



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 26 MARCH 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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Ashley Ittoo
Acting Clerk of the National Assembly	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit, CSK
Clerk Assistant	Gopall, Mr Navin
Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
Clerk Assistant	Naika-Cahanee Mrs Prishnee
Adviser, Hansard	Allet, Mrs Marie-Hélène Caroline
Assistant Hansard Editor	Hurdoss, Miss Doushika
Parliamentary Librarian and Information Officer	Jeewoonarain, Ms Prittydevi
Serjeant-at-Arms	Bundhoo, Mr Anirood

MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 01 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 26 March 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)

Mr Speaker: Please be seated.

MRS PRISHNEE NAIKA-CAHANEESA – CLERK ASSISTANT – APPOINTMENT

Hon. Members, first, welcome back to the National Assembly. Before we proceed with the business of the House today, I have to inform you that Mrs Prishnee Naika-Cahaneesa has joined the Clerk's Table as Clerk Assistant.

Mrs Naika-Cahaneesa joined the Judiciary as Trainee Court Officer in May 2009 and was promoted to Senior Court Officer in July 2017. Prior to joining the National Assembly, she held the post of Judicial Research Assistant.

She holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Mauritius.

On behalf of the House and in my own name, I extend a warm welcome to Mrs Naika-Cahaneesa and wish her a successful professional career.

I now invite Mrs Naika-Cahaneesa to join the Table.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF COMMITTEES – ELECTION

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 7(a) of Standing Order 7 of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly, I move that the hon. Third Member for Constituency No.16, Vacoas and Floréal, Mr Ashley Ittoo, be elected Deputy Chairperson of Committees.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: Is there any counterproposal?

Hon. Members, there being no counterproposal, I declare the hon. Third Member for Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal, Mr Ashley Ittoo, elected Deputy Chairperson of Committees of the Assembly and I extend to him my sincere congratulations.

(Applause)

As per tradition, maybe he wishes to say a few words.

Mr Ittoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to have been elected to serve the Assembly as Deputy Chairperson of Committees. I seize this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to the hon. Prime Minister and Leader of the House for the trust he has placed in me.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I assure this august Assembly that I will faithfully discharge the responsibilities bestowed upon me to the best of my abilities.

I thank you for your attention.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY

MR ERIC JOSEPH RAOUL GUIMBEAU, GOSK

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with immense sadness that we have learnt of the demise of Mr Eric Joseph Raoul Guimbeau, former Member of Parliament, on Wednesday 06 March 2024 at the age of 63.

Mr Eric Guimbeau was born on 23 October 1960. He attended the Lycée La Bourdonnais for his primary education. In 1980, he proceeded to South Africa for his secondary education. He left for the United States of America in 1985 to pursue higher studies at the Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge for his BSc in Agricultural Mechanics.

After his graduation in 1987, Mr Guimbeau took up employment in the Sales Department of Rogers Ltd. He later served as Director in several companies and in August 2014, was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Saint Aubin Group.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Guimbeau made his first foray in politics in 1996 when he stood as candidate for the Municipal Elections in Ward 3, Curepipe but was not elected.

In the year 2000, Mr Guimbeau contested the General Election in Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands under the banner of the MSM/MMM Alliance and was elected as First Member. He was appointment Parliamentary Private Secretary, a post which he held until December 2004. He also served as Member of the ICAC's Parliamentary Committee.

In 2005, Mr Guimbeau contested the General Election in Constituency No. 17 under the banner of the MSM/MMM Alliance and was again elected. In 2006, he was designated to serve as Member of the ICAC's Parliamentary Committee. He also served as Member of the Public Accounts Committee.

In 2009, Mr Guimbeau founded his own political party, the *Mouvement Mauricien Social Démocrate (MMSD)* and sat as an independent Member until March 2010.

In May 2010, Mr Guimbeau ran for the General Election in Constituency No. 17 under the banner of the MMM-UN-MMSD Alliance and was elected as First Member. In June 2010, he was nominated to serve on the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Guimbeau contested the 2014 General Election in Constituency No. 14 under the banner of the MMSD but was not returned.

In 2015, he ran for the Municipal Elections in Ward No. 4 in Curepipe under the banner of the MMSD but was not elected.

Mr Guimbeau also contested the 2019 General Election in Constituency No. 17 under the banner of the MMSD but was not returned. Subsequently, Mr Guimbeau continued to serve as CEO of the Saint Aubin Group until his tragic death on 06 March 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in May 2014, Mr Eric Guimbeau was conferred the title of Honorary Citizen by the Municipal Council of Curepipe for his active participation in social work. Mr Guimbeau was, on 12 March 2024, elevated to the rank of Grand Officer of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean for his significant contribution in the economic sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request you to kindly direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family, in particular to his wife, Mrs Virginie Jacqueline Françoise and to his children.

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, would you like to join?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the nation was indeed shocked by the tragic and untimely death of Mr Eric Guimbeau. I also join the hon. Prime Minister in requesting you, Mr Speaker, Sir, to direct the Acting Clerk to convey my deepest condolences and the condolences

of the whole Opposition to his wife Virginie and his four children: Charles, Alizée, Stanislas and Maxime.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself with the tribute paid to the memory of late Mr Eric Joseph Raoul Guimbeau, former Member of Parliament by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of Opposition, and I direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Thank you.

HON. ARMANCE – MEDIA STATEMENT – PARLIAMENTARY DOCUMENTS

Hon. Members, I have a few announcements.

My attention has been drawn to a statement made to the media on Saturday by hon. Armance, the Opposition Whip, to the effect that he had not, as at Friday last, at 15 00 hours, yet received the Order Paper and all other documents pertaining to today's Sitting.

As hon. Members are aware, Cabinet meets on Fridays to decide, amongst other things, the business of the Assembly to be dealt with on ensuing Tuesdays' Sittings.

On receipt of the Order Paper from Cabinet, the Clerk has the duty to ensure that all Papers concerning the Items, namely, Questions, Motions and Bills, if any, are properly arranged and in the latter case, more particularly in accordance with Standing Order 54(1) for onward transmission to hon. Members.

At times, in the case of amendment Bills, additional time may be required if there is need to enclose the existing legislations to which amendments are being proposed.

In the discharge of her responsibilities, the Clerk ensures that due care and diligence is exercised before the Order Paper is transmitted to hon. Members and posted on the website of the National Assembly.

Finally, I wish to remind hon. Members of the provisions of Standing Order 14(1) which bestows upon the Clerk the responsibility of ensuring that the Order Paper and related

parliamentary documents are transmitted to hon. Members within the procedural delay of not less than 3 days before the commencement of the sitting of the Assembly.

I have therefore deemed it fit to make this announcement in order to clear any doubt or misunderstanding that there has been undue delay from the Office of the Clerk following the statement made by the hon. Member to the media.

S.O. 27 – REJECTION OF PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

I have a second statement.

Hon. Juman, Dr. the hon. Boolell and Dr. the hon. Aumeer are reported to have stated in the press that their Parliamentary Questions have been rejected without any communication as to the justification as to why their Questions have been disallowed.

Hon. Members, I wish to reiterate that pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 27, admissibility of questions rests with the Speaker. Further, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 21(4), when a question has been refused, the matter must be taken by the hon. Member privately with the Speaker. The responsibility of seeking clarifications as to the reasons why a Parliamentary Question has been disallowed by the Speaker rests with the hon. Member concerned and not the Speaker or the Clerk.

ICAC & PAC COMMITTEES - NEW MEMBERS - NOMINATION

Lastly, following the appointment of hon. Ms Naveena Ramyad as Minister on 14 February 2024 and her ensuing resignations as Member and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption and Member of the Public Accounts Committee and, pursuant to the provisions of paragraph (9)(a) of Standing Order 70, I have to inform the House that –

- On 06 March 2024, pursuant to section 59(2) and (3) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, the hon. Prime Minister has designated hon. Mohamad Salim Abbas Mamode as Member and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption; and

- On 19 March 2024, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (9)(a) of Standing Order 70, the Committee of Selection met under my Chairpersonship and nominated hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy, PPS, as Member to serve the Public Accounts Committee.

I thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

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

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

- (a) The Annual Report of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The National Identity Card (Mobile ID) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 28 of 2024)
- (c) The National Identity Card Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 29 of 2024)
- (d) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the year ended 30 June 2022.
- (e) The Public Service Commission (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 46 of 2024)
- (f) The Maritime Zones (Baselines and Closing Lines) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 49 of 2024)
- (g) The Maritime Zones (EEZ Outer Limit Lines) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 50 of 2024)

B. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning**Ministry of Tourism**

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)

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

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for the year ended 30 June 2022.
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate for the year ended 30 June 2022.
- (c) The Annual Reports and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre Trust Fund for the years ended
 - (i) 01 July 2017 to 30 June 2018; and
 - (ii) 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.

D. Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management

- (a) The District Council of Savanne (Traffic Centre) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 26 of 2024).
- (b) The District Council of Rivière du Rempart (Rent of Petit Raffray Multipurpose Hall) Regulation 2023. (Government Notice No. 48 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail

The Road Traffic (Crop Season) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 190 of 2023)

F. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Banking (Processing and Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 184 of 2023)
- (b) The Banking (Significant Interest Fees) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 185 of 2023)
- (c) The Freeport (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 186 of 2023)

- (d) The Performance Audit Report on 'Fostering a culture of Community Sports and Physical Activity'- Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation. (In Original)
- (e) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Gambling Regulatory Authority for the year ended 30 June 2019.
- (f) The Annual Report of the Procurement Policy Office for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (g) Virement Warrant – Quarter 2 (October – December 2023): Nos. 06 -15 (In Original)
- (h) Virement (Contingencies) Warrant Return – Quarter 2 (October – December 2023): No. 04 - 08 (In Original)
- (i) Virement Certificate – Quarter 2 (October – December 2023): Vote/Sub-Head (Certificates Nos.): 1-7(2), 1-9(3), 1-11(1), 1-12(1-2), 1-16(1-2), 2-108(1), 2-3(1), 2-5(2-6), 2-10(1,2), 3-1(1), 3-3(1,2), 4-1(1), 5-1(4-7), 5-2(3), 5-3(1), 5-4(2), 6-1(2-5), 6-103(1), 6-2(1,2), 6-3(1), 7-1(4), 7-2(2-5), 8-1(4,6,8), 9-202(2-4), 11-1(1), 12-1(2-3), 13-4(1,2), 14-1(2-5), 15-1(1), 16-1(2), 17-1(1), 17-2(1,2), 18-1(1-6), 20-1(1), 21-1 (2,3) and 23-1(2-4).
- (j) Retrospective Virement Warrant: No. 226 (In Original)
- (k) The National Savings Fund (Collection of Contributions) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 2 of 2024)
- (l) The National Pensions (Pension Points) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 3 of 2024)
- (m) The Income Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 4 of 2024)
- (n) The Public Procurement (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 16 of 2024)
- (o) The Finance and Audit (COVID-19 Projects Development Fund) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 17 of 2024)
- (p) The Finance and Audit (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 18 of 2024)

- (q) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 30 of 2024)
- (r) The Freeport (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 41 of 2024)
- (s) The Public Procurement (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 42 of 2024)
- (t) The Sugar Insurance Fund (Reduced General Insurance Premium) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 45 of 2024)

G. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Central Water Authority for the year ended 30 June 2020.
- (b) The Energy Efficiency (Labelling of Regulated Machinery) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 36 of 2024)
- (c) The Central Water Authority (Dry Season) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 37 of 2024)

H. Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity

- (a) The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Trust Fund for the years/period ended:
 - (i) 01 July 2016 to 30 June 2017;
 - (ii) 01 July 2017 to 30 June 2018;
 - (iii) 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2019;
 - (iv) 01 July 2019 to 30 June 2020;
 - (v) 01 July 2020 to 30 June 2021;
 - (vi) 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2022; and
 - (vii) 01 July 2022 to 03 February 2023.
- (b) The Social Aid (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 1 of 2024)

- (c) The Social Contribution and Social Benefits (Independence Allowance) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 21 of 2024)
- (d) The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statement of the National Savings Fund for the year 30 June 2018.

I. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

- (a) The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Financial Services Commission for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Financial Services (Consolidated Licensing and Fees) (Amendment) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 5 of 2024)
- (c) The Financial Services (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 19 of 2024)
- (d) The Financial Services (Consolidated Licensing and Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 22 of 2024).
- (e) The Financial Services (Spot Commodity Market and Intermediaries) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 23 of 2024)
- (f) The Insurance (Industry Compensation Fund) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 27 of 2024)
- (g) The Captive Insurance (Captive Insurance Business) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 31 of 2024)
- (h) The Captive Insurance (Pure Captive Business Rules 2016) (Revocation) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 32 of 2024)
- (i) The Financial Services (Consolidated Licensing and Fees) (Amendment No. 3) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 33 of 2024)

J. Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Beach Authority for year ended 30 June 2021.

K. Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

- (a) The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board for the year ended 31 December 2018.
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Meat Authority for the year ended 30 June 2020.

L. Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation

The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports for the year ended 30 June 2023.

M. Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Land Drainage Authority for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original).

N. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Manufacturing Sector Workers Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2020. (In Original)
- (b) The Workers' Rights (Additional Remuneration) (2024) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 7 of 2024)
- (c) The National Minimum Wage (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 8 of 2024)
- (d) The Export Enterprises (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 24 of 2024)
- (e) The Special Education Needs Institutions Employees (Remuneration) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 39 of 2024)

O. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The Public Health (Testing of Infectious or Communicable Diseases) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 6 of 2024)
- (b) The Dangerous Drugs (Prescribed Forms) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 10 of 2024)
- (c) The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 40 of 2024)

P. Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping

The Fisheries (Fishing of Sea Cucumbers) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 189 of 2023)

Q. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

- (a) The Annual Reports and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Women's Council for the years ended:
 - (i) 01 July 2017 to 07 March 2018; and
 - (ii) 08 March 2018 to 30 June 2019; and
 - (iii) 01 July 2019 to 30 June 2020
- (b) The Children's (Conduct of Child Mentors) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 44 of 2024)

R. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

- (a) The Annual Reports and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Rights Management Society/Mauritius Society of Authors for the years ended:
 - (i) 01 July 2016 to 30 June 2017;
 - (ii) 01 July 2017 to 30 June 2018;

- (iv) 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 and
- (v) 01 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.
- (b) The Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the English Speaking Union for the year ended 30 June 2023.

S. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 34) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 187 of 2023)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 35) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 188 of 2023)
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 9 of 2024)
- (d) The Legal Metrology (Assize Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 11 of 2024)
- (e) The Legal Metrology (Assize) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 12 of 2024)
- (f) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 13 of 2024)
- (g) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 14 of 2024)
- (h) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 15 of 2024).
- (i) The Consumer Protection (Control of Fairs) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 20 of 2024).
- (j) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 25 of 2024)

- (k) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 34 of 2024)
- (l) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 43 of 2024)
- (m) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 47 of 2024)

T. Ministry of Industrial Development, SME's and Cooperatives

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Standards Bureau for the year ended 30 June 2022.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**CYCLONE BELAL – FLOODING – DAMAGES TO HOUSEHOLDS,
DRAINAGE WORKS & EVACUATION PLAN (PORT LOUIS)**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to cases of flooding in mainland Mauritius during the passage of cyclone Belal, he will –

- (a) state the number of households having suffered damage across the island as a result thereof;
- (b) state the drainage works effected in Port Louis since then to date, and
- (c) table a copy of the evacuation plan for the capital city.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the foremost, I would like to express our deepest sympathy, on behalf of the Government of Mauritius and myself, to all those households and persons, who have suffered due to the flooding caused during the passage of cyclone Belal. I wish to also thank the Leader of the Opposition for this PNQ as it gives me the opportunity to inform the House of the different measures and actions being taken by the Government following the passage of the cyclone Belal in January 2024.

It is a known fact that climate change has increased the frequency, intensity and severity of natural hazards leading to disasters, especially for small and vulnerable Small Island Developing States (SIDS), like Mauritius. There is now a higher prevalence of extreme weather events such as flash floods, rainfall variability and intense tropical cyclones, locally as well as in other countries. As you are all aware, Brazil was also subject to extreme weather condition during the last weekend. It experienced flooding which, unfortunately, caused 20 casualties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, this growing concern is being felt in the Republic of Mauritius as several wakes of livelihood are being disturbed by these impacts. This concern is further exacerbated as we are influenced by large ocean-atmosphere interactions and our country is located along the path of tropical cyclones. The impact of the accelerated climate change on tropical cyclones is leading to more threatening and unpredictable situation all around the world.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Saturday 13 January 2024, a tropical depression evolving to the northwest of St Brandon had intensified into a moderate tropical storm, which was named Belal at 04 00 hours on the same day by the Mauritius Meteorological Station (MMS).

