit from another duty exempted motor vehicle provided he reimburses the proportionate duties and taxes remaining due on the current motor vehicle. The new motor vehicle should be cleared within 9 months;
- (b) abolish the applicable 15% customs duty on milk beverages obtained from nuts, and
- (c) create new HS Codes to identify those products on which excise duty or VAT is being abolished or reduced as mentioned in the Annex to the Budget Speech 2024-2025.

Clauses 22, 54 and 67 amend the Dental Council Act, Medical Council Act and Pharmacy Council Act, respectively, to review the requirement for a Higher School Certificate, or its equivalent, for the registration of dental surgeons, general practitioners and pharmacists, respectively.

Clause 29 amends the Excise Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) creating a new category of wines with a lower alcohol strength and a new category of golden rums to allow local manufacture of these products;
- (b) renew the Negative Excise Duty Refund Scheme for a further period of 1 year up to 30 June 2025;

- (c) abolish the excise duty of Rs2 per unit on plastic bottles made from plant-based materials, and
- (d) grant 100% excise duty exemption to, *inter alia*, a priest, as an artisanal fisher and a parent or legal guardian of a disabled person.

Clause 41 amends the Income Tax Act to, amongst others, –

- (a) increase the maximum allowable deduction for donations made by an individual to an approved charitable institution including a religious body from Rs50,000 to Rs100,000;
- (b) allow taxpayers to deduct from their taxable income, the amount of wages paid to a carer up to a maximum of Rs30,000 in an income year provided the latter's CSG and NSF contributions have been paid;
- (c) grant to an individual, an additional deduction in respect of the fees paid for a dependent child to attend a fee-paying private primary or secondary school up to a maximum of Rs60,000 per child in an income year.
- (d) increase the exemption threshold on lump sum received as pension, retiring allowance or severance allowance from Rs2.5 million to Rs3 million;
- (e) exempt from income tax, as from 1 January 2024, any compensation payable by Government or a public sector body for losses directly or indirectly suffered as a result of a natural disaster;
- (f) implement the decision of Government to provide a monthly financial assistance for payment of National Minimum Wage and salary compensation 2024;
- (g) renew the *Prime à l'Emploi* Scheme which targets unemployed women and persons with disabilities for financial year 2024/2025 and extend the Scheme to part-time employees who work for a minimum of 20 hours in a week;
- (h) exempt from income tax, any allowance paid by Government to an individual under a financial assistance scheme;
- (i) introduce the Corporate Climate Responsibility levy which is equivalent to 2% of a company's chargeable income;

- (j) exempt profits derived from the sale of virtual assets and virtual tokens from income tax;
- (k) grant to a company a deduction, up to a maximum of Rs100,000 in an income year, in respect of donations made to an approved charitable institution including a religious body;
- (l) grant to a company a double deduction in respect of expenditure incurred to support the work of a professional in the Arts;
- (m) grant to a company a triple deduction, capped at Rs1 million, in respect of donations made through electronic means to a NGO involved in combatting drug abuse, prevention of gender-based violence or poverty alleviation;
- (n) grant to a company a tax credit of 25% of the expenditure incurred in an income year in respect of a crèche or the cost of setting up a Child Day Care Centre for the benefit of its employees;
- (o) extend the investment tax credit of 15% per annum over 3 years to cover capital expenditure incurred on the cost of acquisition of artificial intelligence and patents;
- (p) extend the partial exemption regime of 80% to a company holder of a Payment Intermediary Services licence or a Robotic and Artificial Intelligence Enabled Advisory Services licence, and
- (q) allow, for financial year 2024/2025, the one-off transfer of Rs1 billion of CSR funds by the MRA to the Consolidated Fund, for financing social schemes and programmes including overseas treatment scheme, grant for antenatal care and *l'Allocation Egalité des Chances*.

Clause 46 amends the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act to, *inter alia* –

- (a) re-introduce the Arrears Payment Scheme for another year. A debtor will benefit from the full waiver of interest and penalties if he settles his debt outstanding as at 30 June 2024 or before 26 June 2025, and
- (b) deem that an effective change in ownership of a company will occur where there is a change of more than 10% in its shareholding.

Clause 53 amends the Mauritius Revenue Authority Act to, amongst others –

- (a) re-introduce the Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme which provides for full waiver of penalties and interest where tax arrears are paid in full by 26 June 2025, and
- (b) introduce the Contribution Arrears Payment Scheme which provides for full waiver or waiver of 75% of penalties, interest or surcharge, as the case maybe, where arrears of social contribution, NPF and NSF contribution or training levy are paid in full by 26 June 2025.

Clause 61 amends the National Pensions Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) provide for payment of Child’s Allowance to beneficiaries of basic pensions, irrespective of the number of children, and
- (b) increase the quantum of Child’s Allowance to Rs2,500;
- (c) provide an additional monthly disability allowance of Rs3,000 to a disabled child of less than 18 years who benefits from the invalid basic pension;
- (d) review the operational mechanism of the National Pensions Fund (NPF) and the National Savings Fund (NSF);
- (e) increase by Rs500 the quantum of Basic Retirement Pension, Basic Invalidity Pension, Basic Widows Pension and Basic Orphan’s Pension;
- (f) increase the quantum of Guardian’s Allowance payable to persons taking responsibility of orphans to Rs2,000, and
- (g) provide for an increase in the Inmate’s Allowance to Rs1,500 to improve the well-being of retirees in charitable institutions.

Clause 62 amends the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act to enlarge the mandate of the conservation fund to finance, amongst others, biodiversity and conservation projects, and forestry related activities.

Clause 63 amends the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) reduce from 30 working days to 21 working days delay for an application to be deemed to have been granted, and
- (b) provide that the Ministry issues a notification that the application is still under consideration where the application has not been determined within the delay of 21 working days.

Clause 65 amends the Pas Géométriques Act to clarify that a person may, by inheritance, hold more than one campement site lease.

Clauses 66 and 87 amend the Pensions Act and the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act to

–

- (a) refund to the heirs of a public officer, appointed before 01 January 2013 and who dies while in service, the share of contributions that the officer has made, including any pensionable service in statutory bodies, and
- (b) effect the payment of the death gratuity, payable upon the demise of a pensioner, to his surviving spouse or, if there is no surviving spouse, to his legal personal representative.

Clause 69 amends the Private Health Institutions Act to cater for research.

Clause 74 amends the Registration Duty Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (a) extend the Home Ownership and Home Loan Schemes up to 30 June 2025.
- (b) extend the direct debit payment facility, currently given to banks, notaries and attorneys to motor vehicle dealers, and
- (c) deem that an effective change in ownership of a company will occur where there is a change of more than 10% in its shareholding.

Clause 76 amends the Registration of Associations Act to, *inter alia*, –

- (d) facilitate the registration of amendment of rules of a registered association, and

- (e) remove the requirement for the secretary of an association to deposit with the Registrar of Associations an original document of the security bond furnished by an officer.

Clause 77 amends the Removal of Sand Act to allow for sand extraction for the purpose of beach nourishment.

Clause 83 amends the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act to, amongst others –

- (a) increase the amount of retirement benefit payable, as from 01 January 2024, to a person aged 75 years or above from Rs1,000 to Rs2,500;
- (b) extend the payment of the CSG Income Allowance until June 2025 including end of year bonus. The amount of allowance payable is being increased as follows –
 - (i) Rs3,000 for individuals deriving income not exceeding Rs20,000;
 - (ii) Rs2,500 for individuals deriving income above Rs20,000 but not exceeding Rs25,000;
 - (iii) Rs2,000 for individuals deriving income above Rs25,000 but not exceeding Rs30,000, and
 - (iv) Rs1,500 for individuals deriving income above Rs30,000 but not exceeding Rs50,000;
- (c) extend the payment of the CSG Child Allowance until June 2025 including end of year bonus and increase the monthly allowance from Rs2,000 to Rs2,500;
- (d) introduce the Revenu Minimum Garantie allowance to ensure that all full-time employees have a monthly *Revenu Minimum Garanti* of Rs20,000;
- (e) introduce the monthly School Allowance of Rs2,000 for children up to the age of 10 years;

- (f) introduce the monthly Equal Chance Allowance of Rs2,000 for every household earning less than Rs20,000 monthly;
- (g) introduce the Maternity allowance of Rs 2,000 which will be paid to a mother for 9 months as from the month in which she has reached the third trimester of her pregnancy;
- (h) introduce the one-off Pregnancy Care Allowance of Rs3,000 to pregnant woman upon completion of not less than 6 medical check-ups required to be followed during her pregnancy, and
- (i) provide an additional monthly allowance of Rs3,000 to a disabled child of less than 18 years who benefits from the CSG Disability Allowance.

Clause 92 amends the Value Added Tax Act to, *inter alia*, -

- (a) provide that the rate of exchange should be specified in the VAT invoice for supplies expressed in a currency other than Mauritius currency;
- (b) exempt the entrance fee to a digital art gallery from VAT, and
- (c) increase the once-in a lifetime VAT exemption on the purchase of a taxi to a maximum of Rs120,000.

Clause 93 amends the Veterinary Council Act to, amongst others –

- (a) allow a person, holding a degree, a diploma or an equivalent qualification in veterinary medicine and surgery to provide such veterinary treatment, to an animal as the veterinary surgeon may authorise, and
- (b) allow for the temporary registration of a non-citizen as veterinary surgeon where he undertakes to work in a company or any other body in the field of veterinary medicine and surgery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am proposing amendments at Committee Stage to the Construction Industry Authority Act, the Customs Tariff Act, the Fair Trading Act, the Income Tax Act, the

National Land Transport Authority Act and the Worker’s Rights Act. These amendments are being circulated in the House.

I now commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

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

At 1.22 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 3.02 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

SITTING OF 18 JULY 2024 - SUSPENDED HON. MEMBERS - OBSTRUCTION & DISTURBANCES

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to inform the House that the hon. Acting Prime Minister has, earlier today, given notice in writing of a privilege complaint under Standing Order 74(1) against hon. Bhagwan, hon. Juman and hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, presently suspended from the service of the Assembly, who have forcefully entered the precincts of the National Assembly to access the Chamber and who have also created disturbances outside the Chamber with a view to obstructing and interrupting the proceedings of the House on Thursday 18 July 2024.

Hon. Members, I have considered the matter and I take the view that offences may have been committed under section 6(1) (c), (h) and (i) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, which reads as follows –

“6. Contempt of Assembly

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

Paragraph (c) reads as follows –

“refusing or willfully failing to obey any rule or order of the Assembly, or any order of a committee acting within the scope of its authority”

Paragraph (h) reads as follows –

“creating or joining in any disturbance which interrupts or is likely to interrupt the proceedings of the Assembly or of any committee while the Assembly or committee is sitting;”

Paragraph (i) reads as follows –

“misbehaving in a disrespectful, indecorous, improper or disorderly manner, within the precincts of the Assembly at any time between the commencement and final termination of a sitting on any day on which the Assembly meets;”

MOTION – S.O. 74(4)

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of your ruling, I move that the matter whereby hon. Bhagwan, hon. Juman and hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, presently suspended from the service of the Assembly, who have forcefully entered the precincts of the National Assembly to access the Chamber and who have also created disturbances outside the Chamber with a view to obstructing and interrupting the proceedings of the House on Thursday 18 July 2024, be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action pursuant to Standing Order 74(4) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

(3.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor to intervene on the

Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024). I also join my colleagues in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker of the House.

The Finance Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, provides for a range of amendments in various legislations, each meticulously crafted to support our economic and social goals. These amendments, I must say, are not mere technicalities; they are essential adjustments that will facilitate the effective implementation of the Budget 2024-2025.

I have to say that this last Budget also strikes the right balance between economic progress and social development. Inclusivity, social justice and equality can only be achieved if economic progress and social development go hand in hand. From 2014 to date, our Government has lived up to the challenge and the Minister of Finance, hon. Dr. Padayachy, has over the years successfully worked towards achieving this important balance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government's commitment to social welfare is unwavering. The population bears testimony that during the last decade, our Government proposed and implemented a series of measures to improve the lives of our seniors, persons with disabilities, widows, orphans and also other vulnerable people. One of our top priorities is to cater for their welfare, security and well-being. As such, this last Budget continues to reflect the vision of our Government.

Allow me at this stage, Mr Speaker, Sir, to address some of the salient clauses of the Bill. I must highlight that one of the main clauses is, in fact, the substantial increase in basic pensions. I am here referring to the Basic Retirement Pension, Basic Widows Pension, Basic Orphan's Pension and Basic Invalidity Pension also.

How can we forget the fact that in 2005, the Basic Retirement Pension was only Rs2,200? From 2005 to 2014, during the nine year mandate of the previous regime, Labour Party, the pension was increased by merely Rs150 to Rs200 per year. In November 2014, the Basic Retirement Pension stood at merely Rs3,623. We are here talking of an increase of only Rs1,423 over a period of 9 years from 2005 to 2014.

In November 2014, as soon as we came, we have increased the Basic Retirement Pension from Rs3,623 to Rs5,000. We have not stopped there. We have kept on increasing the Basic Retirement Pension over the years.

Today, we are proposing to amend the Second Schedule of the National Pensions Act to further increase the Basic Retirement Pension to –

- Rs14,000 for those aged 60 to 64;
- Rs15,000 for those aged 65 to 74;
- Rs16,500 for those aged 75 to 89;
- Rs24,210 for those aged 90 to 99, and
- Rs29,210 for those aged 100 years and above.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over the 9 years, 2014 to 2024, we have brought an increase of more than Rs10,000 in the Basic Retirement Pension compared to Rs1,423 by the previous Government over the same period of time. We have given the same consideration to persons with disabilities, widows and orphans.

Let me now address the Basic Invalidity Pension and the Basic Widows Pension. In 2005, you will remember that the Invalidity Pension and the Basic Widows Pension were only Rs2,025, that is, less than the Basic Retirement Pension which was at that time Rs2,200. In November 2014, both pensions stood at merely Rs3,267. From 2005 to November 2014, both pensions were increased by only Rs1,242.

Now, what have we done, Mr Speaker, Sir? We have found it appropriate to align the Basic Widow's Pension and the Basic Invalidity Pension with the Basic Retirement Pension. Today, both pensions stand at Rs14,000. Therefore, over our 9 year mandate, these two pensions have been increased by Rs10,733 compared to only Rs1,242 by the Labour Party government.

Likewise, the Basic Orphan's Pension was only Rs1,120 in 2005. In November 2014, the Basic Orphan's Pension stood at merely Rs2,500, an increase of only Rs1,380 over a period of nine years from 2005 to 2014. Since November 2014 to date, we have increased the Basic Orphan's Pension from Rs2,500 to Rs14,000, an increase of Rs11,500 compared to Rs1,380 by the previous government over almost the same length of time.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is also good to know that currently there are 269,245 beneficiaries of the Basic Retirement Pension; 16,883 beneficiaries of the Basic Widows Pension; 27,251 beneficiaries of the Basic Invalidation Pension and 392 beneficiaries of the Basic Orphan's Pension making a total of 313,771 beneficiaries. As you can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, over the years the lives of 313,771 people have been improved.

If we had followed the trend of the Labour Party, that is, increase pension at the rate of Rs150 to Rs200 yearly, today the Basic Retirement Pension would have been only around Rs5,046 instead of Rs14,000 not even half of what it is today. Likewise, the Basic Invalidation Pension and the Basic Widow's Pension would have Rs4,509 instead of Rs14,000 now. The Basic Orphan's Pension would have been Rs2,500 instead of Rs14,000 today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that soon after the announcement in the Budget Speech 2024-2025, my Ministry has already paid the new increase in all the basic pensions. On 01 July 2024, most beneficiaries of the basic pensions have been paid the new rates. The remaining beneficiaries – I am here referring to those deriving their basic pensions through the post offices – have been paid as from 03 July 2024 .

Mr Speaker, Sir, our aim is to build a more inclusive and fairer society which is why since 2014, our Government has come up with a series of initiatives in favour of persons with disabilities. The amendment to the Excise Act is being proposed following several requests made by parents to broaden the category of persons with disabilities benefiting from duty concessions. Through clause 29 of the Finance Bill, we are proposing to amend the Excise Act to make provisions for a new category of persons with disabilities to benefit from duty concessions. Currently, under the Excise Act, a parent or legal guardian of a child with orthopaedic disability, severe mobility problems and who require constant care and attention is eligible to benefit from duty concessions on motor vehicles.

Now, by adding a new paragraph, paragraph 72A to the First Schedule of the Excise Act, parents or legal guardians of children of all types of disabilities will benefit from a 100% duty free purchase of a motorcar granted once every seven years. This would therefore enable parents having children with disabilities, suffering from autism spectrum disorder, severe intellectual disabilities, severe visual and hearing impairment who were deprived of such facility to start

benefiting from same. This measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, will surely ease the burden on parents and demonstrate our compassion and responsiveness to the needs of those in need.

To bring further relief to children with disabilities, through clause 83 of the Bill, we are proposing to amend the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act. This amendment makes provision for an additional disability allowance of Rs3,000 to all children with disabilities under the age of 18 who are already benefiting from a disability allowance. I wish to add that children with disabilities who are in receipt of the Basic Invalidity Pension will also be eligible to this additional allowance of Rs3,000. This additional allowance, Mr Speaker, Sir, will of course have to be recommended by the Medical Board.

Encore une fois, M. le président, nous avons été à l'écoute des parents afin de leur apporter davantage de soutien. Nous ne pouvons pas rester insensible aux difficultés des personnes qui ont besoin d'aide. Cette mesure va certainement alléger leur fardeau. Qui a oublié l'injustice subie par les enfants moins de 15 ans vivant avec un handicap qui n'étaient même pas éligible à la pension d'invalidité ? *This injustice really bothered me and the Government, unacceptable that the previous Government has not done what needed to be done long ago.* Nous avons tenu à corriger cette injustice qui a perduré pendant plus de 40 ans. Cela montre l'engagement de notre Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth et de notre gouvernement de continuer à accompagner et encadrer les enfants en situation de handicap.

Grâce aux mesures apportées par ce gouvernement, un enfant en situation de handicap peut désormais avoir sa pension d'invalidité de R 14 000, *Carer's Allowance* de R 3 500, s'il a besoin de l'assistance d'un soignant. Le remboursement des frais de taxi estimé à R 2 000 pour se rendre à l'école et la *School Allowance* de R 2 000. Si on fait le calcul R 14 000 plus R 3 500 plus R 2 000 plus R 2 000 plus R 3 000, donc, un enfant ayant un handicap âgé jusqu'à 18 ans aura R 24 500.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the population will remember our legacy for years to come. We listen to the people and bring solutions to their problems. As a caring Government, each year in the National budget we have tried our best to strike the right balance between economic development and social progress and addressed challenges through meaningful social measures in each of our Government's budget.

Another laudable measure in the Finance Bill is the revision of the Child Allowance under the National Pensions Act. Previously a beneficiary of a basic pension under the National Pensions Act could benefit from a Child Allowance for a maximum of 3 children. Through clause 61 of the Finance Bill, we are removing this restriction; henceforth, the number of children will no longer be capped. A beneficiary of a basic pension will be eligible for Child Allowance for all of the children.

Around 12,500 children are expected to benefit from this measure and Rs300 million has been allocated for this particular measure.

Allow me now to address Clause 61 of the Finance Bill, amending section 38 of the National Pensions Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, since we are speaking of the NPF-NSF Investment Committee which has been the subject of much debate lately, let me seize this opportunity to bring some clarity, briefly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Parliamentary question dated 09 July 2024 was on the placement made by the NPF-NSF Investment Committee. The supplementary question was on one particular placement in Hold Attitude. NPF-NSF Investment Committee has made over 250 placements. If the original question was specific to Hold Attitude, I would have had all the details at that point in time. That is why I told the hon. Member that his supplementary question was far from the original question and he had to come up with a specific question. Having said this, let me reassure the House and the workers that National Pensions Fund presently stands at Rs154 billion and the National Savings Fund stands at Rs43 billion and as I stated in my reply, the NPF-NSF Investment Committee makes investment in the best and safe manner.

I wish to inform the House that on 12 June 2024, Hold Attitude has settled all outstanding interests amounting to Rs129.6 million to NPF-NSF for the period March 2022 to September 2023. In addition, Hold Attitude has also paid a penalty of Rs10.8 million on 01 July 2024. I have been further informed that as far as the capital of Rs1.4 billion is concerned, the maturity date is on 30 September 2024. The capital is secured by the guarantee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the amendment under Clause 61 of the Finance Bill. We are further reinforcing the composition of the NPF-NSF Investment Committee.

Representatives from the PMO, Ministry of Financial Services and the Bank of Mauritius will now form part of the NPF-NSF Investment Committee. The purpose is also to retain the tripartism spirit so that all decisions are taken collectively. Officers, as may be designated by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, will assist the NPF-NSF Investment Committee. This will surely ensure prompt tracking and reporting on performance of investment portfolios, ensuring adequate supervisions and control are in place and initiating prompt recovery procedures as and when required.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these new measures are a testament of our commitment to promote inclusiveness, social justice and also to ensure that no child is left behind.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bholah!

(3.27 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is my pleasure to participate in the debates on the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill of 2024.

We all know that the Finance Bill is a pivotal piece of legislation for the implementation of the various measures enunciated in the Budget 2024/2025.

The underlying philosophy of the recent Budget was crafted to secure our future. “Tomorrow is ours” reflects our roadmap for progress. We believe in equity. We believe in a society where everyone has access to resources and opportunities. This means investing in education, healthcare, and social services to level the playing field and bridge the gap.

Another cornerstone of our budgetary philosophy is sustainability. We recognize that our actions today have consequences for future generations and we must act responsibly to safeguard the planet and its resources.

Mr Speaker, Sir the Finance Bill seeks to bring amendments to more than 90 existing legislations.

Out of these amendments, I will touch upon the –

1. Economic Development Board Act;
2. Companies Act;
3. Banking Act;
4. Financial Reporting Act;
5. Financial Services Act;
6. Freeport Act;
7. Income Tax Act;
8. National Pensions Act;
9. The Virtual Asset and Initial Token Offering Services Act 2021, and
10. Financial Crimes Commission Act.

I will lay emphasis on the impact of the proposed amendments on the Financial Services sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Economic Development Board Act – Mauritius developed its financial services architecture in the late 80's. And the sector picked up in 1992 with the creation of the Mauritius Offshore Business Activities Act, also known as MOBAA.

Over the last three decades, the main focus of the Financial Services sector was the Global Business. The sector has evolved and adapted to international norms and has come up with a niche market.

Today, Mauritius faces direct competition from international financial centres. The product offerings and services have to evolve to match the international trend. It is also crucial to have the professionals with the right skills to serve these new areas.

Following a skill gap survey conducted by my Ministry in April 2022, it was observed that skills in specific sectors were missing namely; wealth management, family office, virtual asset sector.

In section 13 (1) of the Economic Development Board Act, a framework for the Expert Occupation Permit will be included to cater for the above sector of activities.

This will give the opportunity for high calibre professionals to work in the Mauritius IFC thereby increasing our service level and putting us at par with other major IFCs.

The Companies Act – as per the Financial Stability report of the Bank of Mauritius, the Global Business sector Forex deposit amounted to \$12 billion as at June 2023. And this represents 32.34% of the total deposits of the banking sector.

With regard to amendment proposed to the Companies Act, as a mean to protect the jurisdiction, the Financial Services Commission (FSC) will now have to provide its green light for a company to be removed from the Register of companies. This will increase the soundness of the system and ensure the financial stability.

The Banking Act – Mr Speaker, Sir, as matters stand now in the Banking Act, it is stated that, I quote –

“no director or senior officer or employee of any financial institution shall be at the same time a director or senior officer or an employee of any other financial institution except with the approval of the central bank.”

With the proposed amendment in section 47, subsection (2), provision is being made to include licensee under the National Payment Systems Act. I believe that by including the licensee of the National Payment Systems Act, this will give enhanced protection to the payment ecosystem and increase governance.

Section 2(b) of the Financial Reporting Act is being amended. Henceforth definition of “public interest entity” does not include a Global Business Corporation or an Authorised Company under the Financial Services Act.

Authorised Companies (AC) in Mauritius were introduced in 2018 to attract foreign investment by offering a favourable regulatory environment. ACs are subject to minimal reporting requirements, benefiting from tax exemptions and reduced compliance obligations compared to other companies in Mauritius.

However, potential challenges arise if ACs are classified as Public Interest Entities (PIE), triggering additional compliance burdens under the Financial Reporting Act (FRA). This could contradict initial promises of regulatory relief and deter foreign investors, impacting Mauritius' reputation as an international financial centre.

ACs primarily serve private stakeholders with limited public interest impact and the imposition of Public Interest Entities obligations could undermine the jurisdiction's competitiveness and economic growth objectives.

It is noteworthy to mention that compliance requirements of a Public Interest Entity under the FRA are as follows –

1. 'Where a public interest entity is required under any enactment to prepare a financial statement or report, it shall ensure that the financial statement or report is in compliance with the financial reporting requirements of this Act or any other relevant enactment, any regulations or rules made under this Act and with the IFRS'.
2. 'Every public interest entity shall adopt, and report on corporate governance in accordance with the National Code of Corporate Governance'.

The preparation of financial statements and the adoption and reporting on the principles of the NCCG will all be unforeseen additional burdens on the ACs. What exacerbates the situation is that these were burdens which the investors were promised relief from by virtue of section 71A(10) and (11) of the Financial Services Act as a benefit of setting up an AC in the Mauritian jurisdiction.

The loss of AC businesses as a result of additional unforeseen compliance requirements would not only impact the GDP contribution of the financial services to the economy of Mauritius, but may also adversely impact the reputation of Mauritius as an IFC which promotes the ease of doing business, more specifically with regards to structures like ACs.

Today, international investors are drawn to the Mauritius IFC for cross border investments owing to its good repute. Investors are offered with a choice to opt for an AC to conduct cross

border investments. The effects of the growth of the financial services sector are clearly visible through the figures. The Economic Development Board (EDB) has published the figures which set the narrative on the impact of the financial services sector on the economy. As of 2022, the financial services sector has had a 13.5% GDP contribution and has seen a growth rate of 4.2%.

Additionally, according to the latest statistics published by the FSC, there were a total of 6,300 live ACs as at December 2023. These figures clearly demonstrate the impact cross border investment vehicles, including the AC have had on our economy. These peaks would have been difficult to attain if investors did not prefer our jurisdiction for their cross-border investments. The boastful figures can also be attributed to the fact that the investors trust our robust legal framework and that the benefits provided to their businesses under our laws are conducive to their growth. Hence, the amendment to the FRA is yet another step to consolidate ease of doing business in Mauritius and to increase our competitiveness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amendments are being brought to the Financial Services Act to increase the ease of doing business and to streamline the application process by the Financial Services Commission (FSC). Currently, application of licence is catered for under Sections 16-18 of Financial Services Act. Presently, there is no time frame within which the FSC needs to process a licence and reach a decision.

A timeframe of 10 working days is part of the Government's objective to increase ease of doing business and to enhance the Mauritius IFC jurisdiction. The timeframe will start running once the application is deemed complete by the Financial Services Commission. The Commission will beef up its resources (both human and technological) to reach the said objective. Depending on the type of licences issued by the Financial Services Commission, the Commission will provide an indicative table of timeframes to process and issue of licences. This is in line with the need to provide clarity and certainty for investors. This is also in line with our strategy to increasing business in Africa and India.

Furthermore, by capping the number of days to 15 for the service provider to submit information following a request from Financial Services Commission, this will accelerate the application process. The FSC is fully committed to implementing the above measures so as to

ensure more efficient applications processing and reduction of turnaround time. The quality of applications also will have to be improved in order to avoid 'deemed withdrawal.' The industry players have welcomed Government's policies to improve turnaround time for application of licences. This will enhance the attractiveness of the Mauritius IFC and thus allowing us to address challenges that the jurisdiction is facing with respect to increased competition from other IFCs.

Those provisions would be enforceable as from 01 October 2024. In the next couple of months, the Financial Services Commission will issue a series of FSC Rules and other guidance with respect to same. It must be noted that the above provisions will only be applicable for financial services licences. We are confident that the above-mentioned policy measures and their implementation will lead to the orderly growth of the financial services sector as well as the global business sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the activities of a GBC have been extended to Freeport as per amendments brought to the Freeport Act. This includes building, developing and managing by the enterprise of its own infrastructural facilities, warehouses, cold storage, etc. With the idea of improving the business environment, this ground-breaking initiative will encourage more international companies to set up in Mauritius and enable them carry out more activities. This will impact positively on employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per amendments to the Income Tax Act, the definition of securities has been amended to provide a clear classification as to where virtual assets and tokens fall, for recording purposes. In sub part (c) under the Second Schedule of the same Act, provision is being made for partial exemption for companies holding a Payment Intermediary Services (PIS) licence and Robotic and Artificial Intelligence Enabled Advisory Services licence issued by the Financial Services Commission. In the view of making Mauritius a Fintech Hub, these changes provide certainty to investors making use of the Fintech landscape.

Mr Speaker Sir, as a caring and responsible government, we need to ensure that the contribution of our people in pension funds will yield enough return so that our people can enjoy a financially stable retirement.

Having a representative of the Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance at the level of the NPF and NSF Investment Committee as per amendment that will be brought to the National Pensions Act, will definitely help in achieving this objective, and I note that my colleague, hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo has welcome this idea as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently, section 15 of the VAITOS Act provides for an obligation on the Virtual Asset Service Provider (VASP) to seek the approval of the Financial Services Commission prior to the appointment of a Senior Executive.

Section 15 of the VAITOS Act 2021 is being amended in order to provide further clarity in the law. The proposed amendment will impose a clear statutory obligation on a VASP to appoint/have a Senior Executive at all times.

This will give additional comfort to the investors and better quality of service, which is a key element in making Mauritius a Fintech Hub for the region.

Asset recovery is a vital component of an effective anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism regime. Confiscation, amongst others, prevents criminal property from being laundered or reinvested, reducing therefore the rewards of crime and ensuring that victims receive their due restitution. As we face the growing complexities of financial crimes, it is crucial that decisive actions are taken to continuously enhance our efforts. In this respect, the amendments to the Financial Crimes Commission Act will further strengthen the Asset Recovery Framework in Mauritius to ensure that it remains comprehensive, effective and in conformity with International Standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the face of unprecedented global challenges, we have demonstrated resilience and resolve, uniting as a nation to overcome adversity. Whether it was navigating the complexities of the pandemic, addressing social inequalities, or confronting environmental threats, we have stood together, shoulder to shoulder, in pursuit of a better tomorrow. The Budget 2024/2025 reaffirms our commitment to building a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. And with the adoption of the Finance Bill today, we are providing wings to our Mauritian dream.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Dr. the hon. Mrs Chukowry!

(3.46 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At the very outset, allow me to wish you every possible success in your new responsibilities as Speaker of this august Assembly.

M. le président, merci de me donner l'occasion d'intervenir sur le *Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024)*. Ce projet de loi comporte des amendements à une série de lois, et notamment, la loi sur la *Consumer Protection (Prices and Supplies Control) Act*, la *Fair Trading Act* et la *Competition Act*. Ces amendements ne sont pas de simples mises à jour administratives ; ils sont des réformes essentielles qui amélioreront de façon significative la protection des consommateurs. Ils vont aussi favoriser des pratiques commerciales équitables et garantiront la transparence et l'équité sur notre marché.

M. le président, dans le paysage numérique qui est en constante évolution, il est impératif que nos lois suivent les avancées technologiques. La redéfinition du terme "*supply*" pour inclure les transactions en ligne et électroniques est la preuve que ce gouvernement reconnaît la part grandissante que joue le commerce électronique dans notre société.

Avec de plus en plus de consommateurs qui se tournent vers les achats en ligne, il est crucial que les protections attachées aux achats conventionnels soient étendues aux achats numériques. Cela garantit que les consommateurs soient protégés contre la fraude, les publicités trompeuses et les pratiques déloyales quand ils ont recours aux achats en ligne qui prennent de plus en plus d'ampleur.

M. le président, à travers les amendements proposés, il y aura désormais des dispositions légales qui devront être scrupuleusement respectées par les opérateurs de commerces en ligne. Par exemple –

- Comme les magasins et autres points de ventes physiques, pour le commerce en ligne les prix devront être affichés de façon claire et visible.
- Outre les prix pratiqués, tous les coûts supplémentaires, notamment les frais de livraison, les taxes et les frais de manutention devront être clairement indiqués. Cela permettra aux consommateurs de connaître le coût total avant de faire un achat, évitant ainsi toute charge cachée.
- Les nouvelles provisions de la loi incluent aussi la nécessité d'une tarification transparente, d'une publicité honnête et de politiques de retour claires, créant ainsi des conditions de concurrence équitables pour toutes les entreprises, quel que soit leur mode de fonctionnement.
- Les consommateurs achetant des produits en ligne auront les mêmes droits que ceux achetant dans des magasins et autres commerces physiques, y compris le droit à des descriptions de produits précises, la possibilité de retourner des produits défectueux et la protection contre les activités frauduleuses.

Avec toutes ces conditions réunies, les consommateurs pourront effectuer leurs achats en ligne en toute confiance et avec la même tranquillité d'esprit qu'ils ont dans les environnements physiques de vente au détail.

Je tiens également à souligner quelques changements majeurs qui seront apportés grâce à ces amendements.

Premièrement, la *Fair Trading Act* sera modifiée pour inclure la réglementation du commerce électronique. Un nouveau paragraphe sera ajouté à la section 8 pour réglementer spécifiquement le commerce en ligne. Cela permettra d'assurer que les transactions digitales soient réglementées de manière adéquate, offrant ainsi une protection accrue aux consommateurs dans l'espace numérique.

De plus, une nouvelle section 12A sera introduite, permettant aux officiers de mon ministère de régler tout différend entre un consommateur et un commerçant à travers la

médiation. Cela offre une voie rapide et efficace pour résoudre les litiges, réduisant ainsi le besoin de longues procédures judiciaires.

M. le président, nous ne sommes pas seuls dans cette démarche. À l'échelle mondiale, il y a une forte tendance à renforcer la protection des consommateurs en réponse aux défis posés par la numérisation et la mondialisation. Des pays du monde entier adoptent des lois complètes sur la protection des consommateurs qui traitent de questions telles que la fraude en ligne, la confidentialité des données et les transactions transfrontalières. En modifiant notre loi sur la Protection des Consommateurs, nous alignons notre législation aux meilleures pratiques internationales, démontrant notre engagement à protéger nos citoyens et à favoriser un marché équitable.

L'un des principaux amendements est l'exigence d'une indication claire et transparente des prix de vente. Chaque commerçant doit s'assurer que les étiquettes de prix soient placées de manière visible, et en roupie mauricienne. Cette transparence est essentielle pour la confiance des consommateurs, garantissant qu'il n'y a pas de coûts cachés ou de frais inattendus.

Les nouvelles dispositions pour l'affichage des prix sont particulièrement remarquables –

- Chaque commerçant est tenu de s'assurer que les étiquettes de prix proposés à la vente soient placées à proximité des produits concernés. Cette normalisation garantit la clarté et évite toute incompréhension ou mauvaise interprétation.
- Pour les commerçants acceptant des devises étrangères, le prix de vente en devise étrangère doit également être indiqué, y compris toutes les commissions ou taux de conversion. Cela garantit que les consommateurs soient pleinement informés des implications de coût lorsqu'ils paient en devise étrangère.
- Toute annonce de réduction de prix doit indiquer le prix précédent appliqué pendant une période déterminée avant la réduction. Cela signifie que les consommateurs peuvent avoir confiance que les réductions annoncées sont authentiques.
- Le prix précédent doit être le prix le plus bas appliqué pendant les 30 jours précédant la réduction de prix. Cela empêche l'inflation artificielle des prix avant

l'application des réductions. Des exceptions sont faites pour les produits périssables et les produits sur le marché depuis moins de 30 jours, reflétant les considérations pratiques dans ces cas.