The first cyclone bulletin for a Cyclone Warning Class I for Mauritius was issued at 10 10 hours on Saturday 13 January 2024. The moderate tropical storm was centred at about 580 km to the north-north-west of Mauritius and was moving towards the southwest at a speed of 13 km/h and on that trajectory, Belal was expected to approach our region and represented a potential threat to our island.

The National Emergency Operations Command (NEOC) was subsequently activated to Level I at 12 35 hours on the same day. The following actions...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House has been in recess for three and a half months. The question is very specific. Can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister to reply specifically, especially since we have very limited time? Is that too much to ask after three and a half months of recess?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am trying to explain how the cyclone developed and how the situation developed.

The National Emergency Operations Command (NEOC) was subsequently activated to Level I at 12 35 hours on the same day. The following actions were taken by NEOC. They are all important, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is why I have to mention them –

- (a) coordination with the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the timely issue of relevant press communiqués for dialysis patients, senior citizen, distribution of methadone, precautionary advice on health-related issues and other matters;
- (b) coordination with Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for opening of Evacuee Centres;
- (c) persons with disabilities, senior citizens with reduced mobility who are requiring Evacuee Centres facilities would be dealt with on a case-to-case basis by NEOC and Ministry of Health and Wellness.

(Interruptions)

Yes! I get the impression that this was not important. All these issues about health, social security, looking after all the evacuees are not important for some Members!

On Saturday 13 January 2024 at 22 10 hours, Belal had intensified into a severe tropical storm and continued to move towards the south-west at a speed of 20 km/h. Cyclone Warning Class I was maintained.

On Sunday 14 January 2024, at 04 00 hours, the severe tropical storm was centred about 460 km to the north-west of Mauritius and was moving towards...

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: *Nouvo sef meteo!*

Mr Ameer Meea: *Line intervenir personnellement!*

Dr. Husnoo: ...and was moving towards the south-south-west at a speed of 20 km/h. Belal was located slightly further west than forecasted but continued to approach our region and was still considered as a potential threat. Cyclone Warning Class I was maintained. However, despite Class I, NEOC was upgraded to Level II at 07 30 hours.

At 16 00 hours, the Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) had highlighted that Belal had slowed down slightly during the last hours and was moving towards the south at a speed of about 14 km/h. It was then situated at about 410 km almost to the west of Mauritius.

Mr X. L. Duval: How relevant is the answer to my question? Would the Vice-Prime Minister like me to read the question to him again?

Dr. Husnoo: You have read the question; I have heard it. I am...

Mr X. L. Duval: This has nothing to do with...

Dr. Husnoo: Because this is...

Mr X. L. Duval: Already 7 minutes have gone!

Dr. Husnoo: You will have your time; I think the Speaker will give you your time.

What I am trying to say is that I have to give this preamble, Mr Speaker, Sir, so that we understand how the situation developed and what were the issues involved.

At 16 00 hours, the Mauritius Meteorological Services had highlighted that Belal had slowed down slightly during the last hours and was moving towards the south at a speed of about 14 km/hr. It was then situated at about 410 km almost to the west of Mauritius. Subsequently, Cyclone Warning Class I was maintained.

The National Crisis Committee met for a second time at 17 00 hours and the then Director of the MMS informed the Committee that the cyclone warning would be waived on Monday 15 January 2024 at 04 00 hours should Belal maintain its present trajectory.

However, at 22 10 hours, according to the MMS, Cyclone Belal had started to track towards the southeast and was centred at about 360 km almost to the west of Mauritius and was moving at a speed of 10 km/hr. Cyclone Warning Class I was maintained. No major incident was reported at that time.

On Monday 15 January 2024 at 04 00 hours, Belal was centred at 310 km to the west of Mauritius and continued to move in the southeast direction at a speed of 10 km/hr. Cyclone Warning Class I was maintained.

It was then decided, despite Class I, that all educational institutions, including nurseries, remained closed. The NEOC was upgraded to Level II at 07 30 hours.

At 10 10 hours, Belal started to track more eastward and was moving towards the east-south-east at a speed of 12 km/hr. A Cyclone Warning Class II was issued at 10 10 hours. Close monitoring was still ongoing.

A third National Crisis Committee was held at 11 30 hours to analyse the situation. NEOC was subsequently upgraded to Level III at 13 25 hours and the Local Emergency Operations Command (LEOCs) were therefore activated. Based on the prevailing weather and intensity, a Cyclone Warning Class III was issued at 13 30 hours.

A curfew order was issued, which was valid from 20 00 hours to 12 00 hours on Tuesday 16 January 2024.

The Class III Cyclone Warning was maintained up to 16 January 2024 at 01 10 hours.

Mauritius was under the influence of cyclonic conditions with gusts exceeding 120 km/hr on Tuesday 16 January 2024. Subsequently, a Cyclone Warning Class IV was issued at 01 10 hours and maintained up to 10 10 hours.

A Safety Bulletin was issued at 10 10 hours and subsequently, the curfew order lapsed at 14 10 hours. Based on the recommendation of the NCC, all cyclone warnings for Mauritius were waived on Tuesday 16 January 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform that, according to Police Department's records, 4,365 Disaster Assistance Forms have been issued.

As regards part (b) of the question, various drainage works have been undertaken by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, National Development Unit and Road Development Unit at different locations.

The ongoing works within the region of Port Louis comprises the following –

- a) Drain works at Raoul Rivet;
- b) Raising of walls along Ruisseau du Pouce;
- c) Demolition of covered slabs along Pouce Stream from Desroches to Brown Sequard Street, and
- d) Construction of second outlet at Caudan to increase the conveyance capacity of stormwater towards the sea.

In addition, future works envisaged are as follows –

- a) Construction of cut-off at Monneron;
- b) Drain works at Lord Kitchener Street, and
- c) Upgrading of Rouselle Bridge at Canal Dayot.

Besides the structural works, the cleaning and desilting of rivers and canals within the jurisdiction of Port Louis has been carried out as follows –

- a) Cleaning of Ruisseau Créole and cut-off drain along Signal Mountain completed;
- b) Desilting of River Latanier over a stretch of 8.5 km, and
- c) Cleaning works at La Paix Stream and along Le Pouce Stream.

The desilting of rivers is also envisaged at the following watercourses –

- a) Desilting of River St Louis and Canal Dayot over a stretch of 8 km, still at bid evaluation;
- b) Desilting of Rivulet Terre Rouge at Ste Croix along a stretch of 1.2 km, and
- c) Desilting works along Mt Ory Stream along a 2.5 km stretch.

As regards part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that there is a protocol in place for the evacuation of the City Centre of Port Louis, which has been tested on many occasions, including a traffic diversion plan by the Police.

The purpose of this protocol is to protect and save lives and property, based upon the concept of –

- (a) Vertical evacuation;
- (b) Diversion plan by the Police to prevent traffic flow towards Port Louis;

- (c) Road closures by Police to prevent traffic flow towards flooded areas within Port Louis City Centre close to Le Ruisseau Créole, Ruisseau du Pouce, La Poudrière Stream, Canal Anglais;
- (d) Maintaining access to critical services, like Hospitals, Line Barracks and Government House;
- (e) Evacuation routes from Port Louis wherever applicable, and
- (f) Actions by other stakeholders.

In addition to the protocol, as a preparedness measure for the current cyclonic and rainy season, a Table Top Exercise was carried out on 28 November 2023 with the involvement of some 50 stakeholders, out of which 20 were physically present in the National Emergency Operations Command whilst coordination was maintained with the rest.

I wish to add that various measures have been taken by this Government under the National Flood Management Programme, for the construction and rehabilitation of drains by different implementing agencies. The Land Drainage Authority has been set up under the Land Drainage Act in 2017, in order to coordinate all drainage works and to ensure its effective implementation. In addition thereto, the cleaning and desilting of rivers is also being undertaken to mitigate any impacts of riverine flooding.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister has taken the first 10 minutes to answer a question which I never asked. Therefore, I would request your indulgence that additional time may be given, as he suggested, for supplementary questions.

We all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that at the end of the week, there is supposed to be another cyclone, cyclone Gamane, which apparently is going to come directly on Mauritius. So, the citizens of Mauritius are in dread of what is going to happen. My first question is concerning damage to households. You replied saying that the Police were called to some 4,600 houses. That is not the question that I asked. I asked how many houses have been damaged. You know apparently how many cars have been damaged, but are you able to tell this House how many houses have been damaged? Did you do a survey to see what is the loss, sometimes tremendous loss, to householders following the cyclone?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why I mentioned that the Police had issued 4,375 disaster assistance, because most people report to the Police Station when damage is done to

their house. That is why I mentioned it and from there on, we know how many houses are affected or how many people lost their belongings or food or whatever, and then act accordingly.