M. le président, si plus d'un prix est affiché simultanément pour des produits ou services, le consommateur doit être facturé au prix le plus bas affiché. Cela protège les consommateurs contre les surfacturations dues à des affichages de prix conflictuels.

Dans le cas où un ancien prix a été entièrement recouvert et obscurci par un nouveau prix, le nouveau prix doit être considéré comme le prix affiché. Cela garantit la clarté et évite tout litige sur le prix applicable.

M. le président, si un prix affiché contient une erreur involontaire et évidente, le commerçant n'est pas tenu de vendre à ce prix une fois l'erreur corrigée et le consommateur informé. Cette disposition protège les commerçants contre les erreurs authentiques tout en s'assurant que les consommateurs soient rapidement informés du prix correct.

De plus, des dispositions sont prises pour protéger les commerçants contre des actes malveillants tels que les prix altérés, défigurés, couverts, supprimés ou obscurcis par une personne non autorisée.

M. le président, pour garantir le respect de ces protections renforcées, nous augmentons les sanctions en cas de non-conformité. L'amende maximale passera de R 300 000 à R 500 000, et la peine d'emprisonnement sera prolongée de 5 à 7 ans. Ces sanctions plus sévères servent de puissant moyen de dissuasion contre les violations et soulignent notre engagement en faveur de la protection des consommateurs.

De plus, les amendements donnent aux officiers de mon ministère le pouvoir d'agir face aux infractions, garantissant une application rapide et efficace de la loi. Le régime pour l'application des *Fixed Penalties* a été renforcé et simplifié, le rendant plus efficace pour traiter les infractions mineures et ainsi préserver l'efficacité de notre cadre de protection des consommateurs.

M. le président, permettez-moi de souligner que de nombreux pays, notamment ceux de l'Union Européenne ont des lois strictes concernant la protection des consommateurs. Ces lois incluent des exigences claires en matière d'indication des prix, la réglementation des transactions

en ligne et des mécanismes d'application robustes. S'aligner sur de telles normes protège non seulement nos consommateurs mais renforce également notre compétitivité mondiale en favorisant un environnement commercial transparent et digne de confiance.

M. le président, la *Competition Act* est aussi amendée pour garantir que toutes les enquêtes soient menées de manière efficace, impartiale et équitable. Le changement principal concerne la section 67, qui est amendée pour élargir la marge de manœuvre du Directeur Exécutif et établir un processus clair pour traiter les désaccords entre le Directeur Exécutif et les commissaires.

Cela fait suite au jugement de la Cour suprême, qui avait mis en exergue ce manquement. Ce changement vise à rendre la *Competition Commission* plus transparente. Cela garantit que toutes les enquêtes soient menées de manière approfondie et qu'il existe un processus équitable pour résoudre les désaccords, créant ainsi un environnement plus juste et compétitif à Maurice.

M. le président, ces amendements constituent un effort complet pour moderniser notre cadre de protection des consommateurs, l'aligner aux meilleures pratiques internationales et répondre aux besoins évolutifs de notre marché. À travers ces amendements, ce gouvernement démontre son engagement à consolider la structure pour la protection des consommateurs.

En ce faisant, nous protégeons non seulement nos citoyens mais nous établissons également une norme d'excellence en matière de droits des consommateurs qui résonne à l'échelle mondiale. Je profite de cette occasion pour remercier tous les officiers de mon ministère et j'ai aussi une pensée spéciale pour l'ancienne *Head* du *Consumer Affairs Unit*, Madame Amita Gunesh qui a pris sa retraite la semaine dernière.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

(4.00 p.m.)

Mr J. F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir for this opportunity, to add my voice, on this debate pertaining to the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024).

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me, to join the other hon. Members, to extend my congratulations to you, on your election as a new young Speaker of the National Assembly. I wish you a successful and progressive mission ahead for your speakership, while serving our democratic institution and the Republic.

I also seize this opportunity to thank the former Speaker hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, G.C.S.K, G.O.S.K, for his speakership and insights towards our National Assembly.

I shared some outstanding working relationships as a patriot and on official missions with him and other hon. Members from both sides of the House, and especially on the *Association des Parlements des États membres de la Commission de L'Océan Indien – APCOI*. I wish him well and good health ahead.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming back to the Bill, the object of this Bill is to provide for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2024-2025 and for matters connected, consequential and incidental thereto.

'Tomorrow is ours', is the budget 2024-2025 theme, presented by the Dr. hon. Padayachy, which surely carries the government philosophy for economic dynamism, a sustainable and inclusive Republic of Mauritius, and building our future together, as one people and one nation.

The hon. Minister reiterated same, as it has been entrenched in the budget in the interest of our whole republic and my intervention today, relates briefly, to the amendments pertaining to a few clauses of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Veterinary Council Act 2020 is amended. You will note that there is a shortage of veterinarian in our Republic as we are still facing animal diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease despite it is not that alarming. The mandatory implementation of National Livestock Identification System as per clause 4 - Animal Diseases Act amended, requires that the Division of Veterinary Services (DVS) to implement such system for all farmers, farms, slaughterhouses, quarantine facilities, isolation facilities, game handling facilities, apiaries and breeding facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will realise that in Rodrigues for a population of around 40,000 animals' heads, there are only 2 veterinarians. We have recently witnessed the problem of

exportation of live animals from Rodrigues through an unwarranted monopoly of one importer. The veterinarians even had to disembark some animals from the ship having not been tested and obtained the necessary veterinary health clearances. A very responsible decision to ensure that there is no transmission of any pathogenic agents from Rodrigues to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 93 - the Veterinary Council Act 2020 is amended at section 19 to provide for a new paragraph, where –

“a person who holds a degree, a diploma or an equivalent qualification in veterinary medicine and surgery to providing, under the responsibility of a veterinary surgeon, such veterinary treatment, to an animal as the veterinary surgeon may authorise.”

I trust this will allow the Council to facilitate and obtain recruitment of more Veterinary Officers as per the qualifications specified to serve the whole Republic.

Rodrigues certainly requires additional veterinarian to support our livestock sector development. Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 36 - Forests and Reserves Act is amended by inserting, after section 8, a new section - 8A. Removal of protected plants –

“The Conservator of Forests shall, for a national project or in the interest of public safety, authorise, in writing, a person to remove a protected plant on any State land or reserve.”

This clause gives powers to the conservator of forest and will certainly facilitate not only the removal, but also the displacement of endemic trees at the New Plaine Corail Airport Site Rodrigues for the forthcoming Plaine Corail Airport Development Project, which we OPR party fully endorse.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the problems faced by many artists post-COVID-19, Government is committed to provide support to our local artists. Clause 41 - Income Tax Act is amended for expenditure incurred to support artists –

“where in an income year, a company incurs expenditure to support the work of a professional in the Arts, it may deduct, from its gross income of that income year, twice the amount of such expenditure.”

This is a commendable incentive for many artists who are actually having hard times to earn a living.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new clause 66A - Donation to NGO by a company through electronic means to an NGO which is involved in –

- (i) combatting drug abuse;
- (ii) prevention of gender-based violence, or
- (iii) poverty alleviation, it shall be allowed in that income year, a deduction from its gross income of an amount representing thrice the amount of such donation.

The maximum deduction is Rs1 m., which with this measure will lead to a maximum deduction of Rs3 m. as tax deduction by a company. I hope this will encourage many companies to contribute in the fight against drugs, gender-based violence and poverty alleviation.

Here, I will plead and request companies who wish to contribute to pay a particular attention to Rodrigues needs as regards to limited resources thereat, through NGO's like Caritas and CRAC Anti-Drug Group in their fight against poverty and drugs abuse.

Clause 77- Removal of Sand Act is amended by inserting the new definitions for “beach nourishment”, which means the adding of sand and other sediments of sand to a beach for the purposes of –

- (a) preventing beach erosion, and
- (b) increasing the width of the beach.

Mr Speaker, Sir, climate change is accelerating coastal erosion worldwide and Rodrigues is no exception as a small developing state for its fourteen proclaimed public beaches which no one wants to see them vanish in the years to come. It is clear that over the last century Rodrigues has lost a few metres of shoreline of its pristine beaches through beach erosion and degradation mainly observed at Graviers, Port Sud Est, Caverne Provert and Grand Baie. In the case of Grand Baie, it is observed that the beach has retreated by approximately 30 to 60 over 130 metres of shoreline.

There has been serious loss of coconut trees and filao trees over the years. Rodrigues can't afford to continue losing its beautiful sandy beaches. Thus, controlling coastal erosion of our sandy beaches, which are key tourist attraction, leisure and recreational values for our local people, is of critical importance to our socio-economic development. It is imperative that

remedial actions are undertaken to protect our beaches. What is required is sustainable mitigation actions to address the problem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2018, the Regional Assembly, has engaged in beach nourishment and re-profiling to add sediment, that is, sand dredged or removed from river mouths onto the erode part of the beach, thus to help create a natural slope and restore the beach.

To mitigate the long shore drift of sediment, there is installation of geotextile sand bags groins, to protect approximately 0.5 kilometres of beaches from wave and tidal-induced erosion while allowing the surrounding community to be involved by participating in the project and receiving financial incentives. Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill provides a new section at 9A - Removal of sand for beach nourishment for authorising a person for the purpose of beach nourishment, remove sand and other sediments of sand from the sea or river. This is subject to an EIA licence or approval.

Now, for Government projects, does removal of sand and other sediments of sands from a dredging area, will be exempted or still requires an EIA licence or approval? I question! Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 83 - Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act 2021 is amended, at sub-clause 30BB - Equal Chance Allowance. Mr Speaker, Sir, yesterday on my way to the Plaine Corail Airport in Rodrigues, I assisted an ambulance attendant, while he was transferring a bedridden lady, returning back home from treatment in Mauritius to help her getting into her house.

At that particular point in time, one question came into my mind: how this incapacitated lady will cope alone if she does not receive a 24 hour carer and basic support required as a bedridden person? Mr Speaker, Sir, this is where I realised how grateful this caring Government is, to come up with this equal chance allowance for payment of Rs2,500 for bedridden, next of kin, spouse, father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brother or sister of that person or of his spouse to one adult member of a household where the household earnings do not exceed Rs20,000 as from July 2024 to June 2025.

This Bill further provides for payment of a school allowance of Rs2,000 for the months of July 2024 to June 2025 to an eligible child who is aged not less than 3 years, but below the age of 10 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, how many parents and children are being relieved by this measure when MRA pays them this school allowance of Rs2,000, irrespective the number of children, especially for our Rodriguan brothers and sisters. I note that in addition to the school allowance payable under subsection (2), an additional sum equivalent to that allowance will be paid for the coming month of December 2024, *13^e mois aussi pou gagne*. You will be surprised that today MRA has become a sweet name in the mouth of many out there, hon. Dr. Padayachy! A sweet name, yes!

Mr Speaker: Address the Speaker, please.

Mr François: Surely, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not go any further and with these words, in support to the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, as presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, for an economic dynamism, a sustainable and inclusive Republic of Mauritius and building our future together, I thank you for your kind attention.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ganoo!

(4.13 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly allow me also to congratulate you on your appointment as the new Speaker to this House. Mr Speaker, Sir, late Jawaharlal Nehru said that the House represents the will of the people and the Speaker represents and is the symbol of the House. The Speaker therefore symbolises the will of the people.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an important piece of legislation bringing amendments to some 95 enactments relating to measures announced in the Budget Speech 2024-2025, and for matters connected, consequential or incidental thereto.

M. le président, je disais il y a quelques minutes de cela, à une conférence de presse, que probablement le *Finance Bill* est le projet de loi le plus important dans notre calendrier parlementaire. Pourquoi est-il le plus important ? C'est parce qu'aussi excellent que le budget puisse être, il ne sera que des effets d'annonce et restera lettre morte sans être suivi par un

Finance Bill. C'est pourquoi, M. le président, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous ne cesserons pas de dénoncer l'opposition pour leurs comportements honteux en choisissant de s'absenter de l'hémicycle à un moment où un projet de loi aussi crucial que le *Finance Bill* fait l'objet de nos débats. Après leurs comportements indignes et odieux lors de votre élection jeudi dernier, M. le président, aujourd'hui l'opposition persiste et signe. L'histoire les jugera.

As for me, I am pleased to be given this opportunity to intervene on this Bill, in so much as clauses 59 and 79 relate directly to my Ministry, and closely pertain to the setting up of an enabling framework for e-mobility while also allowing the National Land Transport Authority to better categorise and classify motor cars to be reckoned as classic or vintage.

Climate change is already wreaking havoc in so many parts of the world and it is no more a myth. The recent events in terms of unpredictable torrential rains and prolonged droughts are harbingers of even more serious catastrophes that act as Damocles sword over our heads if we do not react immediately and boldly. We are therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the crossroads where we cannot afford complacency and need to adopt fleet electrification as a means to make our transport system more sustainable.

Against this alarming backdrop we are being urged to call to arms against our common enemy – carbon emissions. This adversary can be fought in the battle can be won only if we pursue our efforts towards decarbonisation and set an enabling framework for e-mobility to thrive in. That is to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, mobility has never been before a subject matter under so much global scrutiny, as on the one hand it is of imperative necessity to meet our social and economic needs while on the other end, it is having a detrimental effect on our environment.

This Government is fully alive to the fact that we have to reverse the trend in emissions and particularly in the transport sector. Reckoning that the land transport sector is the second largest emitter accounting for some 28% of overall emissions, that is, some 1132 kilotons of CO₂, we can, therefore, deduce that the growing trend in emissions arises from a steady increase in vehicle use over past decades, that is, a compounded growth of some 6% for the past 20 years up to 2019 which is the pre-COVID year. It is therefore our duty, Mr Speaker, Sir, to identify fitting remedial measures and ensure their successful crystallisation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, vehicular fleet in our country boast of nearly 690,000 vehicles as of May of this year, consisting of around 321,000 cars, 245,000 two-wheelers while the remaining being other types of vehicles. We can therefore have an inkling of the level of emissions generated from the transport sector where 95% of the emissions are from cars, 3% from the two-wheelers and the remaining 2% from other classes of vehicles.

In fact, if we are to remain in a do nothing trajectory we would be reaching more than 1,300 kilotons of emissions by 2015 and this apocalyptic scenario is outright a nonstarter as we do not want to bequeath a carbon-driven transport system. Rather, we want to reverse and reduce emissions and this is the decarbonisation pathway to reduce emission by 74 km CO₂ by the end of this decade.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it takes minute planning and bold measures to achieve fleet electrification, and this is exactly what this Government is doing in a progressive, yet carefully devised manner. This is what this Government has been doing for the past years and had it not been for the COVID-19 where our immediate attention was drawn towards saving lives, we would have been further ahead.

In fact, according to the International Energy Agency, electric vehicles are instrumental to decarbonise route transports, the more so that road transportation makes up to 16% of global emissions. It is no secret to all that exponential growth has been witnessed globally in the sale of electric vehicles along with enhanced range and autonomy and wider availability of models which now make electric cars more appealing to the public. In fact, some countries are even targeting to do away from fuel propelled vehicles in the next 10 to 15 years and we cannot afford to lose pace and lag behind.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the high upfront acquisition cost has been a limiting factor and stall penetration of electric vehicles in our country. However, as a visionary Government, we ensured that through a wide array of fiscal influent, we eliminate barriers that were impeding the shift toward e-mobility. Therefore, we are the Government who have introduced impactful measures to decarbonise the transport sector. We are the one to have put sustainable mobility back on the agenda. The continuing increase in electric vehicles recorded over the past 3 years in our country is, therefore, far from being a coincidence. It is rather the result of concerted and planned actions

which led to a higher uptake in relative terms of electric vehicles in Mauritius. In fact, the number of vehicles increased by three folds since 2019 and we are continuing to witness an increase in the number of vehicles registered, reaching over 1000 new vehicles last year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is that ultimately the choice to acquire an electric vehicle rests solely with the individual. However, we also acknowledge that the price of a vehicle is the determining factor at the time of purchase though there has now been a shift from the initial acquisition cost towards the life cycle cost of a vehicle, that is, the expenditure to be incurred by the owner over the useful lifetime of the vehicle. It is with this in mind that this Government has made electric vehicles more easily accessible by removing the taxes associated therewith. In so doing, we are democratising the ownership of electric vehicles.

In addition to setting the scene for the adoption of a greater number of such vehicles, we went a little further so that individuals could be allowed to power their e-vehicles through a photovoltaic installation not exceeding 10 Kw and at the same time export any surplus to the grid.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards promoting electric buses, I need to inform the House that the Bus Modernisation Scheme was reviewed last year to allow for an enhanced subsidy allocation to promote the uptake of electric vehicles. Bus operators are now eligible to a higher quantum amounting to 30% of the price of an electric bus, subject to a maximum of Rs3.5 million per bus. Furthermore, the IFCM would now be providing loans at a concessional rate of 2% in order to assist bus operators to acquire electric buses. We are confident that with our bold measures, more and more electric buses will be in operation in the near future and from my interaction with the bus operators, they are indeed keen to operate such buses but need an adaptation period.

In fact, what we have learned through the pilot phase of the electric bus of the NTC is that an electric bus results in significant savings in terms of maintenance cost in addition to net benefits when comparing fuel costs against electric charges. It is yet a matter of comfort that the NTC is keen on further electrifying its fleet and had come up with a Fleet Renewal Plan where it intends to replace 370 buses in the next few years with focus on electric buses. We are currently doing needful for the first phase of the project and discussions have reached quite far and I hope to come up shortly with a final timeline with regard to the first batch of the 200 electric buses to

be sourced by NTC. We are not only providing financial incentives but we are also planning the way ahead. This is the reason why a fully-fledged report was commissioned in 2020 by my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities and this roadmap sets out the way forward and the various mechanisms to be put in place to achieve fleet electrification.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the 10-Year Electric Vehicle Integration Roadmap for Mauritius which clearly articulates how we are to induce the electrification of our vehicle fleet, according to the medium electric vehicle growth scenario, we are to record some 26,000 e-vehicles by 2030, making this category of vehicles accounting for 15% of new car sales.

Mr Speaker, Sir, fleet electrification does not only involve Government but we also need the active participation of the private sector and for the market to adjust accordingly. The transition towards a greener transport system therefore requires the support of all relevant stakeholders. We are therefore particularly appreciative of the efforts made by players of the automobile industry into making charging facilities more accessible.

The electrification of the fleet also constitutes a unique opportunity for petrol serving stations to reinvent themselves and join the bandwagon of clean and green players. With their intimate knowledge of the automobile industry, they can seize this opportunity to contribute in our national efforts to decarbonise the industry. In fact, the transition to green mobility involves the active participation of all relevant stakeholders and I make a call for them to partake in this endeavour. From initially only few charging facilities across the island, we now have more and more charging points strategically located throughout the country for the benefit of the citizens. We believe that e-mobility cannot thrive in the absence of an appropriate and enabling ecosystem and this is why we need private sector initiative.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will concur with me that electric mobility cannot operate in a vacuum and the proper framework has to be in place. While we do need the initial search in terms of fiscal instruments to ease the penetration of green mobility, at the same time, we need to have an adequate infrastructure to cater for the energy requirements of the e-vehicles. This is why provision is being made in the law to regulate the operation of public electric motor vehicle charging stations by the National Land Transport Authority as is already the case for petrol

service stations through this Bill. These amendments to the Road Traffic Act will allow the NLTA as a regulatory body, to exercise due oversight on the operation of the public electric motor vehicle charging station in Mauritius and attach such conditions as may be appropriate for the orderly and safe operation thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, likewise, the NLTA Act is also being amended to duly empower the NLTA to license and regulate public electric motor vehicle charging stations, so that entities granted with such a licence are accountable and report to the regulatory body. In addition, the NLTA will be empowered to set standards for devices and equipment used in the charging of an electric motor vehicle in order to protect the public and safeguard their interest. This is required, Mr Speaker, Sir, as the operation of public electric motor vehicle charging stations cannot operate on their own but needs to comply with such directives and code of practice as may be issued by the relevant authorities, and this, for the orderly provision of charging facilities to the public. These amendments stand to further consolidate the electric vehicle ecosystem in our country as we are laying the basis for the operation of electric vehicles' charging facilities in Mauritius and this, while having in mind the safety and rights of owners of electric vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, electric vehicles being quite a nascent technology and given the highly evolutive nature thereof with significant research being conducted worldwide at our end, we must promote a collaborative approach so that we harness the full benefits of electric vehicle technology and further enhance the framework under which such vehicles could operate. To this end, provision is further being made under the NLTA Act for the NLTA to cooperate and collaborate with the relevant institutions, in the discharge of the functions under any enactment relating to electrical installations for the charging of an electric motor vehicle. These entities comprise the CEB and the Utility Regulatory Board and the aim is for the provision of charging facilities to be regulated in such a manner wherein the expertise of competent authorities is tapped in.

Mr Speaker, Sir, provision has been duly made for the licencing regime in respect of these public electric motor vehicle charging stations, inasmuch as the merits of any application thereof would be scrutinised and examined by the NLTA and the Licensing Board operating thereunder it. All such applications will be gaged on their merits and for which the NLTA will be tasked to

devise the eligibility criteria thereof and checklist which would define the documentation and information to be submitted by any parties willing to provide such services. Moreover, as the Licensing Board of the NLTA has its own determination guidelines, it would be fairly easy for the NLTA to proceed with the determination of such application and if the need arises, the NLTA will also rely on the support of entities endowed with the relevant technical expertise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, likewise, the Rodrigues Transport Committee which is duly empowered to licence public service vehicles and petrol service stations in Rodrigues will have its functions broadened as the above entity will also be empowered to deliver such licences in order to allow the operation of public electric motor vehicle charging stations in the island of Rodrigues on the same footing as in Mauritius as we believe that electric mobility should be promoted also across the whole Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we have favoured a progressive and incremental approach, we have also borne in mind that electric vehicles have specificities on their own too and their charging system does not have a close fit as compared to petrol propelled vehicles. This is why and with a view to ensuring the safety of users, that appropriate regulations would be made under the Road Traffic Act to spell out the conditions to be met for the grant of a licence by the NLTA, including the relevant requirements to be fulfilled by the promoter so that there is no compromise as to the safety of the installations. These regulations will also allow for the transition process wherein existing facilities will be taken into account and necessary transitional clauses will be taken care of at the time of finalising the said regulations. We will also address our mind that the regulator and any relevant and competent authority are duly empowered to make inspections and checks so as to be comforted that all connections and installations have been made as per the agreed procedures and complied with relevant legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, should it be that promoters and licensees fail to meet the requirements and conditions attached to their licences, the NLTA will be duly empowered by virtue of these amendments to suspend or revoke the licences after following all the relevant procedures. In general, the amendments have been couched in such a manner as to give wide powers to the NLTA on the same footing as in the case of petrol service stations to exercise oversight over the

charging stations and to take such actions, including disciplinary sanctions against persons not complying with the conditions attached to their licence or those operating without a licence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, several actions are being taken to promote electric mobility. Now, we are going a step further towards consolidating the framework for further promoting electric vehicles in our country. This is being done through the regulation of electric vehicle charging stations so that we do take on board the needs and general interests of the public for the licensing and operation of such facilities across the island in order that any such stations operate only after having exhaustively met all the criteria to the satisfaction of the NLTA and other authorities. For example, the location of such entities has to be carefully devised in terms of access and without impeding traffic flow.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come to another issue: the classic or the vintage motor cars. We have, Mr Speaker, Sir, to make a distinction as to the type of motor vehicles operating in Mauritius in as much as we need to be mindful to setting appropriate standards for vehicles to be reckoned as classic or vintage motor cars. To this end, amendments have been made under the Road Traffic Act and will pave the way for more clarity as to the definition thereof and wherein the age criterion, as is the case in the UK, will be the principle tenet for the classification thereof.

Accordingly, the 40-year threshold will be used to define such a vehicle and will be used as the overarching yardstick to classify such vehicles. However, this does not mean *per se* that all motor vehicles aged 40 years or more be automatically categorised as such and be allowed to hit the roads. Indeed, any vehicles being used on the roads will still require a valid licence and will have to continue to be examined by the NLTA to ascertain their roadworthiness. In addition, to better regulate the operation and licensing of these vehicles, appropriate regulations will follow so that the NLTA may attach such conditions as deemed relevant to ensure that these vehicles do not pose any safety issues and that the vehicle owners meet such requirements as may be specified by the NLTA.

Through the making of these regulations, this will oust vehicles being automatically classified as a classic or vintage motor car by the mere operation of the law, as these vehicles will have to meet such conditions as deemed fit by the NLTA. In so doing, these vehicles will truly meet the intended meaning of being a classic or vintage motor car, as they will have to

capture all the specificities and features that one would normally expect from such type of vehicles. However, due care will be taken at the time of drafting the regulations to ensure that the interests of existing owners of classic or vintage motor cars are not impaired, save that we will not compromise as regards the state and roadworthiness of such vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, we need to remind ourselves of the stark reality, that is, we only have one world which has borne the brunt of our unrestrained and, at times, ill-advised human-led development. We now need to partake in the global efforts to curtailing the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. For this reason, we not only need to make it sustainable, but also a place where the next generation will not have to live in the fear of being a victim of impending natural catastrophes.

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

Mr Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Ag. Prime Minister!

(4.36 p.m.)

The Ag. Prime Minister: M. le président, avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet et de décortiquer les dispositions de la loi des finances qui se réfèrent aux missions des deux ministères dont j'ai la responsabilité, permettez-moi, deux remarques quant au contexte dans lequel ce débat se tient aujourd'hui.

D'abord, M. le président, nous nous réunissons pour la première fois depuis votre désignation comme président de l'Assemblée, le jeudi 18 juillet 2024 de la semaine dernière. Ce jour-là, outre le comportement sans précédent de ces trois députés suspendus et qui ont fait l'objet d'une motion plus tôt aujourd'hui, n'est-ce pas, il s'est passé un deuxième événement également sans précédent dans les annales de notre démocratie parlementaire et extrêmement grave que je ne saurais passer sous silence.

Ce jour-là, M. le président, alors que je m'apprête à gagner l'hémicycle avant que ne débutent nos travaux, je découvre un attroupement des députés de l'opposition. Il me semblait que toutes et tous étaient là. Un attroupement qui bloquait l'accès, presque entièrement, à l'hémicycle, et en particulier, à la porte qui se trouve à votre droite. Ces députés sont alors dans

un état d'excitation extrême et très hostile. Je choisis, comme à mon habitude, d'entrer par la porte qui se trouve à votre gauche et je me fais alors insulter et traiter de tous les noms ! Que d'insultes, que d'invectives ! Ce traitement, je ne suis pas le seul à le subir, car nombre de mes collègues ministres et députés en font l'expérience. Et il m'est rapporté que même des membres du personnel de l'Assemblée nationale auraient subi le même traitement.

M. le président, de toutes mes années de députation – et moi, j'ai connu les bancs de cette Assemblée nationale pour la première fois en 1991 – je n'ai jamais connu une telle situation ! Tous les députés, par définition, un représentant du peuple, ont le droit et le devoir démocratique d'accéder à l'hémicycle pour participer aux travaux de l'Assemblée nationale. Et toute tentative d'entraver l'exercice de ce droit, de ce devoir, représente une atteinte, on ne peut plus grave, à la démocratie parlementaire. Jamais au grand jamais, notre démocratie aura-t-elle témoigné d'un tel comportement indigne !

Deuxième remarque, M. le président, l'absence consternante, atterrante, que dis-je scandaleuse, de toute l'opposition – à l'exception des députés du PMSD à l'Assemblée nationale – leur absence de l'Assemblée nationale alors que nous débattons d'un projet de loi des plus importants, la loi des finances qui vient amender, je crois que mon collègue le ministre des Finances parlait de 95 textes de loi ce matin. Cette loi des finances qui va traduire dans la loi et dans les faits les mesures budgétaires. Là aussi, y a-t-il un précédent ? J'en doute ! Une opposition absente des débats autour de la loi des finances. Pourquoi ? Pourquoi l'opposition est-elle absente aujourd'hui ? Je suis tellement étonné que je me pose la question et j'essaie de comprendre.

Rappelez-vous, le jeudi 18 juillet dernier, l'opposition a justifié le boycott des travaux de votre élection, M. le président, en alléguant l'illégalité du procédé adopté pour la désignation du Speaker. Et bien, y a-t-il eu par la suite, vendredi, lundi et, aujourd'hui, un recours légal ? Y a-t-il eu une action devant nos cours de justice ? Non ! Donc, ils ont réalisé qu'ils se sont trompés, lourdement trompés !

Et soudain, aujourd'hui, ce n'est plus l'illégalité de votre désignation mais l'absence de la levée de suspension à l'encontre de trois députés qui devient la raison invoquée pour ne pas être présents. Pourtant la levée des suspensions n'a rien à voir avec la désignation du fait d'avoir un

nouveau Speaker. Cette suspension elle peut être levée à l'initiative de l'opposition en présentant des excuses n'importe quand, avant ou après votre désignation. Elle peut être levée par une motion de l'exécutif qui aurait pu être introduite avant ou après votre désignation. Donc, cette raison ne peut justifier leur absence aujourd'hui, le 23 juillet. Comment sinon expliquer leur présence avant le 23 juillet ? Clairement, M. le président, ne nous voilons pas la face. Il s'agit tout simplement, je dis ne pas se voiler la face mais ils ont perdu la face quand ils ont allégué l'illégalité du procédé adopté pour votre désignation donc aujourd'hui pour ne pas perdre la face et venir ici se soumettre à notre autorité, il faut trouver un autre prétexte, donc, la levée de suspension des députés dont la suspension ne date pas d'hier.

Rien qu'un prétexte, M. le président, mais un prétexte permettant d'abdiquer devant leurs responsabilités comme le disait dans la presse, M. le député, Nando Bodha et je m'étonne de son absence. Lui qui disait qu'il se devait d'être à l'Assemblée nationale par respect pour le mandat que lui a confié l'électorat. Eh bien, aujourd'hui, c'est une abdication ni plus ni moins devant leurs responsabilités en démocratie d'être à l'Assemblée nationale et de participer aux débats parlementaires. Quelle honte !

Mr Dhunoo: Shame!

The Ag. Prime Minister: *M. le président, cela étant dit, je vais passer à la loi des finances, and I will try to be to the point and brief. I take the floor because it is my duty as Minister of Housing on one hand and Minister of Tourism on the other hand to explain the purport of the legislative amendments being brought by way of the Finance Bill for the benefit of other Members of the House and of the public at large. So, very quickly first, clause 46 of the Bill relates to the Land Duties and Taxes Act. This is the law that provides for deeds of transfer when there is sale of land, sale of property to carry payment of a tax and so far in the law, the National Housing Development Corporation (NHDC) was exempted from such duties or taxes.*

However, in the meantime, there has been a Special Purpose Vehicle, the National Social Living Development (NSLD) Corporation that has been created and what this clause will do, is to add the NSLD to the Eighth Schedule and therefore, exempt the NSLD, as is the case for the NHDC, from payment of registration duty, land transfer tax and tax on transfer of leasehold rights on State land. If had we not done that, it would have meant, at worst, transferring the cost thereof to the purchaser, making these housing units even more expensive; at best, it would have

meant a lot of bureaucratic procedures having regard to the payment of all these taxes. So, this is the reason why clause 46 of the Finance Bill is before us to be voted upon.

Second, clause 48 of the Finance Bill relates to the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund Act. Now, as we all know, Le Morne is a very important part of our history. The whole of our nation has a very emotional attachment to Le Morne and what it represents. Le Morne is governed, is managed by Le Morne Trust Fund, which is administered by a Board, which is comprised of representatives of various Ministries: Finance, Arts and Culture, Agriculture, Education, Environment but not the Ministry of Tourism and yet the future of tourism is certainly the further development of cultural and historical tourism. The Aapravasi Ghat is now a major attraction, our new intercontinental museum of slavery attracts more and more visitors and the future of tourism resides in showing, demonstrating to our visitors, our rich historical and cultural past. So, this clause very simply ensures that henceforth there will be a representative of the Ministry of Tourism sitting on the Board and helping to devise initiatives, projects, considering the tourism dimension of the operation of the Le Morne Heritage Site: hours of opening, how we welcome visitors and guests, there is so much to be done and I hope this provision will help us move in the right direction.

Beyond this clause, clause 49 amends the Local Government Act, that's another interesting point. As you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Valuation Department of the Ministry of Housing is entrusted by law with the responsibility of compiling, maintaining the cadastral database and of determining the cadastral value. For instance, the Valuation Department has started this exercise, having regard to the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes because it has been requested to compile and it has been requested to compile the cadastral database for the City of Port Louis in present financial year.

However, the main issue that is encountered in this task, for instance, that we have experienced in Quatre Bornes, is collection of data that is accurate, that is transparent and that would be admissible before a Court of law. Now, that at the present time requires individually surveying each and every property. You can imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, how time consuming, how costly such an exercise is. So, what the amendment provides for in the new Section 106 subsection 2(b) of the Local Government Act is the ability to have recourse to data from aerial photography, satellite imagery, and Digital Elevation Models to assist in the valuation exercise

and compilation and completion of the cadastral database. We believe this will allow for more efficient, transparent and effective way of pursuing the task of the Valuation Department and will allow for a rapid completion of cadastral service.

Next, I would like to speak about clause 56; this is the amendment to the Morcellement Act which is a very important amendment. Right now, the law as it stands does not provide for what is being introduced, the concept of the green forest within proposed *morcellement*. What pertains nowadays is requirement of a planning policy guideline which is not law but it is issued under the Planning and Development Act, which requires provision of 2% of any development area in a *morcellement* to be earmarked for a public open space with a minimum of 25 square metres for 20 plots.

We are now going beyond that and writing into the law, the requirement that and this was announced in the budget speech, this was explained in the budget speech that wherever there is a *morcellement* of more than five *arpents* including smart cities, 4% of the total area for development will have to be allotted for the development of a mini-forest and in particular with endemic trees.

It has to do with environmental sustainability and the increasing challenges posed by climate change obviously but also the need to safeguard property and lives faced with the risks of flooding and I know that my colleague, the Minister of Finance, feels very strongly about such issues after the unfortunate experience of recent years. It is important to note that the requirement will exclude standalone industrial projects, agricultural *morcellement*, land parcelling for the purpose of charity or religion, very importantly, a division in kin between co-heirs ascendants and descendants and sub-division of large plots that do not entail development.

One of the challenges will be who will manage these green forests because we certainly do not want such areas of land within *morcellement* to be left *à l'abandon* or to become a site for the people of the surrounding to throw their garbage, a dumping ground. So, what do we do about it? The law introduces this conception of an *association foncière* as exists in our *code civil*, in our civil code but, beyond that, if that is not the case, then the local authority will have the responsibility. Of course my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, will worry about the resources to do this and it is one of the challenges we shall face and we intend to rise up to that challenge and work with local authorities outsourcing, delegating as maybe appropriate the

responsibility to manage and maintain such green forests that should become an important part of the landscape of Mauritius in years to come.

Let us not forget that in the budget, the Minister of Finance referred to the need to increase tree coverage by 100 hectares annually over the next decade. Next, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Removal of Sand Act and this is where I am so sorry that the Opposition is not here, we have heard such demagoguery concerning authorisation to remove sand from the sea but I would invite Members of the House and members of the public to consider very carefully the new provisions of the Removal of Sand Act. Forgive me, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should have spoken of the Pas Géométriques Act but I will come back to that. So, removal of sand, I was initially very concerned because in as far as 1996 when I was Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, I was instrumental in the first steps to completely ban extraction of sand from our seabed.