Mr X. L. Duval: Do you have it district-wise? Do you have it around the island with regard to these 4,375 houses?

Dr. Husnoo: It is island-wide.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can you table that?

Dr. Husnoo: I just mentioned it. It is 4,375.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can you table it?

Dr. Husnoo: I just got the figure; I just mentioned it to you.

Mr X. L. Duval: District-wise; per district.

Dr. Husnoo: No, I don't have it district-wise with me.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can you perhaps do that? That will be interesting.

Dr. Husnoo: I will have to enquire with the Police.

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, address the Chair!

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister this question. Car owners, 1,800 of them, usually richer people, have been surveyed, have been granted compensation to the tune of Rs200 m. or more from public funds for the damage to their cars. Much poorer people have had their houses, their appliances, their furniture, their clothes sometimes completely destroyed and taken away by flood waters. Why is it that you have not surveyed these people and especially, why is it that Government has not found the money to reimburse and compensate these poor householders?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained earlier that we have about 4,375 people who have contacted the Police. Now, the Government has acted on this. A lot of people whose houses have been damaged or their furniture has been affected or they have lost their food have been helped by the Ministry of Social Security. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a cyclone allowance of Rs250 per person per night at the evacuation centres. And even that, you were not giving! So, you cannot talk!

(Interruptions)

A food allowance of Rs250 per damaged food stuff per person per day for a maximum of three days upon presentation of the Police memo. So far, 392 families have been helped and food allowance has been given to 3,709 families to the tune of Rs6.4 m. Food packs have been given to the people who have lost their food, Mr Speaker, Sir. As at to date, 3,850 people have been given food packs, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, the Government is working, Mr Speaker, Sir, to provide for those people who have faced losses during the cyclone.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that when there was flooding in 2013, upwards of Rs100,000 plus vouchers, plus gifts were given to each household having had a loss from the flooding.

I would like to ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister again. My question is not about Rs1,000 given per family; my question is not about Rs2,000 hamper still being given to families. My question is about families who have lost their refrigerators, washing machines, clothes, furniture made of plywood and who have had their houses destroyed. I will take you to my Constituency with pleasure! These people have lost hundreds of thousands of rupees. Now, we paid Rs100,000 ten years ago; it is worth Rs200,000 today. What have you done except from the crumbs that you have given to the householders? Obviously, the cake has gone to the car owners. This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, a question of putting cars first, putting people last.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained that so many people have gone to the Police. We are still investigating, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have explained that; I have mentioned it.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I reiterate. The Vice-Prime Minister has been incapable of telling us what compensation has been given to people who have lost their household appliances, furniture, clothes and who have had their houses sometimes destroyed. What have you done for this category of people?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained that 4,375 people have contacted the Police. All of them have not been given any allowance yet. So, we have to wait. According to the information I have, 3,850 families have been helped so far. So, we will have to wait and see, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Helped with Rs1,000 and with hampers of Rs2,000. Let us be clear about this!

Now I want to come to a particular problem which is even worse. The Cabinet communiqué mentions 83 people under the Social Register of Mauritius. These are the poorest people in Mauritius; 83 of them. They were supposed to be surveyed and they were supposed to be compensated. Does the hon. Vice-Prime Minister know that not one of these families – and I have contacted a few of them – have received any help from the NEF after two months?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have explained, the Ministry of Social Security is looking after these people. I have mentioned that a lot of people have not been contacted yet. The work is ongoing. It is the Ministry of Social Security that is looking after that; it is not the Ministry of Local Government. I would like to make that clear.

Mr X. L. Duval: It seems from the press that the CEO of the FSC has been fired because he was not able to compensate more than 200 vehicle owners. Don't you think that there is a problem here when that person is fired and yet nobody here takes any action?

I would like to move on, Mr Speaker, Sir, to drainage.

(Interruptions)

You should take care of this! I visited Signal Mountain yesterday, and I will circulate to you a video of the flooding coming from the mountain right down Labourdonnais Street, Desroches Street and all the adjoining streets on 15 January. I visited that place yesterday and I was shocked to see that there has been absolutely no work done on the drainage system since that date to now. Two months! And that the same thing is likely to happen again, as it has happened before and on the 15th! The only work that has been done is some sort of small wall to embellish the region. You are an MP for Port Louis. Why has the work not been done in an extreme emergency? And I will post later on and show you the river that comes from the mountain down to Labourdonnais Street, floods La Poudrière Street and down Desroches Street. Why has this not been done?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to mention that before the cyclonic weather, a lot of work was done. The work does not start after the cyclone only; the work starts

before the cyclonic weather, in August and September the year before. After the cyclone, a lot of damage was done to the beds of these rivers.

(Interruptions)

Please, let me answer!

A lot of damage has been done. A lot of silt has collected and not only in one river but in so many rivers; not in Port Louis only, but across the island. When that happened, this Government made site visits, not just the Local Government, but also the RDA, LDA, NDU have gone around and have had a look and have seen the problem. Now, some of the works are major works, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we just give a contract like that? No. We have to do a tender, we have to do an evaluation, and then we award. I have got a list of projects where the works have been done and are being done, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not only of one place that I am talking about. I have got a list of projects here.

So, it is not a question of taking one site and saying that the work has not been done. We have to look at the country as a whole, not just in Port Louis; the country as a whole. The work is being done across the island, and obviously, in Port Louis as well, but it takes time. These works are major works. When you have the bed of the river which has been carried away, it is not just about coming, cleaning and removing the mud. It is not just removing mud. You have been there. I have been there as well, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I have visited these places. So, I am aware of the damage that has been done to the rivers, but some of them are major works. It takes time, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unfortunately, it does take time if you want to do the work properly.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, who asked the question about bed of the rivers? The question is about Signal Mountain! The overflowing from Signal Mountain! You will see from there, like a river, huge amount of water from Signal Mountain goes into Labourdonnais Street. The question is that the drains at Signal Mountain need to be urgently - like today - rehabilitated, increased. I will take you there if you want later on so that you can see clearly that this is putting in danger thousands of people working and living in Port Louis. And all the cars that have been destroyed recently will again be destroyed if there is another flooding in Port Louis. That is the importance of the question!

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained that we do not have only one place to look after.

(Interruptions)

You may be laughing, but it is a fact! There are so many drains, so many rivers and so many places where we have problems. A lot of work has been done, is being done and will be done.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not got any answer to any of my questions yet! We now go to the evacuation plan. Now, surely the hon. Vice-Prime Minister will agree that if there is some sort of evacuation plan – I work in Newton Street – all of us here should know what the evacuation plan is! Should we go here, should we go there, up there? We need to know what your evacuation plan is! This is why I asked you to table the evacuation plan. I do not need a table top because anyway it did not work in November because in January you saw the disaster of your evacuation plan. So, I am asking what is the new evacuation plan that you may have so that people like me and everybody else are able to evacuate safely in case of another flooding, which will surely happen because of climate change?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained in my answer that we have a protocol. During heavy rain, the Police try to cordon off the flood prone areas. We know that; we have it from the LDA. We know for example in Port Louis, the lowest point would be around Poudrière Street, maybe at Caudan. The Police would cordon off these areas, stop people from coming there and divert the traffic. So, I have just explained all this. All these have been done during and after cyclone Belal as well. This protocol was put in place, Mr Speaker, Sir, to close flood prone areas, to prevent these kinds of things from happening again. So, we have the protocol, we have put it in place, and it has been working, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: 1,800 cars damaged, hundreds and thousands of houses damaged. Thank you for your evacuation plan which obviously is a total disaster. I would like to ask the hon. Minister, on his own website – I am sure you are very familiar with – he states that as far as flood prone areas are concerned - I would like the House to listen to this - it says 480 sites have been identified as flood prone, of which 56 sites are considered to be life threatening and crucial. This flood prone area map is secret; it is kept by the Government and has not been published. Do you not think that if there are 56 sites which are life threatening, the population of Mauritius

ought to know where these sites are, whether their houses are located on these sites? And as far as the 480 other sites are concerned, don't you think the population of Mauritius who paid for the report should have access to this flood prone area report?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know where the flood prone areas are and we are working on it. We have been working on it! The question has been answered before.

(Interruptions)

Exactly! So, we know them; the works are being done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/8 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. PQ B/18 will be replied by the hon. Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. PQ B/60 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting, and PQ B/5 has been withdrawn.