Today we are faced with a new phenomenon – the accelerated disappearance of our beaches. On the one hand, erosion of our beaches and I will repeat what the Minister of Finance said in the budget speech, the number of regions around the country, I think he referred to 37 kms of our coastline that are now degraded in the north, in the south, in the east, in the west. We know that the sea level is rising much faster in Mauritius – 5.6 mm annually as compared to the global average of 3.3 mm annually and today, many of our hotels are directly affected. Just go and visit the Trou aux Biches hotel, one of our oldest hotels and the region of Trou aux Biches generally but it is the same phenomenon we are witnessing around the island.

On the one hand, sand erosion, on the other hand, sand accretion blocking the canals within the lagoon for our fishermen, hindering activities of people relying on the sea, fishermen who rely on the sea for their living. Creating new challenges for our hotels. The Ile aux Cerfs region, go and see what was called the Le Touessrok which is now known as the Shangri-La Hotel. So we had to do something about it and this matter has been the subject of a lot of work. I remember a high-level meeting between the Government chaired by the Prime Minister with Business Mauritius debating this issue which is now perceived as a direct and immediate threat to our development effort and the Finance Bill brings about with this amendment at least part of the answer.

We are introducing the concept of beach nourishment which did not exist in the law, we are introducing dredging areas which will be areas specifically designated for that purpose to

allow therefore removal of sand from dredging areas for the purpose of beach nourishment but it is not any Tom Dick or Harry who may, tomorrow morning go and remove sand from the lagoon. Again, I think hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger should have been here to listen to the facts. If, Mr Speaker, Sir, one considers the new section 9A – Removal of sand for beach nourishment, one will take cognisance of the long list of very stringent conditions which any operator will have to face.

Permits, EIA license, detailed project plan, report on mitigation measures, proof of public consultation, removal of sand only in the presence of an officer who has to endorse post facto the permit and continuous monitoring, regular reports. Beach nourishment is an imperative; there is no getting away from it. The importance of conditions is there and we have responded to that challenge.

I will go back to the *Pas Géométriques* Act. Now, this is another important matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. Up until now, in the law, there was a prohibition to hold more than one *campement* site lease. Now, what happens, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you are lucky enough to hold a *campement* site lease and by virtue of the passing of your parents, there is another *campement* site lease that needs as per our *code civil* to be shared out amongst the lawful inheritors? It is illegal as per the law. Is it constitutional? How does it tally with the provisions of the Civil Code? Well, over these last few years, we have received a number of representations and we had to do something about it.

So, this law removes the prohibition, but, of course, the possibility of a person holding more than one *campement* site lease in effect will be very limited. Two *campement* site leases, one inherited, if your parents are married under the *séparation de biens* regime; three, this would be truly exceptional, but at least, it will allow for conformity between the *Pas Géométriques* Act and the *Code civil*.

Then, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to touch very quickly upon the *Pas Géométriques* amendment. It will be accompanied by an amendment of the corresponding section in the State Lands Act which provides that not more than one lease shall be held by a person directly or indirectly at any time. That is now subject to the rules of inheritance.

The State Lands Act is also being amended because since 2013, when a hotel suspends its operation – it is no longer operating because it is going for renovation or reconstruction – the annual rental for the State Land Lease usually, *Pas Géométriques*, on the seafront is reduced by 50%. During the COVID years, it was 100%, and then, it went back to 50%. So, ever since 2013, a hotel that goes for reconstruction or renovation while it is not in operation pays only 50% of the rental. That is very important because renovation and reconstruction is the rule for a hotel. A hotel cannot go beyond 10 years or 15 years without going through renovation. Otherwise, it cannot face up to the competitive environment it operates in. It cannot face up to the expectations and demands of its clientele.

Now, unfortunately, this measure was not extended after June 2023 and we are now remedying the situation. We are introducing legal provisions that will cover the period June 2023 to June 2025. Any excess amount paid for 2023-2024 will be offset against the liability for 2024-2025. I think that is quite straightforward.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be happy to hear the amendment of the Tourism Authority Act. Until now, a restaurant by definition had to have more than 40 covers. Otherwise, it could not get a licence to operate. That is not very democratic and it is not good for the development of tourism. We can have smaller restaurants, increasingly now as we speak of gastronomy restaurants. So, this necessity/ requirement of a minimum of 40 covers is being removed from the law to allow for smaller restaurants to legally operate.

Also, the Tourism Authority Act is being amended so that henceforth, a Tourist Accommodation Certificate will be issued for one year instead of three years. For the very simple reason that on one hand, these certificates were being issued for three years, whereas the Tourism Enterprise Licence Fees and Insurance Certificate had to be renewed every year. So, it led to a very confusing situation. We are simply aligning it so that henceforth, both the Tourism Accommodation Certificate and the Tourism Enterprise Licence Fees will be payable for a year.

Those, Mr Speaker, Sir, are the provisions that pertain to the Ministries of Housing and Tourism and that concern the Ministries for which I am responsible. I am done. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes!

At 5.08 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.47 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Dr. Padayachy!

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy):

M. le président, je vous remercie pour cette opportunité qui m'est donnée de clore pour la cinquième et dernière fois de ce mandat les débats sur la loi de Finances 2024.

Comme à l'accoutumée, je tiens à saluer mes collègues ministres et PPS ayant pris part aux débats entourant le vote du *Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024)*. Leurs interventions ont été remarquées et remarquables à de nombreux égards. Elles ont aussi souligné le fort consensus et la pleine adhésion à la vision économique, sociale et environnementale portée par notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth.

Touchant au but d'un mandat fait de soubresauts internationaux, le cap dessiné et maintenu par notre Premier ministre a prouvé qu'efficacité pouvait et devait rimer avec solidarité. Cette philosophie progressiste et pragmatique a été au cœur des budgets de notre mandature. Le budget 2024-2025, 'Demain est à nous' s'est inscrit dans cette lignée. Dans son sillage, nous sommes aujourd'hui appelés à voter le projet de loi de finances 2024.

Ce vote fondamental pour maintenir notre dynamique de développement nous permettra de mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires annoncées. Ce faisant, une fois voté par cet auguste Assemblée, le présent projet de loi viendra apporter les amendements nécessaires à quelque 94 législations existantes. Ils viendront soutenir encore davantage la trajectoire ascendante de notre croissance économique, permettront de relever les défis du changement climatique et offriront à tous les Mauriciens la possibilité d'accéder aux mêmes opportunités. Cette vision partagée par l'ensemble des membres de ce gouvernement est celle que nous, sous la direction du Premier ministre, avons promue pour le bénéfice de notre pays, de notre économie et de notre population.

M. le président, 'Demain est à nous' est un budget orienté vers l'avenir, élargissant le champ des possibles, il établit une nouvelle donne pour des centaines de milliers de Mauriciens. Je suis convaincu que les mesures annoncées dans le discours du budget 2024-2025 permettront à Maurice de réaliser une stratégie holistique de développement économique plus robuste, plus

inclusive, plus durable. Certaines mesures sont d'ailleurs déjà applicables, alors que les autres deviendront opérationnelles grâce au vote de ce projet de loi de finances.

M. le président, l'année dernière nous avons enregistré un taux de croissance du PIB de 7 % comme le prévoyait *Statistics Mauritius* et comme l'a confirmé le FMI lors de ses récentes consultations au titre de l'Article 4. Grâce aux mesures annoncées dans le budget, *Statistics Mauritius* et Maurice stratégie tablent tous deux sur une croissance économique de 6,5 % pour 2024. Les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes. Au-delà de cette moyenne nationale, déjà bien plus élevée que la croissance mondiale estimée à 3,2 %, nous nous attendons à des taux de croissance positifs dans tous les secteurs de l'économie mauricienne. L'investissement restera une source majeure de développement économique avec un taux de croissance de 24,2 % cette année tiré par l'investissement du secteur privé qui augmentera de 25,7 %. Cela témoigne de la confiance des investisseurs privés dans l'économie et l'environnement des affaires. En outre, les projets d'investissements du secteur public augmenteront de près de 19,8 %, ce qui reflète l'amélioration continue des infrastructures publiques dans tout le pays.

M. le président, alors que mes collègues sont revenus sur un certain nombre de points dans leurs discours respectifs, je concentrerai mon intervention sur trois aspects principaux du projet de loi de finances qui reflètent la philosophie du gouvernement et donc du budget. Par les efforts qu'il déploie dans ce projet de loi de finances, le gouvernement cherche avant tout à favoriser le dynamisme économique du pays et à faciliter les affaires sur notre territoire. Depuis plusieurs années maintenant, nous avons fait de la réforme de l'environnement des affaires une priorité. Pour continuer à stimuler les IDE en prenant en considération l'ensemble du cycle de vie de l'entreprise, ce gouvernement a apporté des réponses concrètes aux entrepreneurs et investisseurs souhaitant faire de Maurice leur base. Grâce au vote du projet de loi de finances 2024, nous continuerons à améliorer notre climat des affaires, afin de réaliser pleinement notre potentiel économique.

Comme le savent les membres de la Chambre, une réforme majeure qui a permis à Maurice de rendre les affaires plus faciles dans la juridiction est l'introduction du système national électronique de licence, dite *NELS* au niveau de l'*Economic Development Board*. Actuellement, quelques 26 licences sont disponibles sur cette plateforme. Par le vote de ce projet de loi, nous augmenterons le nombre de licences sur le *National Electronic Licensing System* de 26 à 35 en

commençant par les demandes d'essais cliniques et les licences de pêche. En outre, *EDB* travaille avec les ministères et les autorités concernés pour doubler le nombre de licences délivrées en ligne au cours des trois prochaines années. La mise en œuvre de délai pour la délivrance des licences et des permis constitue un autre aspect majeur de réforme pour les entreprises. Nous avons introduit ce concept dans un certain nombre de législations et nous l'étendons aujourd'hui à la *Financial Services Commission*. La *FSC* rationalisera ces licences et ces permis afin qu'ils soient accordés dans un délai de 10 jours ouvrables sous réserve que toutes les conditions soient remplies. À l'approche de l'expiration du délai fixé, la demande sera transmise à un sous-comité chargé d'accélérer la délivrance de la licence.

M. le président, alors que Maurice consolide sa position de centre financier international dans la région, nous facilitons la création d'entreprise partout, sur tout le territoire et à tout moment.

C'est pourquoi le Centre d'information du *Companies and Business Registration Department* sera opérationnel 24 heures sur 24 et 7 jours sur 7. En outre, le CBRD offrira des services de dépôt de dossiers numériques sur place pendant les heures de travail.

Pour faciliter la vie quotidienne des entreprises et des particuliers, la portabilité des comptes bancaires va devenir une réalité. Elle permettra à une entreprise ou un particulier de changer de banque sans avoir à modifier son numéro de compte bancaire à chaque fois.

M. le président, dans la même veine, grâce au vote du projet de loi de finances 2024, le service du *e-bunkering* de la *Mauritius Cargo Community Services Ltd* sera opérationnel 24 heures sur 24 et 7 jours sur 7. Cela contribuera à stimuler le commerce transfrontalier, notamment par la mise en place d'un guichet unique pour faciliter les demandes de permis d'importations et d'exportations et la réduction des délais de dédouanement et des coûts. De plus, les autorités locales accepteront désormais les paiements électroniques pour les services offerts.

M. le président, la philosophie de ce gouvernement est d'aider les particuliers et les entreprises à surmonter les difficultés telles qu'elles soient. Il s'agit notamment des difficultés à payer les impôts et les contributions en temps et heure. Ce gouvernement est conscient qu'un

certain nombre de contribuables ont été confrontés à des difficultés au cours de dernières années, en particulier pendant la pandémie de la Covid-19.

Pour atténuer le choc, nous avons donc introduit en 2021 un programme de règlement des arriérés d'impôts, le *Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme*. Cette mesure a été renouvelée tous les ans depuis et a bénéficié à un total de 19 431 particuliers et entreprises qui ont donc pu se régulariser au cours des trois dernières années.

Au travers du vote de ce projet de loi de finances 2024, nous renouvelons, donc, ce régime pour une année supplémentaire. Cela permettra une exonération totale des pénalités et des intérêts, à condition que tous les impôts soient payés d'ici juin 2025.

Nous avons également observé qu'un certain nombre d'entreprises n'ont pas été en mesure de payer leurs contributions *National Pensions Fund*, *National Savings Fund*, *Training Levy* ou encore *Recycling Fee*. En fait, une somme totale de plus de R 1,7 milliard était due par les entreprises d'ici juin 2023 au titre des contributions susmentionnées.

Ainsi, grâce à l'introduction du *Contribution Arrears Settlement Scheme* jusqu'en juin 2025, nous offrons aux entreprises une occasion unique de payer leurs cotisations en renonçant aux pénalités accumulées.

M. le président, l'emploi est un combat que nous avons mené avec détermination et succès. Fort de cette stratégie gagnante, ce gouvernement continuera d'améliorer l'environnement dans lequel les entreprises recrutent, tant au niveau local qu'international.

Afin de renforcer nos forces vives et d'accroître notre potentiel de croissance, nous avons déjà renouvelé le programme Prime à l'Emploi pour les femmes et les personnes handicapées pour une période d'un an. Cette mesure a permis de recruter environ 10 000 femmes dans les entreprises depuis juillet 2022.

Grâce au projet de loi de finances 2024, présenté aujourd'hui, nous introduisons encore plus de souplesse pour permettre aux femmes et aux personnes handicapées d'intégrer le monde du travail.

En effet, nous introduisons un programme prime à l'emploi pour les travailleurs à temps partiel sur la base de 20 heures par semaine. Cela permettra à davantage de femmes jusqu'alors au foyer d'accéder au marché du travail. Ces femmes, qui ont très souvent d'importantes obligations familiales, pourront dès lors, intégrer le marché du travail à temps partiel tout en contribuant à la fois à l'économie et au ménage.

Parallèlement, nous facilitons le recrutement de talents étrangers à Maurice. Le ratio travailleurs étrangers et travailleurs mauriciens seront donc supprimés pour les secteurs de l'industrie manufacturière, des entreprises orientées vers l'exportation, des ports francs et des TIC/BPO. Cette mesure s'inscrit dans le cadre du passage de notre économie à des niveaux de développement plus élevés et de la baisse du taux de chômage.

En outre, le gouvernement facilitera le recrutement de talents étrangers par les entreprises en revoquant le seuil des permis d'occupation pour les professionnels qui a été ramené de R 30 000 à R 22 500. Nous permettrons ainsi aux non-citoyens titulaires d'un permis de résidence pour retraité de travailler sans le *work permit* ou *occupation permit* supplémentaire.

De plus, pour consolider la position de centre financier international de Maurice, un permis d'occupation de 10 ans sera introduit grâce au vote de ce projet de loi pour attirer les talents étrangers dans les domaines de la gestion de patrimoine, du *family office*, des actifs virtuels et des jetons virtuels. L'implémentation de ces diverses mesures sera le socle sur lequel notre économie croitra dans les prochaines années.

M. le président, j'en viens maintenant au deuxième thème, qui est celui de notre action en faveur d'une économie mauricienne durable et inclusive. Le monde est confronté à des défis sans précédent et redoutables en raison des conséquences visibles du changement climatique. De ce côté-ci de l'hémicycle, nous ne pouvons rester insensibles à la destruction de nos plages, de nos récifs coralliens, de nos lagons et de nos forêts. Nous devons être innovants et tourner vers l'avenir.

Pour réaliser notre programme d'atténuation et d'adaptation au changement climatique, nous avons besoin de la collaboration de tous, c'est-à-dire, du gouvernement, de la communauté des affaires, de la société civile et des partenaires du développement. Pour soutenir cette

ambition de programme dont le coût est estimé à 6,5 milliards de dollars d'ici 2030, nous devons mettre nos ressources en commun et chacun doit contribuer à cette initiative.

En conséquence, grâce au vote de ce projet de loi de finances, nous introduirons la *Climate Corporate Responsibility Levy*. Cette contribution environnementale équivaldra à 2 % des profits. Les entreprises qui seront soumises à cette contribution sont les sociétés commerciales internationales, les *trusts*, les fondations, les PME, les sociétés à responsabilités limitées excluant les PME. Le prélèvement sera payé pour l'année d'imposition commençant le 1^{er} juillet 2024 et pour chaque année d'imposition suivante comme suit : dans le cas d'une société résidente avec sa déclaration annuelle et dans tous les autres cas avec la déclaration annuelle de la société. Les sociétés dont le chiffre d'affaires annuel est inférieur à R 50 millions sont exemptées de ce prélèvement, comme je viens de l'indiquer.

Le revenu imposable permet de déduire les pertes fiscales non compensées. En outre, si une entreprise dispose de crédits au titre de l'impôt étranger, elle sera autorisée à déduire tous crédits non utilisés de la contribution CCR.

M. le président, pour parfaire cette nouvelle dynamique, je dois également ajouter qu'un *Climate and Sustainability Fund* sera créé pour mettre en œuvre ce programme contre le changement et le dérèglement climatique. Il sera géré par un comité mixte, comprenant des représentants du gouvernement, du secteur privé et de la société civile. Ce fonds sera également ouvert aux dons d'organisations internationales et de particuliers.

À cet égard, il est important de souligner que cette contribution environnementale a été introduite après des discussions avec le secteur privé qui a appelé de ses vœux à la création d'une plateforme pour mettre en œuvre des initiatives stratégiques pour le climat. Avec plus de 37 kilomètres de côtes touchées par l'érosion, une diminution de 10 000 hectares de forêts entre 1994 et 2022, il est plus qu'urgent de donner corps à ce plan national. Ce dernier vise à protéger, gérer et restaurer l'écosystème naturel du pays ainsi qu'à lutter contre les effets du changement climatique dans son ensemble.

Selon Business Mauritius, entité représentant les opérateurs du secteur privé, je cite –

“The CCR levy, which will feed into the new Climate Sustainability Fund, is a necessary measure supported by the business community. With good governance and public-private collaboration, this initiative could yield benefits greater than the proposed 2% levy on profits.”

Il est donc vraiment regrettable de voir que cet enthousiasme est noirci par des manipulations externes qui font porter des critiques infondées envers la CCR par une minorité d'entreprises proche du Parti travailliste.

Ces gesticulations ne nous démobilisent ou ne nous déstabilisent en rien. Bien au contraire, nous redoublons d'efforts. Ainsi, le *Morcellement Act* est en cours de modification afin de rendre obligatoire pour tout projet de morcellement de plus de 5 arpents, l'allocation d'une parcelle de terrain dédiée à un *green forest*. Cette parcelle devrait représenter au moins 4% de la superficie totale du morcellement. Elle devrait ainsi être utilisée pour planter des arbres endémiques et être conçue pour fournir un cadre verdoyant avec un aménagement paysagé et utilisable pour les résidents du morcellement.

M. le président, j'en viens au troisième thème qui se concentre sur la construction d'un avenir équitable pour tous les citoyens de la république de Maurice. Nous apportons le soutien nécessaire, notamment financier, pour permettre à la population d'accéder à un avenir meilleur en saisissant les opportunités qu'elle mérite, que ce soit en termes de santé, d'éducation ou de qualité de vie. Car tout au long de ce mandat, le gouvernement a eu pour objectif principal d'améliorer la vie de ces citoyens : enfants, parents, travailleurs, personnes handicapées, malades, veuves, orphelins, retraités et bien entendu, ménages vulnérables.

M. le président, depuis 2014, le gouvernement a augmenté la pension de retraite de base de R 3 623 par mois à R 13 500 par mois. Ce faisant, nous avons tenu notre promesse de porter la *BRP* à R 13 500 d'ici à la fin de ce mandat. Comme l'a dit l'honorable Premier ministre Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, parole donnée, parole sacrée. En plus d'avoir tenu notre parole, aujourd'hui, avec ce projet de loi, nous allons plus loin en portant les pensions de base à R 14 000 par mois pour tous les individus éligibles à partir du 1 juillet 2024. Cela bénéficiera à plus de 310 000 retraités, veuves, invalides et orphelins. C'est ce gouvernement, sous la direction de l'honorable

Premier ministre, qui augmentera encore les pensions de base à R 15 000 à partir du 1 janvier 2025.

M. le président, par ce projet de loi de finances, nous corrigeons également une anomalie concernant le paiement des allocations familiales aux titulaires de la pension de base. Il était ainsi jusqu'alors limité en fonction du nombre d'enfants. Désormais, les bénéficiaires d'une pension de base recevront une allocation majorée de R 2 500 par enfant, quel que soit le nombre d'enfants qu'ils ont. Nous sommes également conscients de la situation difficile des parents des enfants handicapés. Alors qu'ils reçoivent aujourd'hui une pension de base de R 14 000 contre seulement R 3 223 en 2014, ce gouvernement sait que le coût pour élever un enfant handicapé dans de bonnes conditions est plus élevé.

Nous accordons donc un *Monthly Invalidity Allowance* supplémentaire de R 3 000 aux parents d'un enfant handicapé de moins de 18 ans qui bénéficient de la pension de base pour invalidité. Cette mesure sera également étendue aux enfants handicapés dont le taux d'invalidité est inférieur à 60% et qui bénéficient de la *CSG Invalidity Allowance*. Au total, M. le président, ce sont plus de 5,500 enfants handicapés qui bénéficieront d'une allocation majorée de R 3 000 par mois.

M. le président, grâce à ce projet de loi en lien avec le budget 2024-2025, le gouvernement continue d'améliorer la vie des Mauriciens et de rehausser leur pouvoir d'achat. La Chambre se souviendra qu'en 2022, le gouvernement avait introduit une mesure historique, la *CSG Income Allowance* de R 1 000 par mois pour ceux qui gagnaient jusqu'à R 50 000. Cette mesure bénéficiait déjà à plus de 500,000 Mauriciens. L'année dernière, nous avons porté ce chiffre à R 2 000 pour ceux qui gagnent jusqu'à R 25 000 mensuellement. Cette année, comme nous l'avons annoncé dans le discours sur le budget 2024-2025, nous augmentons encore le montant de *l'Income Allowance* pour tous les individus à R 3 000 pour ceux qui gagnent moins de R 20 000, R 2 500 pour ceux qui gagnent moins de R 25 000, R 2 000 pour ceux qui gagnent moins de R 30 000 et R 1 500 pour ceux qui gagnent moins de R 50 000.

M. le président, en plus de *l'Income Allowance*, nous avons introduit, l'année dernière, le revenu minimum garanti qui avait été fixé à R 15 000 par mois. En fait, pour un employé à temps plein qui gagne moins de R 15 000 par mois, en comptant son salaire et l'allocation de revenu, le

gouvernement a garanti la différence et a ainsi versé un complément afin qu'aucun employé ne gagne moins de R 15 000 par mois. Grâce à ce projet de loi de finances 2024, ce gouvernement, sous la direction de notre honorable Premier ministre, va plus loin en s'assurant qu'aucun individu ne gagne moins de R 20 000 par mois à partir du 1 juillet 2024. Il s'agit d'une augmentation de plus de 65% par rapport aux R 12 075 qui constituaient le salaire minimum versé en 2022, il y a seulement deux ans.

Par conséquent, un employé à temps plein gagnant R 16 500 comme salaire de base et R 3 000 comme *Income Allowance* bénéficiera d'un complément de R 500 pour que son revenu minimum garanti soit de R 20 000 par mois.

M. le président, ce gouvernement veut accompagner le rôle central que jouent les jeunes de leur naissance à la majorité dans notre société. Ils sont notre avenir, notre futur, notre raison d'être et de nous dépasser. Ils méritent tous, je dis bien, tous d'avoir accès aux mêmes opportunités. Nous devons faire le maximum pour nos enfants et leur donner le meilleur de ce que notre société peut leur offrir. C'est pourquoi ce gouvernement a rendu le système éducatif totalement gratuit, de l'enseignement pré-primaire à l'enseignement supérieur. Aux côtés de l'éducation gratuite, nous assurons que les parents ont les moyens d'élever leurs enfants dans des conditions décentes.

Dans cette perspective, l'année dernière déjà, nous avons introduit une *Child Allowance* de R 2 000 pour les parents d'enfants de moins de trois ans. Le montant sera porté à R 2 500 par mois. Pour aller plus loin dans notre soutien financier aux parents, nous avons annoncé l'introduction de la *School Allowance* de R 2 000 par mois pour les enfants âgés de 3 ans à 10 ans. Ces deux mesures combinées aideront les parents dans leurs dépenses quotidiennes.

M. le président, dans cette même perspective, le gouvernement a également introduit une *Maternity Allowance* de R 2 000 par mois qui sera versée à une femme enceinte pendant une période de neuf mois à partir du troisième semestre de la grossesse. En outre, ce projet de loi de finances prévoit une allocation unique pour les soins de grossesse de R 3 000 pour toute femme enceinte qui a subi au moins six examens médicaux au cours de sa grossesse.

M. le président, ce gouvernement a été guidé par une philosophie, celle de placer la population au centre de sa stratégie économique et sociale. Le salaire minimum, le revenu

minimum garanti, les différentes allocations, l'augmentation du montant de l'aide sociale et l'augmentation des pensions témoignent clairement de cette volonté que nous avons consacrée en réalité.

Dans le budget 2024-2025 et au travers de ce projet de loi de finances, nous introduisons une mesure nouvelle et historique pour les ménages : l'allocation égalité des chances. Ainsi, un ménage dont le revenu total est inférieur à R 20 000 recevra une allocation d'égalité des chances de R 2 000 pour la période allant de juillet 2024 à juin 2025, ainsi qu'une prime de fin d'année de R 2 000 en décembre 2024. Cette mesure bénéficiera par exemple à une mère célibataire qui travaille à temps partiel et subvient aux besoins de son enfant ou à un retraité qui n'a d'autres revenus que sa pension de retraite et qui a un enfant à charge.

M. le président, ce projet de loi de finances est la quintessence de la vision de ce gouvernement et de ce qui le différencie fondamentalement de l'opposition. La population sait bien que c'est le leadership de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, notre Premier ministre, qui a renversé l'une après l'autre toutes les politiques régressives et antisociales du régime travailliste.

Ce projet de loi de finances, comme les quatre précédents, résumant notre vision progressiste et non punitive envers les plus vulnérables. Jamais un gouvernement n'a fait autant pour renforcer l'État-providence en si peu de temps, surtout dans le contexte des crises économiques auxquelles notre pays a été confronté. Lorsque l'opposition critique les mesures sociales du budget, elle prouve qu'elle n'a jamais eu de considération pour les plus vulnérables et la classe moyenne.

Pour eux ces groupes ne sont que des banques de vote qu'il s'agit de manipuler, de diviser et de monter les uns contre les autres pour le simple gain politique et électoraux. Tout cela fait partie d'une vaste escroquerie politique qu'ils préparent depuis le jour même où ils ont perdu les élections générales de novembre 2019.

M. le président, les mauriciens sont aujourd'hui rassurés d'avoir eu pendant près de cinq ans un gouvernement stable et bienveillant. Un gouvernement à l'écoute des préoccupations de la population et qui répond à ces aspirations. Ce sont les conditions essentielles pour maintenir le climat de confiance et ainsi créer un environnement propice au développement économique et

social de notre pays et cela contrairement à ce que prétend l'opposition qui pense que les mesures sociales compromettent l'économie.

Rien n'est pourtant plus faux, M. le président. La réduction des inégalités alimente la croissance économique. Notre politique en action en est la juste démonstration. La magnitude de notre reprise économique post-covid en a surpris plus d'un au-delà même de nos frontières. Il est indéniable que nos fondamentaux macro-économiques se sont considérablement améliorés au cours des trois dernières années après l'impact négatif de l'apparition de la pandémie de la covid-19. Permettez-moi d'évoquer des commentaires positifs formulés par certaines organisations internationales et certains observateurs économiques sur nos récentes performances économiques ainsi que sur les perspectives futures de notre croissance économique.

Selon le FMI, l'économie mauricienne a fortement rebondi après la pandémie grâce au dynamisme du tourisme, de la construction de logements sociaux et des services financiers. Des politiques de soutien ont également facilité cette forte reprise y compris les mesures fiscales. La croissance du PIB réel a atteint 8,9% en 2022 et 7 % en 2023 de sorte que le PIB a dépassé son niveau d'avant la pandémie. Le chômage total est tombé à 6,3% au troisième trimestre 2023, son niveau le plus bas depuis 27 ans. Le chômage des jeunes est tombé à 17,8% contre 25% au quatrième trimestre 2022, les inégalités et d'autres indicateurs sociaux se sont améliorés reflétant une croissance robuste et des programmes sociaux publics.

Le déficit du compte courant extérieur s'est également fortement réduit en 2023 pour atteindre 4,5% du PIB contre 11,1% en 2022 en raison d'un fort rebond des recettes touristique, d'une augmentation des revenus nets des investissements de portefeuille et d'une baisse de la facture des importations de produits de base et que les perspectives de croissance de l'économie mauricienne sont favorables. Dans une déclaration faite lors de la réunion du conseil d'administration du FMI en mai 2024, monsieur Regis N'Sonde, directeur exécutif du FMI pour Maurice a souligné les points suivants –

- Les efforts proactifs des autorités mauriciennes au cours des dernières années pour faire face à la crise économique, renforcer la structure économique sous-jacente et mettre en preuve un *policy mix* efficace ont permis une forte reprise après la pandémie.

- L'économie connaît actuellement une croissance vigoureuse dépassant les projections antérieures du PIB ce qui met en évidence l'efficacité de la gestion de la crise par le gouvernement et place Maurice en bonne position pour une reprise stable et soutenue au cours de la période.
- Maurice a connu des augmentations significatives des investissements directs étrangers bruts en 2022 et 2023 atteignant le montant historique de R 37 milliards l'an dernier.
- Les réserves internationales officielles brutes restent confortables à environ 11 mois d'importation à la fin du mois d'avril 2024 fournissant un tampon adéquat contre les chocs extérieurs et que malgré des conditions mondiales difficiles y compris le conflit Russie-Ukraine en cours, les taux d'intérêts mondiaux élevés et les tensions accrues au Moyen-Orient, le centre financier international de Maurice continu d'attirer des flux financiers importants principalement grâce à la résilience des activités d'investissement transfrontalière mondiale.

M. le président, la Banque mondiale estime pour sa part que Maurice a été en mesure de se remettre de la récession provoquée par la pandémie. La croissance économique est robuste, soutenue par la reprise rapide du secteur du tourisme et des investissements majeurs du secteur public. *Moody's Investors Service* a aussi souligné que l'économie mauricienne s'est redressée depuis la réouverture de ses frontières en 2021. Sa forte croissance reflète la résilience de l'économie malgré sa petite taille et la concentration de l'activité économique et que le déficit de la balance courante s'améliore à mesure que le tourisme retrouve ses niveaux d'avant la pandémie et les réserves internationales continuent de fournir une marge de manœuvre suffisante pour faire face aux chocs extérieurs.

Ces commentaires ne sont pas les fruits d'une imagination débordante, ils sont fondés sur des faits et des chiffres concrets qui confirment notre réussite économique. Ces faits et chiffres sont les suivants –

- (i) un taux de croissance du PIB réel de 8,9 % en 2022, le plus rapide depuis plus de 35 ans suivi d'une croissance encore élevée de 7 % en 2023;

- (ii) une augmentation de 31 % de l'investissement total sous l'effet d'une forte hausse de l'investissement public et privé;
- (iii) des entrées d'IDE atteignant des niveaux records de R 33,5 milliards en 2022 et de R 37 milliards en 2023;
- (iv) les dépenses de consommation réelle ont augmenté de 1,5 % en 2023 soutenues par les effets positifs de l'augmentation des activités touristiques et de la hausse des revenus;
- (v) une baisse du taux de chômage à 6,3 % en 2023 contre 7,7% en 2022. Il s'agit du taux de chômage le plus bas enregistré depuis plus de 25 ans. De 2022 à 2023, le taux de chômage des hommes est passé de 6 % à 4,6 % et celui des femmes de 10,2 % à 8,7 %. Les taux de chômage des femmes et des jeunes ont atteint un niveau historiquement bas au quatrième trimestre 2023;
- (vi) une baisse du taux d'inflation qui est passé de 10,8 % en 2022 à 7,7% en 2023. Il a maintenu sa trajectoire descendante pour atteindre 4,5 % en juin 2024;
- (vii) une réduction du déficit du compte courant de la balance des paiements à 4,5 % du PIB en 2023 contre 11,1% en 2022 résultant de l'augmentation des recettes touristiques de l'amélioration des revenus nets des investissements de portefeuille et de la baisse des importations de biens;
- (viii) une augmentation des réserves internationales officielles brutes du pays à 8,2 milliards de dollars à la fin juin 2024 contre 6,7 milliards de dollars un an plus tôt. La position des réserves de change est donc à un niveau très confortable et fournit suffisamment d'amortisseurs contre les chocs externes.

Porté par un dynamisme vertueuse nous entrons maintenant dans une nouvelle phase de transformation pour notre pays et les mauriciens. Demain nous appartient, solidaires et engagés, nous donnerons vie à ces aspirations. M. le président, comme l'ont souligner les différentes institutions, les perspectives pour 2024 et à moyen terme sont favorables. L'économie devrait croître de 6,5 % en 2024, tous les secteurs enregistrant une croissance positive. Les principaux moteurs de la croissance seront les suivants –

- (i) la construction;

- (ii) les services financiers;
- (iii) le tourisme, et
- (iv) les nouveaux secteurs porteurs tels que l'énergie renouvelable.

Par ailleurs le taux d'investissement devrait atteindre 25 % en 2024 soit le niveau le plus élevé de ces 15 dernières années. Les entrées de l'IDE devraient elles, atteindre un nouveau record d'environ R 40 milliards en 2024. Grâce aux exports qui atteindront R 360 milliards, le déficit de la balance courante devrait continuer à se réduire.

M. le président, avant de conclure, je ne peux pas passer sous silence l'absence de certains membres de l'opposition. Absent aujourd'hui encore des bancs de cette auguste Assemblée, l'opposition offre une nouvelle fois un spectacle déplorable. Ce *boycott* de la démocratie parlementaire orchestré par le Parti travailliste, le MMM, les Nouveaux Démocrates et Nando Bodha est tout sauf honorable.

Bafouant tous les usages et le décorum de la Chambre, ils s'adonnent à un nivèlement vers le bas des traditions les plus ancrées de notre vie politique usuellement riche, diverse et respectueuse. Alors qu'ils se confisquent eux-mêmes le droit des réponses, nous procéderons au vote de ce projet de loi de finance et appliquerons ainsi la vision de ce gouvernement car aussi regrettable qu'il soit, qu'ils ne veulent pas jouer le jeu de la démocratie, nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, maintenons notre cap ; un cap qui sert les intérêts de la nation et de sa population.

L'histoire retiendra que les députés du Parti travailliste, du MMM et de Nouveaux Démocrates et Nando Bodha ne sont pas présents au moment où nous allons voter les amendements aux cadres légaux référant entre autres –

- à augmenter les pensions des personnes âgées, des personnes avec des handicaps, les veuves et les orphelins ;
- augmenter les allocations des travailleurs touchants moins de R 50,000 ;
- augmenter le revenu minimum garanti à R 20,000 ;
- la mise en place de l'allocation maternité à R 2,000 aux mamans des nouveau-nés;

- augmenter à R 2,500 l’allocation pour les enfants de 0-3 ans ;
- la mise en place d’une allocation de scolarité pour les enfants de 3-10 ans, et
- surtout pour voter les amendements nécessaires pour la prise en charge complet et le support total de l’État aux enfants et aux jeunes de moins de 25 ans atteints de maladies graves comme le cancer et nécessitant des soins onéreux à l’étranger.

M. le président, permettez-moi de réaffirmer à travers le vote du présent projet de loi de finance notre engagement immuable pour la population. Les Mauriciens peuvent compter sur nous car la parole donnée est la parole sacrée. Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

(NO. X OF 2024)

Clauses 1 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 16 (Construction Industry Authority Act 2023 Amended)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 16 –

“in clause 16, in paragraph (d), in the proposed new Sub-part DA, in section 25A, in subsection (2), by deleting the words “issue to a certificate” and replacing them by the words “issue a certificate”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 17 to 29 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 30 (Fair Trading Act Amended)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 30 –

“in clause 30, in paragraph (c), in the proposed new section 12A, in subsection (2), by inserting, after the word “thinks”, the word “fit”;

Amendment agreed to.