I now call hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – *KREOL MORISIEN* – PROPOSED INTRODUCTION

(No. B/1) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth 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 proposed introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the National Assembly, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/405 of 09 May 2023, I gave an overview of the numerous initiatives undertaken by different institutions with a view to paving the way for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* into the National Assembly.

These institutions, which include the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the *Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris*, the University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Creole Speaking Union, have indeed been doing a lot of work to prepare the ground for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* into the National Assembly and the importance of such preparatory works cannot be overstressed.

I have, on several occasions, in this House, emphasised the need to pursue the teaching, learning and training of *Kreol Morisien*, over a period of time, with a view to developing a critical mass of people with a mastery of the language. Apart from the language issue, we also have to put in place the necessary logistics in terms of information and technology hardware and software at the National Assembly, including the training of Members of National Assembly, particularly, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker and staff of the Hansard Unit - including all of us, Members of the National Assembly.

Mr X. L. Duval: All of us!

The Prime Minister: Yes, and I shall come to that a bit later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, besides, most experts and knowledgeable people in this field do agree on the need to proceed in stages, while at the same time, adopting a holistic approach.

The House will surely recall what late Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy, G.C.S.K., also known as Dev Virahsawmy, had stated in November 2015, in regard to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* into the National Assembly. To remind, I quote –

« Je ne crois pas que les députés sont prêts pour l'utiliser au Parlement. Pour pouvoir manier une langue, quatre compétences sont nécessaires. Outre l'écriture, il faut maîtriser l'écoute, le parler et la lecture. Je vous fais remarquer que même ceux qui sont pour l'introduction du kreol au Parlement, ne maîtrisent pas parfaitement son aspect oral. Ils font un mélange de français et de kreol. Bien souvent, ils écoutent mal. Pire, ils ne savent pas lire et écrire correctement le kreol standard. Il est essentiel de s'assurer au préalable que tous les parlementaires maîtrisent la graphie du kreol morisyen, car après leurs interventions, ils sont appelés à corriger leurs textes avant qu'ils ne soient publiés dans le Hansard. Cela dit, pour résoudre ce problème, il faut que le kreol devienne le médium d'enseignement. Cela va permettre à tous les Mauriciens de savoir comment lire et écrire le kreol... Ne mettons pas la charrue devant les bœufs. Maîtrisons bien le kreol avant de l'introduire dans les institutions... Ce qui me fait peur, c'est qu'on utilise un kreol approximatif au Parlement et, de ce fait, on sème la confusion au sein de la population. »

Mr Dev Virahsawmy is also on record for having said the following in March 2018, and I quote –

« Nos parlementaires ne savent pas parler créole correctement. Pourquoi leur demander de s'exprimer dans une langue qu'ils ne maîtrisent pas ? »

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like here to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the pioneering work and outstanding contribution of late Mr Dev Virahsawmy for the development and promotion of the *kreol* language in the Republic of Mauritius. His seminal works and legacy on the *kreol* language will surely remain a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Prof. Arnaud Carpooran, O.S.K., who is another renowned linguist in this field and also the current Chairperson of the Creole Speaking Union, is presently driving a project entitled “Promoting Institutional Democracy through Language Access in *Kreol Repiblik Moris* and Digital Media”. This project is being financed by the Higher Education Commission. One of the objectives of this project is precisely to prepare the ground for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the National Assembly. Prof. Carpooran has also highlighted the importance of the preliminary works before introducing *Kreol Morisien* in the National Assembly. In this connection, he has submitted the following, and I quote –

« Le projet est objectivement, réellement « sur les rails », et que bien que les avancées ne correspondent pas toujours au rythme que souhaiterait une bonne partie de l'opinion publique (...), nous ne pouvons que nous plier aux exigences calendaires qu'impose un projet de recherche d'une telle ampleur. Comme, de surcroît, ce sont des institutions publiques qui sont désormais impliquées, que ce soit au niveau de la recherche, de l'encadrement et de l'appui financier, nous ne pouvons, pour l'heure, qu'être optimistes quant à l'avenir, en espérant pouvoir apporter dans un futur pas trop lointain, des livrables concrets à nos responsables politiques pour leur laisser prendre alors, les décisions qu'ils estimeront justes à leur niveau. »

M. le président, les autres principaux objectifs du projet sont comme suit –

(i) *Création d'un corpus écrit d'au moins 300 000 mots en Kreol Morisien –*

Cet ensemble de données cherche à être représentatif du langage institutionnel utilisé à Maurice et comprendra un corpus de textes à caractère institutionnel, initialement écrit en anglais et traduit en Kreol Morisien. Le seuil de 300 000 mots est considéré par l'équipe de recherche comme le nombre minimal nécessaire pour

qu'un correcteur orthographique expérimental commence à être vraiment opérationnel.

- (ii) Mise-en-place d'un module de correcteur orthographique en Kreol Morisien.*
- (iii) Création d'un ensemble de données audio d'au moins 600 000 mots en Kreol Morisien.*

Cet ensemble de données serait obtenu à partir du même corpus de 300 000 mots traduits en créole mais qui serait transcrit oralement dans au moins deux ensembles de voix différents, où l'équipe de recherche tentera de respecter le critère de représentativité en genre, tout en faisant varier les accents.

- (iv) Configuration d'une base de données de reconnaissance vocale et construction d'un système de reconnaissance vocale automatique, basée sur l'intelligence artificielle en Kreol Morisien.*
- (v) Développement d'un outil de transcription en utilisant le modèle pour reconnaissance vocale automatique.*
- (vi) Développement d'une terminologie appropriée pour faciliter l'utilisation institutionnelle du Kreol Morisien.*
- (vii) Développement d'une typologie des registres de parole et des normes socio-situationnelles en Kreol Morisien, en vue de son emploi institutionnel, et*
- (viii) Conception, évaluation et développement d'outils informatifs et éducatifs à l'aide de l'audiovisuel et des outils multimédias à des fins de diffusion régulière des données obtenues au gré des avancées du projet.*

M. le président, le Prof. Carpooran nous a également expliqué que le projet a connu des avancées substantielles de juin 2022 jusqu'à février 2024 comme suit –

- Mi-juin 2022 : publication d'annonces pour le recrutement de Trainee Project Assistants pour la traduction ;*
- Mi-juillet 2022 : processus de sélection des candidats ;*
- Août 2022 : recrutement de 11 Trainee Project Assistants pour la traduction de –*
 - (i) la Constitution de Maurice;*
 - (ii) les Standing Orders de l'Assemblée nationale et de l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues, ainsi que*

(iii) *des extraits choisis des transcriptions du Hansard.*

- *Octobre 2022 : à l'occasion de la Journée internationale créole, un atelier a été organisé au MIE où ont été rendues publiques, par le biais des médias, les premières retombées du nouveau projet.*
- *Décembre 2022 : publication d'annonce de recrutement de Trainee Project Assistants pour les enregistrements vocaux.*
- *Janvier 2023 : création d'un site internet dédié pour diffuser des informations sur le projet.*
- *Février 2023 : recrutement de quatre Trainee Project Assistants pour les enregistrements vocaux, distribution des tâches et mise en circulation d'une première vidéo des quatre premiers articles de la Constitution de la République de Maurice en Kreol Morisien. Je dois préciser que la traduction de la Constitution a déjà été complétée. La vérification et l'harmonisation linguistique seront effectuées dans un deuxième temps. Dès que cette étape sera terminée, on entamera la validation par des experts légaux et constitutionnels.*
- *Mars 2023 : soumission de la phase 1 des enregistrements audio à l'équipe informatique pour entraîner l'algorithme de transcription parole-texte. Celui-ci comprend des textes contenant 13 961 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 2 heures et demie.*
- *Mars 2023 : première esquisse d'un prototype de correcteur orthographique développé en Python qui est un langage de programmation d'une application logicielle. D'autres approches comme des modèles d'apprentissage en profondeur sont à l'étude.*
- *Mai 2023 : soumission des phases 2 et 3 des enregistrements audio à l'équipe informatique pour entraîner l'algorithme de transcription parole-texte. Ces données comprennent des textes contenant 73 583 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 11 heures et demie et le développement de la première version du modèle CMU Sphinx Automatic Speech Recognition.*
- *Juin 2023 : préparation de la Phase 4 comprenant des textes de 44 308 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 6 heures et le début du*

développement du deuxième modèle utilisant la fonction Automatic Speech Recognition de DeepSpeech qui est un logiciel de reconnaissance vocale.

- Février 2024 : soumission d'un rapport technique intérimaire à la Higher Education Commission sur l'état d'avancement du projet.