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

Clauses 31 to 40 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 41 (Income tax Act Amended)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 41 –

in clause 41, by inserting, after paragraph (k), the following new paragraph –

(ka) in section 150G –

- (i) in subsection (3), by deleting the words “June 2024” and replacing them by the words “June 2025”;
- (ii) by repealing subsection (11) and replacing it by the following subsection –

(11) When an application is made by an individual under the Scheme, the Director-General may pay the allowance for 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the month in which the application is made, provided that the allowance is not paid for any month prior to the month of July 2023.

- (iii) in subsection (12), by deleting the words “30 September 2024” and replacing them by the words “31 December 2025”;

Amendment agreed to.

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

Clauses 42 to 58 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 59 (National Land Transport Authority Act 2019 Amended)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 59 –

“in clause 59, in paragraph (b)(ii), in the proposed new paragraph (gb), by deleting the words “collaborate with the in” and replacing them by the words “collaborate with the relevant institutions in”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 59, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 60 to 96 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 97 (Commencement)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 97 –

“(e) in clause 97, in subclause (17), by deleting the words “Section 41(m)(i)(A)” and replacing them by the words “Sections 41(m)(i)(A) and 95(d)(vi) and (viii)”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 97, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The First and Second Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Third Schedule

Motion made and question proposed: "that the Third Schedule stands part of the Bill"

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for an amendment to the Third Schedule as per amendment –

“(f) by deleting the proposed Third Schedule and replacing it by the following Third Schedule –

THIRD SCHEDULE
[Section 19(c)(i)(C) and (D)]

PART I

8702.10.91, 8702.10.99,8702.90.91,8702.90.99

PART II

Heading	H.S. Code	Description	Statistical Unit	General	COMESA* Group I	COMESA* Group II	SADC	IOC	INDIA	PAKISTAN	EC	TÜRKIYE	UK	CHINA	AfCFTA
				%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
87.02		Motor vehicles for the transport of ten or more persons, including the driver.													
		- With only compression-ignition internal combustion piston engine (diesel or semi-diesel):													
		--- Other:													
	8702.10.91	---- New	U	5	0	0.5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5

Heading	H.S. Code	Description	Statistical Unit	General	COMESA* Group I	COMESA* Group II	SADC	IOC	INDIA	PAKISTAN	EC	TÜRKIYE	UK	CHINA	AfCFTA
				%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	8702.10.99	---- Second-hand	U	5	0	0.5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
		- Other:													
		--- Other:													
	8702.90.91	---- New	U	5	0	0.5	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	0	5
	8702.90.99	---- Second-hand	U	5	0	0.5	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	0	5

Amendment agreed to.

Third Schedule, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Fourth to Seventh Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. X of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 30 July 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 6.38 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 30 July 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ALBION POLICE STATION – POLICE OFFICERS POSTED, CENTRAL INVESTIGATION DIVISION SET-UP & COMMUNITY POLICING

(No. B/595) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Albion Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of Police officers posted thereat, indicating if –

- (a) a Central Investigation Division has been set up thereat, and

- (b) community policing is being undertaken in the regions of Albion Public beach, Morcellement Belle-Vue, Morcellement De Chazal and Morcellement Splendid View.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Mauritius Police Force is divided into eight divisions as follows –

- (i) Metropolitan ‘South’;
- (ii) Metropolitan ‘North’;
- (iii) Northern;
- (iv) Southern;
- (v) Eastern;
- (vi) Western;
- (vii) Central, and
- (viii) Rodrigues.

The region of Albion falls under the Western Division which is attached to the districts of Black River and Lower Plaine Wilhems. It is to be noted that the Western division comprises fourteen Police Stations with its Divisional Headquarters based at Rose Hill. The Police Stations are as follows –

- (i) Albion;
- (ii) Bambous;
- (iii) Barkly;
- (iv) Beau Bassin;
- (v) Black River;
- (vi) Camp Levieux;
- (vii) Coromandel;
- (viii) Flic en Flac;
- (ix) La Gaulette;
- (x) Petite Rivière;
- (xi) Quatre Bornes;
- (xii) Rose Hill;
- (xiii) Sodnac, and

(xiv) Stanley.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that the geographical area of Albion is policed by both the Albion Police Station and Petite Rivière Police Station.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) team responsible for policing in the whole area of Albion is based at Petite Rivière Police Station given that part of Albion is also found within the station area of Petite Rivière. It is to be noted that prior to the coming into operation of the Albion Police Station, policing in the Albion Police station area was already being carried out by a CID team which was based at Petite Rivière Police Station. Accordingly, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that for administrative and operational effectiveness, the CID team will continue to operate from Petite Rivière Police Station.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed that community policing forums are held periodically at force, divisional, station and neighbourhood levels where the concerned stakeholders and community representatives from the various regions are convened at appropriate venues to discuss specific policing issues/problems. For this purpose, representatives of the concerned Police Units attend the meetings to take cognizance of the issues raised and sort them out in partnership with the community or stakeholders.

Likewise, as part of the community forums, neighbourhood officers regularly carry out their meetings at several other places where the community or stakeholders are gathered. In this breath, sensitisation campaigns are also carried out in situ to raise awareness on specific issues to prevent crimes and ensure community safety and security.

As such, the number of community policing forums carried out by Police in the station area of Albion Police Station which includes the regions of Albion Public Beach, Morcellement Belle-Vue, Morcellement De Chazal and Morcellement Splendid View during the periods –

- (a) from 2010 to 2014: one hundred and three;
- (b) from 2015 to 2019: three hundred and twenty-six, and
- (c) from 2020 to date: one hundred and eighty.

I wish to inform the House that the Divisional Commanders of the eight Divisions of the Mauritius Police Force are taking strict measures to ensure that law and order prevails in the country.

**2024 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS – ELECTORS REGISTER
(DECEASED, ABROAD & INELIGIBLE TO VOTE)**

(No. B/598) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the forthcoming National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to if consideration will be given for communicating to candidates, on the eve of the polling day, a list of all electors –

- (a) deceased;
- (b) who are abroad, and
- (c) ineligible to vote, including the names of those that will be struck out from the Register by the Presiding Officer in the morning before polling starts.

Reply: According to Section 4 of the Representation of the People Act, every year, there shall be compiled for every electoral area, a register of persons entitled to be registered as electors for that electoral area. This section further provides that no person shall be registered as an elector in any year unless he has attained or will have attained the age of 18 on 15 August in that year.

The register of electors compiled in a year shall come into force on 16 August in that year and shall remain in force until the register next compiled comes into force.

The eligibility criteria for a person to be registered as an elector is laid down in Section 42 of the Constitution, which provides that all Commonwealth citizens, having resided in Mauritius for at least two years and aged 18 or above are qualified to be registered as electors. However, a person is not entitled to be registered as an elector in more than one constituency and in any constituency in which he is not resident on the prescribed date than on 01 January in that year.

The procedures related to the compilation of the register of electors are two-pronged; phase one comprising the house-to-house inquiry and the second phase consisting of the registration exercise carried out in registration centres.

During the first phase, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner carries out a house-to-house inquiry whereby the Assistant Registration Officers visit all households in Mauritius, Rodrigues and Agalega. During the house-to-house inquiry, each householder is required to complete a return of adult residents and submit same to the Assistant Registration Officer of the respective constituency. Based on information obtained during the house-to-house inquiry and from information received from the Civil Status Division on deceased persons, the Registration Officer then prepares the electors' list, that is, the provisional register in line with the provisions of Section 9 of the Representation of the People Act.

It is apposite to note that the electors' list comprises two sections, namely –

- Section A which consists of a copy of part of the register in force relating to the registration area with the deletion of the names of all persons who appear to the Registration Officer to be no longer qualified to be registered as electors in that registration area, and
- Section B which includes the name of every person who has subscribed the declaration under Section 9 of the Representation of the People Act, namely that the information given by him is correct and that he is qualified to be registered on the register, unless it appears to the Registration Officer that that person is not qualified to be registered as an elector in the registration area to which the part of electors' list relates.

The second phase of registration of electors is carried out in registration centres in all constituencies and at the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. Copies of the electors' list are made available for inspection by the public at the registration centres and at the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. Citizens are invited by way of notice published in the Gazette, on the website, official Facebook page of the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and through publicity spots on radio and television to verify whether their names have been correctly entered on the electors' list. In the event a person's name has not been entered on the electors' list or has been incorrectly entered, the latter may appear before the Registration Officer of the constituency in which he claims to be registered as an elector and present a claim to be registered or to be correctly registered.

Following the registration of electors' exercise in registration centres, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner then publishes a list of claimants, that is, a list of all the persons who have submitted a claim to be registered for all registration areas. The list of claimants also comprises names of service electors who have submitted claims and are qualified to be

registered as electors. According to section 2 of the Representation of the People Act, a “service elector” means a person who –

- “(a) (i) holds the office of Ambassador, High Commissioner or other principal representative of Mauritius; or
- (ii) is a public officer required to perform duties on behalf of the Government of Mauritius under a person specified in subparagraph (i), who is absent from Mauritius for the purpose of taking up his office or performing his duties; or
- (b) is a member of the family of a person specified in paragraph (a) and forms part of his household;”

Thereafter, the electors’ list and the list of claimants are merged to form the register of electors, after the deletion of deceased electors according to information obtained from the Civil Status Division.

In regard to part (a) of the question on deceased electors, I wish to highlight that Section 23(1) of the Representation of People Act provides as follows –

- “(1) The Registrar of Civil Status in Port Louis, and every civil status officer in the other districts and in Rodrigues shall, not later than 20 June, furnish to every registration officer a statement of the names of all persons deceased whose names appear on the list of claimants or on the electors’ list published by the registration officer.
- (2) On receipt of the statement, the registration officer shall, after inquiry if necessary, expunge the names of the deceased person from the lists.”

The cut-off date of 20 June is provided to enable the compilation of the register for publication. The register is then published and comes into force on 16 August each year.

Once the final register is published, no more changes can be brought to the register of electors, and consequently, the names of deceased electors after the date of the compilation of the final register cannot be expunged. Therefore, if an elector dies between the time the register of electors is published and comes into force on polling day, the name of that elector will still appear on the said register.

To address the issue of names of deceased persons appearing on the Register of Electors, following the publication of the Register of Electors, the Civil Status Division submits to the Office of the Electoral Commissioner on a weekly basis a list of deceased persons aged 18 years and above who have passed away after 20 June and these names are listed and compiled by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner.

During an election, a list of deceased persons is compiled for each polling station by the Registration Officer of the constituency. In fact, during the week preceding the polling day, a list of deceased persons is furnished by the Civil Status Division on a daily basis until the polling day and the list is forwarded to the Senior Presiding Officer of each polling station. The list of deceased persons is updated on a daily basis up to the polling day, and includes the names of persons who have passed away on the eve and in the early morning of the polling day.

On the polling day, before the start of the poll, the Senior Presiding Officer instructs the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk of each voting room to insert an annotation “D” against the names of the deceased electors in respect of their voting rooms. The list of deceased electors is kept in the custody of the Senior Presiding Officer and is available for inspection by candidates and election agents on polling day.

The insertion of annotations against the names of deceased electors before the start of the poll has been a long-established practice in order to detect and avert any cases of impersonation, that is, a person attempting to vote in the place of a deceased elector.

Furthermore, Regulation 27 of The National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 lays down the duty of every elector coming to vote. Every elector wishing to record his vote shall present himself to the Presiding Officer in the appropriate voting room at the polling station at which he is entitled to vote, state his name and produce his National Identity Card or any other acceptable proof of his identity. It must be highlighted that since the last Village Council Elections in year 2020, the only acceptable proof of identity, apart from the National Identity Card, is a passport.

It is only after being satisfied that the name of the elector appears on the copy of the part of the register containing the names of electors entitled to vote in his voting room and after having verified his identity by means of an acceptable proof of identity that the Presiding Officer will allow the elector to vote.

It is worth noting that polling agents of political parties and independent candidates are present in the voting room at all times during the voting process. Before a ballot paper is delivered to the elector, the number and name of the elector as they appear on the register are called out aloud by the presiding officer so that the agents of the candidates present in the voting rooms can hear the name being called. The Poll Clerk will also repeat this exercise, that is, he will also call out aloud the name of the elector. This process ensures transparency and prevents impersonation. It is only then that the name is struck out on the register to indicate that he has received a ballot paper.

The Office of the Electoral Commissioner has established this robust system to prevent double or multiple voting and this system has proved its efficacy during the previous general elections where no cases of impersonation were reported, especially after introducing for the 2014 National Assembly Elections, the mandatory requirement for an elector to produce his proof of identity before the latter is issued with a ballot paper.

I wish to point out that pursuant to section 17B(1) of the Civil Status Act, the Registrar of Civil Status shall, through his electronic system, share with another public sector agency, information relating to the name, address, date of birth, gender, NIC number, photograph and date of death, if any, of a person other than a minor. By virtue of the aforementioned provision, the Registrar of Civil Status shares with the Electoral Commissioner the names of persons, being registered as electors, who have passed away. This is done so that the Presiding Officer is made aware of electors deceased and to prevent any other person voting in lieu of that deceased elector.

However, any information received by a public sector agency from the Registrar of Civil Status may be shared to another public sector agency, but not to individuals or group of persons. Therefore, it must also be highlighted that the list of deceased persons submitted by the Civil Status Division to the Electoral Commissioner is meant solely for the official use by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the latter cannot share this information. Being given that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner is not the data controller with respect to data related to deceased persons, communicating such lists to third parties would constitute an infringement of the Civil Status Act.

In reply to part (b) of the question, it has to be highlighted that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner does not compile lists of electors who are abroad on polling day. Moreover, there is no obligation on an elector to inform that Office when he leaves the country or when he returns. Therefore, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner would not be in a position to compile such a list. In any case, an elector needs to produce his National Identity Card or his passport to be allowed to vote.

In regard to the departure from and date of arrival in Mauritius of a citizen, such information cannot be disclosed by the Passport and Immigration Office to third parties, pursuant to Section 33 of the Immigration Act.

As regards part (c) of the question, the qualifications to be registered as an elector are clearly spelt out in Sections 42 and 43 of the Constitution. It would not be practical and feasible for the Office of the Electoral Commissioner to compile a list of such ineligible persons.

Moreover, pursuant to Part II of the Representation of People Act, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner is mandated to compile a list of persons who are eligible to vote. There is thus no legal obligation on the Office of the Electoral Commissioner to compile lists of persons who are ineligible to vote, the moreso as registration of electors is not compulsory.

With respect to the last part of the question, it is to be highlighted that no names of electors are struck out from the register of electors by the Presiding Officers in the morning before polling start. However, as explained earlier, before the poll starts the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk of each voting room insert an annotation “D” against the names of the deceased electors in respect of their voting rooms.

DR. LESUR STREET, BEAU-BASSIN – SPEED BREAKERS INSTALLATION

(No. B/601) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to Dr. Lesur Street in Beau-Bassin, he will state if consideration will be given for the installation of additional speed breakers to prevent cases of accident thereat.

Reply: I am informed that Dr Lesure Street is a two-way traffic road stretching from its junction with Remy Ollier Street to Bissawon Bikhoo Street, at Beau Bassin.

The approximate length of the road is 1.2 km with width varying from 5.5 m to 6.5 m. The road carries traffic from the regions of Vandermeersch Street, through Swami Sivananda Street, Balfour Street and Volcy de la Faye Street to the regions of Balfour Garden and Vuillemin.

The posted speed limit along Dr Lesur Street is 40 km/h. There are already four humps at various locations along Dr Lesur Street, including two in the vicinity of John Kennedy College and the MITD of Vuillemin.

Pedestrian traffic is generally low along Dr Lesur Street, except for the stretch between Vuillemin Street and the MITD, whereby footpaths have already been provided for the segregation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Prior to Dr Lesur Street, five humps already exist along Swami Sivananda Street, Balfour Street and Volcy de la Faye Street. Also, 30 km/h and 40 km/h speed limit signs have already been fixed along various roads in Beau Bassin, including Dr Lesur Street.

As regards the installation of additional speed breakers along Dr Lesur Street, I wish to inform the House that humps are installed as a traffic calming measure along roads

following surveys conducted by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) of my Ministry. The humps are installed where necessary and in strict compliance with the Road Traffic (Road Humps) Regulations 2002.

Consequently, I can assure the hon. Member that the TMRSU will conduct an assessment of Dr Lesur Street and consideration for additional speed breakers will be given, provided that all criteria have been met.

FOREIGN WORKERS – MONEY TRANSFER ISSUES – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/603) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to difficulties encountered by foreign workers whilst transferring money through money changers, he will state the remedial measures his Ministry proposes to take in relation thereto.

Reply: Les *Money Changers* ne sont pas impliqués dans le transfert d'argent à l'étranger, mais qu'il s'agit plutôt des *Foreign Exchange Dealers*.

En février 2024, j'ai présidé un *High-Level Committee*, composé –

- du ministre du Travail, du développement des ressources humaines et de la formation,
- du ministre des Technologies de l'information, de la communication et de l'innovation,
- du ministre du Développement industriel, des PME et des coopératives, ainsi que
- des représentants du bureau du procureur général, et de la Banque de Maurice.

Et cela afin d'examiner les difficultés rencontrées par certains travailleurs étrangers qui transféraient de l'argent par l'intermédiaire de cambistes.

Le *High-Level Committee* a décidé qu'un *Standing Committee* soit mis en place au niveau de la Banque de Maurice pour faire le point sur l'évolution du marché et prendre les mesures appropriées pour résoudre les difficultés rencontrées par certains travailleurs étrangers.

La Banque de Maurice m'a informé que le *Standing Committee* a été mis en place sous la présidence du gouverneur de la Banque et qu'il comprend des *Foreign Exchange Dealers* et la MEXA.

Depuis, le comité s'est réuni régulièrement et les mesures suivantes ont été prises pour éviter les files d'attente inutiles aux guichets des *Foreign Exchange Dealers* –

- une liste complète des usines employant des Bangladais et d'autres expatriés, avec leur localisation, a été établie;
- les *Foreign Exchange Dealers* se rendent directement dans les usines concernées pour fournir aux travailleurs étrangers des services de transfert d'argent, au lieu que les travailleurs étrangers s'y rendent, et
- il a été demandé à chaque *Foreign Exchange Dealers* de communiquer le taux de change aux usines afin que les employés puissent opter pour le meilleur taux.

En outre, avec le soutien de la MEXA, les départements des ressources humaines des entreprises aident les *Foreign Exchange Dealers* en termes de soutien logistique et de contrôle préalable des travailleurs.

Cela a facilité le processus de transfert d'argent dans les succursales des bureaux de change.

En conséquence, les files d'attente devant ces succursales ont été réduites.

Depuis décembre 2023, la Banque de Maurice vend aussi des dollars américains sur une base bilatérale aux *Foreign Exchange Dealers* afin qu'ils soient utilisés uniquement pour les services de transfert d'argent.

En outre, les *Foreign Exchange Dealers* sont en mesure d'acheter des devises étrangères directement sur le marché afin de régler les transferts de fonds vers l'étranger.

La Banque de Maurice continue de suivre de près la situation et se tient prête à apporter son soutien en cas de besoin.

POINTE AUX SABLES, KENSINGTON – BUS SERVICE DISRUPTIONS – REMEDIAL ACTIONS

(No. B/607) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the recurrent bus service disruptions in the region of Kensington in Pointe aux Sables, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to the remedial actions being envisaged therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) that Route 51 which operates from Port Louis New Transportation Centre to Pointe aux Sables is served by 43 buses of the Triolet Bus Service Company Limited which are licensed to operate thereat.

These buses are released at 3-5 minutes interval during peak hours and 10 minutes interval during off-peak.

The first bus from Port Louis via Kensington is released at 05.35 hours and the last release is at 18.15 hours, whereas the first bus departs from Pointe aux Sables to Port Louis via Kensington at 06.08 hours and the last one is at 18.55 hours.

According to the NLTA, surveys are carried out by the Inspectorate on a fortnightly basis along that route and via Kensington. The last survey which was undertaken on 03 July 2024 revealed that buses are operating in accordance with the established timetable. I am also informed that as at date no official complaint regarding irregular schedule of buses or recurrent bus service disruptions in the region of Kensington or Pointe aux Sables has been reported to the NLTA.

Nonetheless, I wish to inform the House that checks are still being made by the NLTA to ensure that passengers are provided with a regular, reliable and adequate transport service.

MAURITIUS DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – RECRUITMENT & SELECTION MODE

(No. B/609) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Mauritius Deposit Insurance Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to when a Chief Executive Officer thereof will be recruited, indicating the mode of selection thereof.

Reply: *La Mauritius Deposit Insurance Scheme Act* a été adoptée en avril 2019.

La loi a été promulguée de manière échelonnée, de sorte que ses parties et sections relatives à la constitution de la Mauritius Deposit Insurance Corporation Ltd (MDIC) sont entrées en vigueur le 15 décembre 2023.

Les autres parties et sections sont entrées en vigueur le 14 juin 2024.

Conformément aux dispositions de la loi, la MDIC a été constituée le 26 mars 2024 en tant que société privée entièrement détenue par la Banque de Maurice.

Le conseil d'administration a été dûment constitué.

Étant donné que la MDIC en est encore au stade initial de ses opérations, son personnel est actuellement composé d'agents détachés par la Banque de Maurice, conformément à l'article 8(4) de la loi.

Le conseil d'administration de la MDIC m'a informé que l'organigramme de la société est en cours d'élaboration.

Dans ce contexte, la MDIC étudie les modèles de sociétés d'assurance-dépôts dans d'autres juridictions.

Un Directeur général sera recruté par voie d'offre publique.

Le Directeur général sera sélectionné sur la base de ses mérites et de son expérience et sera nommé aux conditions que le conseil d'administration de la MDIC déterminera.

TSUNAMI – PREPAREDNESS PLAN & PROTOCOL

(No. B/615) Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Tsunami, he will state the preparedness plan and protocol established therefor, indicating the vulnerable coastal zones and their evacuation plan.

Reply: I am informed by the Mauritius Meteorological Service, which is the national warning centre for tsunami for Mauritius, that tsunamis are generated primarily by earthquakes occurring on the ocean floor, which can eventually take place at any time during a year and at any time during a day.

Various factors, namely the onshore topography immediate to the coast, the topography under the sea offshore and the directivity of the maximum energy waves, determine the level to which a landmass or coastal area could be affected by an approaching tsunami wave.

I am further informed by the Mauritius Meteorological Services that it does not have any record of any significant tsunami that has affected the coastal areas of the Republic of

Mauritius, except the ocean-wide tsunami of 26 December 2004, where Mauritius had observed minor inundation while Rodrigues was more affected.

I am also informed by the Mauritius Meteorological Services that tsunamis generated from either the Sumatra or the Makran source may affect the coasts of the Republic of Mauritius. However, by virtue of their geographical locations, Mauritius and Rodrigues have a lead-time of 5-7 hours before tsunami waves are likely to reach their coasts from either the Sumatra or the Makran source.

On the other hand, I am informed by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre that the Mauritius Oceanography Institute was mandated by the Prime Minister's Office to develop a tsunami preparedness map to identify areas of the coastal zones that would be at risk in the event of a tsunami. In that context, the Mauritius Oceanography Institute worked on a model estimating inundation due to a tsunami and developed a tsunami inundation map for Mauritius and Rodrigues. I am further informed by the Mauritius Oceanography Institute that the tsunami inundation map is prepared based on tsunami modelling taking into account various different scenarios and as such, it does not have a list of vulnerable coastal zones for Mauritius.

Since the occurrence of the ocean-wide tsunami over the Indian Ocean in 2004, there has been an unprecedented mass sensitisation and education by the international community on the causes, impacts and risks of tsunamis.

Regarding the preparedness plan and protocol established, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre stands guided by the National Disaster Scheme (NDS) 2015, which is a functional document to support agencies and stakeholders in understanding and undertaking their roles, responsibilities and actions in emergencies - before, during and after the specific event. As such, provision has been made in this document for a Tsunami Emergency Scheme to –

- a) ensure co-ordination of the standing procedures of concerned stakeholders in the event of an emergency situation;
- b) save life and protect property in coastal regions and other vulnerable areas of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega and St. Brandon, and
- c) provide recovery assistance to the affected local communities.

I wish to inform the House that since 2019, the NDRRMC has organised 78 sensitisation programmes aimed at educating and preparing the general public for potential disasters, with a particular focus on tsunami preparedness. In addition, through the Community Disaster Response Programme, which fundamentally rests on the concept of 'Self Help and Mutual Help', tsunami awareness programmes are also included. Notably, 18 of these programmes have been conducted in 2024, underscoring the NDRRMC's ongoing commitment to disaster risk reduction and management.

Looking ahead, additional sensitisation programmes are scheduled for the later part of 2024, targeting various vulnerable regions, including the coastal areas of Quatre Soeurs, among others.

Furthermore, an annual simulation calendar is prepared by the NDRRMC after consultation with the Local Authorities whereby, each Municipal and District Council plans for simulation exercise for the communities within their jurisdiction. Simulation exercises are therefore, being conducted in vulnerable coastal regions, namely, Quatre Soeurs, Grand Gaube, Belle Mare, amongst others, which aim at enhancing community resilience and response capabilities.

I have also been informed by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre that Local Authorities, public and private organisations including hotels and schools have participated in the Regional Exercise of Indian Ocean Wide-Tsunami Wave Exercise (IOWave) which was carried out in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2023. The primary motive for IOWave exercise was to enhance tsunami preparedness at community level, strengthening coordination throughout the region and evaluation of response capabilities of our country. The exercise also aimed to test operational lines of communications at national, local and community levels and has as well promoted tsunami emergency and community preparedness. Evacuations have been carried out during the simulation exercises at the level of local authorities by the Mauritius Police Force, the National Coast Guard and the National Emergency Operations Command.

Furthermore, at each stage of a tsunami during the IOWave exercise, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre had issued timely and detailed communiqués to a broad range of stakeholders, highlighting all precautionary measures to be taken.

I wish to point out that as part of the Adaptation Fund Project, a dedicated Refuge Centre, a first in its kind of an approximate area of 1000 m² resilient to flooding and coastal inundation has been constructed in the village of Quatre Soeurs in 2018 by the then Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Environment and Sustainable Development. The hi-tech, user-friendly, eco-friendly and sustainable building serves as an emergency escape haven from coastal inundation, tsunami, storm surges and other natural calamities to demonstrate infrastructure alternatives to minimize flooding risk in the future.

The Quatre Soeurs Refuge Centre is the sole shelter found in a tsunami prone area which can be used due to its elevated structure. However, other shelters not found in the coastal regions could be used to accommodate evacuees.

PAILLES, VELVINDRON STREET & 3 OFF LANES – ROAD RESURFACING

(No. B/616) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the resurfacing of Velvindron Street and 3 off lanes in Pailles, he will state the name of the contractor selected therefor, indicating the –

- (a) contract value thereof, and
- (b) schedule of works thereof.

Reply: In January 2024, Mauritius witnessed torrential rainfall caused by tropical cyclone Belal whereby several roads, both classified as well as non-classified ones, were damaged.

Consequently, following consultation with my colleagues Parliamentary Private Secretaries, a total of 224 road repair and resurfacing projects have been identified in all constituencies to be undertaken by the NDU, including the resurfacing of Velvindron Street and 3 off lanes in Pailles.

With regard to part (a) of the question, Square Deal Multipurpose Co-operative Society Limited has been appointed as contractor on 07 May 2024 to carry out the works for an amount of Rs3,245,420.75, inclusive of VAT.

The scope of works comprises mainly –

- (i) milling and scarification of asphalt and resurfacing of some 400m of roads;
- (ii) marking of white lines, and
- (iii) relocation of services, if any.

As regards part (b) of the question, the scarification works and laying of crusher run started on 14 June and were completed on 18 June. However, due to a shortage of bitumen on the market, asphalt works are being delayed. For the time being, the layer of crusher run is being maintained to prevent formation of potholes.

The expected completion date according to the contract awarded is the end of August 2024.

LINE BARRACKS HEADQUARTERS, PORT LOUIS – FIRE OUTBREAK (04 JULY 2022) – INQUIRY

(No. A/51) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the fire outbreak which occurred at the Police Headquarters, Line Barracks in Port Louis, on Monday 04 July 2022, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) if the inquiry initiated thereinto has been completed, indicating the outcome thereof, and
- (b) where matters stand in relation to the restoration works to be carried out thereat, indicating the estimated cost and duration thereof.

Reply: On Monday, 04 July 2022, at about 20:45 hours, a fire broke out in a shed made of corrugated iron sheets found adjacent to the colonial-style building (SSU Block No. 4) housing *inter alia* the following units, subunits and offices –

- (i) Special Support Unit (SSU) No. 4;
- (ii) Special Response Group (SRG) Office;
- (iii) Special Support Unit Logistic Office;

- (iv) Special Support Unit Female Barracks;
- (v) Police Vehicle Technical Unit (PVTU) Sub-Office;
- (vi) SSW Training Wing Recruit Barracks, and
- (vii) SSI-J Catering Store.

The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services (MFRS) were immediately informed of the fire outbreak and they reached the location at 20:55 hours. The area was cordoned and the fire was subdued at around 22:30 hours. At 23:45 hours, the MFRS left the locus, leaving behind a small team of firefighters to attend to any risk of ignition as the spot was dark and smoke was still coming out from the building. A police sentry was placed over the building. There was no casualty and all the recruits were removed to a safe place for security reasons.

A few hours later, at around 01:00 hours, the Police sentry raised the alarm that a fire had broken out again on the first floor of SSU Block No. 4. The standby MFRS team immediately intervened and solicited reinforcement from other fire stations as the fire was rapidly spreading over the whole building due to strong wind.

As from 01:10 hours, the Fire Services of Port Louis, Coromandel, and Port Divisions reached Line Barracks and they finally subdued the fire at 16:00 hours. A team of MFRS remained on standby at the locus until 19:00 hours on Wednesday, 06 July 2022. The roof made of corrugated iron sheets and wooden structures together with the furniture, police equipment, personal belongings of Police Officers and other items found inside SSU Block No. 4 (2288 m²) located along Orleans Street, Port Louis and the shed adjoining the said building were completely burnt.

The Police started an investigation into the above matter on Tuesday, 05 July 2022. The case was referred to the Central Crime Investigation Department (CCID) and a dedicated team under the charge of a Superintendent of Police was assigned the task of conducting an in-depth investigation to determine the exact cause of the fire.

As part of the Police investigation, Scene of Crime Officers, Forensic Scientific Officers, officers from the Energy Services Division, Technical Officers of the Central Electricity Board and officers of the MFRS have examined the scene of fire.

The Police investigation, which started on Tuesday, 05 July 2022, has been completed. On Friday, 15 December 2023, the case file was referred to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) for advice. On Friday, 23 February 2024, the ODPP advised to carry out a fire inquiry to determine the cause of the fire.

The fire inquiry will start on Tuesday, 13 August 2024. Moreover, the case was lodged before the Port Louis South District Court on Tuesday, 02 April 2024.

Regarding the restoration of the building on Tuesday, 05 July 2022, the Police requested the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development (MNI & CD) to carry out a structural survey and submit a report.

On Wednesday, 13 July 2022, a team of engineers from MNI&CD went to the site to conduct a survey, but could not do so due to the heap of debris inside the building. Consequently, the engineers recommended that the debris be removed to enable them to conduct the survey and suggested that a tender be launched for the removal of the debris.

On 09 January 2023, MNI&CD submitted the draft bid document and scope of works for the debris removal.

As the building is listed as a national heritage monument, the bid document and the scope of works were forwarded to the National Heritage Fund (NHF) on 27 February 2023 for examination and clearance prior to the tender being launched. The cost of removing the debris was estimated at Rs8.7 m., excluding VAT.

However, the NHF highlighted that the restoration of the building should be carried out systematically to preserve the original state of the building. To this end, NHF suggested that the stone walls requiring restoration should not be demolished, but be removed partially and replaced in a manner to preserve its originality. Therefore, NHF recommended that the scope of works in the tender document be amended to include both debris removal and building restoration, simultaneously.

On Monday, 09 October 2023, a meeting was held at the Police Headquarters with the representatives of MNI&CD and NHF to look into the matter, but a consensus could not be reached.

As at date, discussion is ongoing with the representatives of MNI&CD and NHF on the way forward. Concurrently, a team from the Special Support Technical Unit was deployed on

a trial basis to remove the debris. However, it was observed that this exercise is time-consuming and would require considerable resources.

**ROCHE BOIS POLICE STATION – POLICE OFFICERS POSTED,
VACANCIES & VEHICLES ATTACHED**

(No. A/52) **Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Roche Bois Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of Police Officers posted thereat, grade-wise, indicating the number of vacancies, grade-wise, and
- (b) the number of vehicles attached thereto.

Reply: In regard to part (a) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has informed that presently forty-three Police Officers are posted at the Roche Bois Police Station as follows –

Grade	Number
Inspector	1
Sub Inspector	1
Police Sergeant	10
Caporal	1
Police Constable	26
Woman Police Constable	04
Total	43

There is no vacancy in any grade thereat.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has informed that presently there are four vehicles attached to the Roche Bois Police Station.

TRANQUEBAR, LE DAUGUET NATURE TRAIL – MAINTENANCE & CLEANING

(No. A/53) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to Le Dauguet Nature Trail in Tranquebar, he will state if he has been made aware of the current state thereof and, if so, give details of the remedial measures being envisaged therefor.

Reply: Two complaints, dated 13 March 2024 and 19 April 2024, had been received at the level of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Environment and Climate Change Division), through the Citizen Support Portal, regarding the upgrading and maintenance of Le Dauguet Nature Trail, while two additional complaints, dated 24 November 2023 and 03 May 2024, had been received, through the same Portal, regarding a pothole at the entrance of the Trail.

The Living Environment Unit of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change undertakes the mowing of the grass at the parking space and the general cleaning of the Trail once every month. Moreover, in order to ensure a safe environment thereat, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change has hired the services of Quick Security Guards on a 24-hour basis. Additionally, the services of Silver Clean Co. Ltd has been hired for the cleaning of the toilet block.

In the context of the outbreak of dengue fever in the island, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has, since February 2024, been requesting assistance from the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change in terms of manpower, for fumigation exercises over the island. Consequently, the usual team mobilised for the maintenance of Le Dauguet Nature Trail had to be reviewed, impacting on its maintenance. Nonetheless, the mowing of the overgrown grass and general cleaning works were undertaken thereat by a team of five General Workers from 24 March to 28 March 2024, 03 May to 09 May 2024, 12 June to 20 June 2024 and 15 July to 19 July 2024. The next round of mowing and cleaning exercises by that same team would be undertaken from 26 August to 30 August 2024.

On 30 January 2023, further to a site visit undertaken at Le Dauguet Nature Trail by the officers of the Living Environment Unit and those of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre following events of heavy rainfall, a pothole of 1 metre in diameter and having a depth of about 2 metres, representing a serious hazard to users, had been observed at the entrance of the Trail. Consequently, several consultative meetings were held with the Land Drainage Authority, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis and the National Development Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development to agree on the upgrading of the road and the culvert. Since 18 November 2023, the Trail has temporarily been closed to vehicular access until further notice.

The National Development Unit has informed that the consultancy services of Luxconsult (Mtius) Ltd has been hired on 30 January 2024 for analysing the catchment

hydrology as well as designing and supervising the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the culvert at Le Dauguet Nature Trail through funds made available to its Ministry.

The National Development Unit has informed that the Consultancy Firm has submitted a Preliminary Design Report in March 2024 and a Detailed Design Report in June 2024. Consequently, the approval of the Land Drainage Authority on those two Reports is currently being awaited by the National Development Unit.