M. le président, je crois comprendre que suivant la soumission du dernier rapport, la Higher Education Commission a déjà déboursé les fonds nécessaires pour la phase suivante de ce projet, qui comprend, entre autres, de nouveaux recrutements pour –

- (a) étoffer l'équipe de traducteurs où l'équipe de recherche vise de constituer une base de données de 300 000 mots en Kreol "institutionnel" jusqu'à la fin du projet;
- (b) étoffer l'équipe responsable des enregistrements vocaux pour la partie speech-to-text du projet;
- (c) procéder à l'étape finale de la programmation aussi bien pour le spellchecker que pour le logiciel speech-to-text.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government has maintained its sustained efforts for the promotion of *Kreol Morisien* at all levels within our education system.

The House will recall that the successful implementation of *Kreol Morisien* at the upper secondary level in 2021 culminated in the first cohort of *Kreol Morisien* candidates sitting for the National School Certificate Examinations in 2023, that is, in Grade 11. Out of a total of 188 school candidates who took part in the 2023 National School Certificate Examinations in *Kreol Morisien* 2023, 181 were successful, representing a pass rate of 96.28%. The pass rate stands at 98% for girls and 93.75% for boys. It is also to be noted that for the National Certificate of Education Assessment 2023, that is, Grade 9, a total of 2021 pupils took part in the examination and the pass rate was 90.5%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these achievements are testimony to the progress made to integrate *Kreol Morisien* into our education system. Moreover, it serves as compelling evidence of our ability to surmount any challenge in assessing the subject and its accreditation, as previously highlighted by Cambridge International.

I must also add that for the current year, a total of 22,506 pupils of the Primary Sector, that is, from Grade 1 to 6, are enrolled for *Kreol Morisien*. Regarding the secondary sector, from Grade 7 to 11, a total of 8,200 pupils are currently enrolled for *Kreol Morisien*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the '*Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris*' has also continued its efforts to promote the *Kreol Morisien*. In fact, since 2022, it has started '*Lir-Ekrir Kreol Morisien*' courses, in collaboration with the University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Creole Speaking Union, for the general public, for people involved in administration and mass communication as well as for press people. Each year, the '*Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris*' celebrates major events such as *Zourne Internasional Kreol*, *Zourne Internasional Lang Maternel* and *Zourne Internasional Tradiksion* in collaboration with other *Kreol Morisien* stakeholders like Creole Speaking Union, University of Mauritius and the Department *Kreol Repiblik Moris* at the Mauritius Institute of Education.

Moreover, in 2023, the '*Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris*' has undertaken the publication of a *bilan* of the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* in schools and is currently updating the orthography of *Kreol Morisien*, which will represent major advancements pertaining not only to *Kreol Morisien* but also on the written usage of the language.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Ministerial Committee set up in 2021, under my Chair, to look into the development of a roadmap for the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* at the upper secondary school level, recommended that the University of Mauritius be designated as an awarding body for a National Certificate in *Kreol Morisien* and that *Kreol Morisien* be introduced as an optional examinable subject at National School Certificate level. As a result, the National Examinations Board was set up in 2023 and the University of Mauritius was conferred the power to award certificate in the secondary sub-sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has also concurrently invested heavily in the training of Educators in *Kreol Morisien*. In fact, some 407 Educators in *Kreol Morisien* have already been trained and the training of some 110 at different levels, that is, at Teacher's Diploma level, Bachelor of Education level and Post Graduate Certificate in Education level is still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also advised, that at the level of the National Assembly, the existing Hansard Production Cycle will have to be reviewed in order to accommodate *Kreol Morisien* and this will also require a phased training of staff and Members of the National Assembly, particularly, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairperson of Committees in the use of *Kreol Morisien* in the Assembly. I would like to mention here that based on the model of short course '*Lir-Ekrir Kreol Morisien*' offered by the University of Mauritius to the public, a

similar course would be devised for the Members of the National Assembly and the staff of the National Assembly.

In addition, the existing schemes of service of all the grades in the Hansard Unit will have to be amended to include *Kreol Morisien* as a qualification requirement.

I am also informed that the Centre for Innovation in Parliament of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in Geneva has agreed to extend assistance to the National Assembly, through a Peer Assist Program, drawing upon the experiences of the House of Commons of Canada and the Parliament of Scotland, both of which have undertaken similar projects.

I understand that the National Assembly is also planning to undertake benchmarking visits to the Lok Sabha in India where I am informed that 22 languages are allowed to be used. I am further informed that a similar visit is planned to the National Assembly of Seychelles. In Seychelles, according to Standing Orders, proceedings of the Assembly shall be conducted in Creole. However, a Member may, with the permission of the Speaker, express in English or French.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to extend its full support to sustain the groundwork undertaken by all the institutions concerned. The House will appreciate that it is only when all the conditions are met that the necessary amendments to the relevant section of the Constitution and the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly can be introduced.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le Premier ministre a repris les citations de feu Dev Virahsawmy et du Prof. Carpooran plusieurs fois, reprises ici-même dans cette Assemblée. De plus, il y a eu plusieurs recherches entreprises et des documents produits. Ma question est simple : le Premier ministre peut-il donner l'assurance à la Chambre que le *Kreol Morisien* va être introduit à l'Assemblée nationale avant la fin de son mandat ?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: En 2029.

Ms Anquetil: *Trop tard ! Trop tard !*

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member has not understood what I have stated in my answer. This is according to experts...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Mo konpran zis kreol mwa!*

The Prime Minister: Do you want to answer in my place?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Mo konpran zis kreol mwa!*

The Prime Minister: *Koze!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *L'arogance!*

The Prime Minister: This hon. Member does not have the decency to listen to my answer!

(Interruptions)

When she put her supplementary question, I did not make any comment. So, please, listen to what I have to say in reply to your supplementary question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have purposely taken the time of the House to explain in detail the different steps that we are taking in order to be able, at the end of the day, to introduce the *Kreol Morisien* in the National Assembly.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Échec lamentable!*

Mr Bérenger: Yes!

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr Speaker: Please, try to be polite! This is bad manners! Please, continue!

The Prime Minister: She is talking of *échec lamentable* and hon. Paul Bérenger says 'yes!'

Mr Bérenger: Yes! *Échec lamentable!*

The Prime Minister: Yes!

Hon. Members: *Échec !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! You do not have the right to reply!

(Interruptions)

You do not have the right to reply!

An hon. Member: 17!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You do not have any right! Please, continue!

Mr Balgobin: *Ramgoolam pou vine ...*

The Prime Minister: Let me remind hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie and particularly hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger of a question that was asked on 01 April 2008 by the then Member of Parliament, Mr Eric Guimbeau. The then Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, answered with regard to *Kreol Morisien*, and I quote –

“(...) Section 49 of the Constitution provides that the official language of the National Assembly shall be English and that any Member may address the Chair in French.

The question, therefore, of amending the Constitution to declare Creole as an official language does not arise at this point.”

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! *La honte!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *16 banané nanien!*

The Prime Minister: And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger asked a supplementary question: ‘Is the hon. Prime Minister prepared to review that?’ The answer of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam was...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Be li pa la!*

The Prime Minister: ... I quote –

“(...) the danger...

Li pa la? He is your leader! He is your leader!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: *La honte!*

The Prime Minister: You want him to become Prime Minister!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: *La honte!*

The Prime Minister: *Li pa la! Li pa la!*

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, both sides of the House!

An hon. Member: *To rev limem! To rev limem!*

The Prime Minister: Let me remind them what was the reply of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam at that time, and I quote part of his answer –

“The danger...

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: *2024 la!*

The Prime Minister: “The danger...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Vinn dan to lepok!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Evoluer!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Ekoute!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Ekoute seki to leader inn dir !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: “(...) the danger I think is, if we start using Creole here, everybody is going to swear at each other ...”

(Interruptions)

Because - Mr Speaker, Sir - it is easier to swear in Creole than in English or French. And I think there is a danger that the level – already we see what the level is sometimes – might get even worse.”

Ms J. Bérenger: *Gro zoure finn ena...*

An hon. Member: Shame!

The Prime Minister: Can you imagine, what I would say, the frivolous reasons put forward by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam to say: ‘no, we are not going to introduce Creole as an official language and, therefore, cannot be used in the National Assembly’. I just wanted to say that because he is their leader; they want him to become the Prime Minister of this country!

An hon. Member: *Li pas la !*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: They are saying he is not here! He is not here, but he is there with you!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind also...

An hon. Member: *Maryaz pankor fer, pe rod fer program!*

The Prime Minister: ... what are the measures that have been taken. It is an ongoing process. It cannot happen *du jour au lendemain*. Let us take the example of, as I quoted, India. In India, do you know how long it has taken for them to be able to allow other languages to be spoken? Because there is all to do with logistics also at the level of the National Assembly. In Seychelles also, since they got independence and since they made Creole become the official language – in 1978, I believe – how long it has taken for them to prepare and to officialise a dictionary in Creole itself before Creole becomes an official language in Parliament. So, there is a lot of work to be done and I have enumerated in my answer all the measures that are being taken.

Now the hon. Member is asking me whether I can give an assurance. You know, there have been other previous governments. I don't know how many years they have been in government; they have not been able to do anything about it. We are doing it, and I hope that there will come a time when *Kreol Morisien* will be able to be spoken.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

An hon. Member: *Ki lamerdman tonn al rode la !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Programme gouvernemental!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Get to ban kestion kine poser!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised...

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Both sides of the House, order! Let me continue.

The Table has been advised that PQ B/23 will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. PQ B/31 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. PQ B/39 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. PQ B/65 will be replied by hon. Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance.

Also, PQs B/2, B/4, B/6, B/7, B/9, B/10, B/15, B/16, B/17, B/43, B/45, /48 and B/62 have been withdrawn.

I now call hon. Bhagwan!

HORSE RACING SEASON 2024 – AUDIT & CONSTRUCTION OF DORMITORIES

(No. B/21) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the opening of the Horse Racing Season 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority/Horse Racing Division, information as to if –

- (a) a full-fledged audit has been carried out to ensure the security of all stakeholders and the public and, if so, by whom, giving details thereof, and
- (b) the People’s Turf PLC has been authorised to construct dormitories at the Champ de Mars and, if so, indicating when the necessary application has been made and approved.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la *GRA* contribue à assurer la sécurité et la sureté de tous les acteurs des courses hippiques présents sur l’hippodrome du Champ de Mars.

En vertu de l’article 93 de la *GRA Act*, il est exigé que toutes les personnes exerçant des activités liées aux courses hippiques soient titulaires d’une licence de gestion personnelle en cour de validité pour pouvoir exercer leurs activités dans le secteur des courses hippiques.

Cette licence de gestion personnelle n’est délivrée par la *GRA* qu’après que celle-ci s’est assurée que le titulaire de la licence est une personne digne de confiance. Si un titulaire de licence est impliqué dans un comportement ou des

actions assimilables à la violence et susceptible d’affecter la sécurité des parties prenantes du secteur des courses de chevaux, le conseil d’administration de la *GRA* peut prendre des mesures disciplinaires en vertu de l’article 99 de la *GRA Act* en suspendant ou en révoquant la licence de gestion personnelle de l’opérateur, de sorte qu’il ne pourra plus exercer ses activités dans le secteur des courses de chevaux.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, je suis informé par la Gambling Regulatory Authority qu’en vertu de la *GRA Act*, il n’y a pas d’obligation légale

imposée à la *GRA* ou à sa division des courses de chevaux d'effectuer un audit complet concernant la sécurité des parties prenantes et du public à l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars. L'obligation concernant la sécurité du public et des parties prenantes à l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars est imposée à l'organisateur des courses de chevaux pendant toute la durée de la saison des courses. La même pratique était applicable lorsque les courses de chevaux étaient organisées par le *Mauritius Turf Club* dans le passé.

M. le président, l'article 31(1) de la *GRA Act* prévoit ce qui suit concernant les devoirs et obligations imposés à un organisateur des courses hippiques quant à la sécurité sur l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars. Un organisateur de courses de chevaux doit, en ce qui concerne une course organisée sur l'hippodrome qu'il gère, veiller à ce que l'hippodrome soit en bon état en prévoyant une surface de course lisse et sûre et des bandes de roulements et des bandes extérieures sûres et sécurisées, assurer la conformité avec les exigences applicables en matière de santé et de sécurité. Dès le début la saison des courses 2024, la *GRA* s'assurera que son titulaire de licence, à savoir le *People's Turf PLC* en sa qualité d'organisateur des courses de chevaux, s'acquitte efficacement de ses responsabilités concernant l'organisation des courses de chevaux sous tous ses aspects, y compris la sécurité, le confort et l'hygiène conformément aux conditions de sa licence.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, je suis informé par la *GRA* qu'elle n'est pas impliquée dans le processus d'octroi d'une autorisation pour quelque type de construction que ce soit à l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars ou ailleurs et n'a donc pas d'information à ce sujet.

Merci.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre est au courant ou aura-t-il le temps de faire un petit tour au Champ de Mars ? L'état de décrépitude qu'est devenu le Champ de Mars, patrimoine national, depuis que le *People's Turf* a pris la responsabilité, a eu la responsabilité d'organiser des courses. Le ministre aura-t-il le temps ou demanderait-il ses officiers ou à la *GRA* d'aller faire un tour aujourd'hui, d'aller voir l'état non seulement des infrastructures mais aussi au niveau de la sécurité, les barrières etc ? Il n'y en a plus et c'est un problème réel de sécurité pour les membres du public aujourd'hui et aussi en vue de l'ouverture de la saison des courses.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de répondre à la question et je ferai part à la GRA des demandes de l'honorable membre de l'opposition et on verra ce qu'il me donnera comme réponse.

Mr Bhagwan: Au vu et au su de tout le monde, il y a une construction qui se fait des dortoirs des travailleurs étrangers, supposément, par *People's Turf* et nous savons tous qui est le magnat de ce *People's Turf*. Le ministre peut-il faire enquêter, demander à la *GRA*, quand même cette organisation qui est maintenant responsable du Champ de Mars au niveau de l'infrastructure, COIREC, qui tombe sous votre responsabilité ? Est-ce que le ministre est disposé à demander à son collègue, le ministre des Administrations régionales, de demander à la municipalité de Port-Louis si la municipalité a délivré des permis officiels où il y a une demande de permis pour la construction de ces dortoirs qui se fait d'une façon illégale parce que ce monsieur croit qu'il est protégé par l'État ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne vais pas aller dans tous les détails que vient de suggérer l'honorable membre de l'opposition parce que s'il a eu un permis, ce n'est pas illégal. Je vais, par conséquent, demander aux autorités qui s'occupent de la délivrance des permis de construction des dortoirs pour avoir quelques éléments dessus. En tout cas, dans la réponse que j'ai donnée à la Chambre, j'avais demandé, parce que la question était concernant la *GRA*, est-ce que la *GRA* donne cette autorisation ? Je tiens à assurer le membre de l'opposition que ce n'est pas la fonction de la *GRA* de donner ce type d'autorisation.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TEXTBOOKS' DELIVERY DELAYS – TENDER EXERCISE – ACTIONS TAKEN

(No. B/22) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the supply of textbooks for primary and secondary students, she will state –

- (a) when the tender exercise therefor was launched, indicating the –
 - (i) names of the bidders and the successful one;

- (ii) contract value thereof and;
 - (iii) table a copy of the contract, together with its conditions, and
- (b) if she has been informed of delays thereof, indicating the remedial actions taken.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to PQs B/22 and B/54 together as they relate to the same subject.

I am informed that seven separate bidding exercises were launched by the Ministry for the procurement of textbooks for primary and secondary sectors for the academic year as follows

—

- (i) textbooks for primary grades 1-6 on 09 June 2023;
- (ii) textbooks for secondary mainstream grades 7-9 on 01 August 2023;
- (iii) textbooks for secondary extended grades 7-9+ on 3 August 2023;
- (iv) textbooks for holistic education programme and Kreol Rodrige grades 1-6 on 14 September 2023 and relaunched on 15 September 2023;
- (v) enlarged textbooks Grades 1-6 and Grades 7-9+ parts 1 and 2 on 18 October 2023, and
- (vi) the textbooks for primary Grades 1-6 part 2 on 06 November 2023.

Furthermore, the Government Printing Department was entrusted with the printing of 12 titles for Grade 3 part 1 textbooks on 17 April 2023.

With your permission, I am tabling the information regarding the names of all the bidders, the successful ones and the contract values. As for part (a)(iii) of PQ B/22, I am tabling copies of documents issued to the successful bidders. I am informed that for such procurement exercises, the letters of acceptance together with the offer and the bidding documents constitute a binding agreement between the Ministry and the successful bidders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b) of PQ B/22, I am informed that for the primary sector, there has been no major delay in the delivery of textbooks except for the textbooks of holistic education programme for which tenders had to be relaunched. Delays have occurred in the delivery of textbooks for secondary sector as there was a challenge filed by one aggrieved bidder at the Ministry on 20 October 2023 after which he also applied to the Independent Review Panel for a review of the decision. It was however rejected by the panel and subsequently on 17 November 2023, the contract was awarded to the successful bidders. Furthermore, one of the suppliers encountered technical issues regarding the printing equipment which remained out of order for several weeks, delaying the process further.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the delay in the delivery of textbooks was reported to my Office, the Zone Directors and Rectors were instructed to arrange for copies of relevant chapters of the textbooks which are all available online to be provided to students pending the delivery of the textbooks and the officers responsible for procurement were instructed to monitor closely the delivery of the remaining textbooks with a view to expediting matters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are 21 titles out of 206 for the primary sector and 33 titles out of 216 of the secondary sector which are pending and yet to be delivered.

The exercise is expected to be completed by next week.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is obvious that the monitoring of the supply of textbooks was also not adequately done and the whole process is being monitored clearly and reviewed, and the Supervising Officer of my Ministry has been asked to ensure that this is effected promptly to avoid any such delays in the delivery of textbooks.

Mr Ameer Meea: M. le président, il est inconcevable de voir ce même scénario se répéter chaque année pour les Grades 7, 8 et 9 alors que le premier trimestre tire à sa fin.

Therefore, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister why is it that the Ministry of Education persists in giving the contract to only one or two suppliers when clearly this supplier, year after year, is unable to deliver according to his contract, according to his engagement. Is it not time to review the whole process of procurement for more transparency in terms of tender exercise, that is, chances be given to several suppliers, not only to one or two?

Mr Speaker: You made your point.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just tabled the documents. In fact, there are a number of suppliers who have come for the bidding. It is an open bidding exercise and there has absolutely been no opacity in the whole process. It has been very transparent. As I have just mentioned in my reply, I have asked the Supervising Officer of my Ministry to monitor and review the whole process to ensure that there is no such recurrence, that is, delays in the supply of textbooks.

Mr Speaker: The next question will go to hon. Bodha.

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether she can lay on the Table of the National Assembly, a copy of all the titles which have been ordered, the number of copies which have been provided to children, and the number of children who have not received any of the books which they should have been entitled to?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just tabled all the documents required. What I want to stress is that all grades in all schools have received textbooks. As I have just mentioned, if I go back to my answer, out of 206 titles, 21 are missing for the primary sector because of the re-launching of the exercise, and 33 titles, out of 216 titles, for the secondary sector.

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

Mr Ameer Meea: *Enn sel supplémentaire ? Enn zafer importan sa ! Pena livres dan lekol !*

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

On resuming at 2.45 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! MP Uteem!

CYCLONE BELAL – DAMAGED PROPERTIES – FINANCIAL COMPENSATIONS

(No. B/23) **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 households whose property have been damaged during the passage of cyclone Belal, he will state if consideration will be given to provide an adequate amount of financial compensations thereto and, if not, why not.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House has been advised that I will be answering the question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the Private Notice Question, in as much as this question has not been withdrawn, there might be some repetition, and I do apologise to you, Mr Speaker, Sir, and to Members of the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House should recall that the island of Mauritius was under the direct influence of tropical cyclone Belal as from Saturday, 13 January 2024, when a Class I Warning was issued at around 10 a.m. As the cyclone approached our island, the Class II and then a Class III Warning were issued on Monday 15 January, culminating in a Class IV Warning with cyclonic conditions prevailing on the island until Tuesday 16 January.

As we are all aware, cyclone Belal wreaked havoc across the island, causing significant damage to property and pain and suffering to numerous of our compatriots. Moreover, it has now become clear to one and all that climate change is upon us, making weather patterns and their consequences even more unpredictable than ever before. This includes cyclone paths, intensity and impact in terms, for instance, of rainfall and consequential flooding.

Government has not been insensitive to the hardship caused by cyclone Belal and a host of measures were taken to alleviate the sufferings and the stress of those afflicted by this calamity. As is normal practice, shelter in social and community centres was offered to individuals and families whose dwelling place became uninhabitable, that is, damage to property in terms of the question put, as a result of the cyclone. To them, the basic necessities were immediately provided on an ongoing basis.

Moreover I am informed that the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity has disbursed Rs388,750 in terms of Cyclone Allowance to some 392 families and Rs6,437,700 as Flood Allowance to 3,709 families.

Furthermore, Government has provided an amount of Rs7.5 million in the nature of food packs to some 3,750 families. In addition, Government acknowledged the fact that the prolonged interruption of electric power supply caused significant loss in terms of food stuff. Accordingly, a one-off financial assistance of Rs2,000 is being provided to households having been deprived of electricity for more than 12 consecutive hours during the passage of the cyclone. Thus, I am given to understand that as at date, a total amount of Rs77.6 million has been disbursed to 38,821 subscribers and I understand this is still ongoing.

I am also informed that as at date financial assistance to the tune of about Rs108 million has already been extended to some 7,296 farmers affected by the cyclone and registered with the Small Farmers Welfare Fund and the Farmers Protection Scheme; we are talking of damage to property, this amount comprises –

- (a) payment of a one-off financial assistance of Rs10,000 per arpent to non-sugar planters including tea growers;
- (b) payment of a special support to planters for damaged plastic or net covers of their sheltered farms;
- (c) a new loan scheme to planters for the rehabilitation of sugarcane, vegetables, fruits and flower cultivation, and hydroponic units affected by cyclone Belal;
- (d) Rs50,000 per planter for repairs to damaged Green Houses;
- (e) free distribution of seeds to affected planters;
- (f) payment between Rs10,000 and Rs25,000 to breeders for deceased animals, as well as payment of a financial support of Rs5,000 per bee colony loss.

As for property of fisherwomen and fishermen, I understand that there is a Scheme under the Fisherman Welfare Fund, providing for compensation of Rs10,000 for damaged boats. Following the passage of cyclone Belal, 51 cases have been registered and are being processed.

As regards damages caused to motor vehicles during the passage of cyclone Belal, I am informed that Government has, as at date, disbursed some Rs26.7 million as compensation to 385 beneficiaries. There are 734 cars which have incurred total loss and there are 986 pending cases awaiting information from either insurers or government valuers.

As regards residential property, assessment of the extent and value of damages attributable to the cyclone is a very complex issue. While some affected property owners chose to report the matter to the police immediately after the cyclone, many *bona fide* individuals did not do so, making it extremely difficult –

- (1) to determine the precise number of *bona fide* victims of the cyclone;
- (2) to effect a contemporaneous assessment of damages, and
- (3) to define the appropriate nature and extent of assistance and/or compensation called for.

Nonetheless, Government decided to provide relief to those in need of assistance in different ways. For instance, a scheme operated by the National Empowerment Foundation was extended to the poorest section of the community, providing soft loans up to a maximum of Rs130,000 for repair work to their homes, made necessary by the cyclone's impact. Secondly, the existing building material scheme at the National Housing Development Company Ltd is available to households whose homes have been affected by cyclone Belal, subject to specific conditions of eligibility to guard against abuse.

Moreover, the Mauritius Housing Company Limited (MHC) has come up with a new loan scheme whereby affected households may contract loans of up to 250,000 at an interest rate of 5% per annum with a repayment period of 10 years to undertake repair works to their property.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all the above measures reflect Government's constant and unconditional commitment to help cyclone victims recover after the passage of Belal and to guard against calamities flowing from cyclones and other natural disasters in the age of climate change.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the floods in March 2013, several households in the vicinity of Canal Dayot received Rs100,000 per family from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. Similarly, following the flood in Fond du Sac in 2019, victims received Rs6,000 per adult,

Rs3,000 per children. So, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, why has no fund been used from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund to compensate the victims who have lost a lot of properties, furniture, appliances and food stuff during the cyclone Belal?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I have endeavoured to explain, this is a very complex issue. In the case of Canal Dayot, we spoke of a specific region where it was relatively easy to ascertain who the affected persons or households were and the same holds for Fond du Sac. In this particular event, it's the whole of the island that was affected and the hon. gentleman will agree with me that it is not as easy a task to determine. I don't want to repeat my question but I stated that some people reported the matter to the police immediately after, in which case, they were issued with a form. In some cases, the police went on site and visually gave a first-hand account of what had happened. Many persons, *bona fide* persons, did not go to the police. So, as at now, to ascertain the precise number in each region of the country is not an easy task.

Secondly, there has been no contemporaneous assessment of damages which makes it extremely difficult for the authorities and thirdly, to determine on a case to case basis, unless it is suggested that there should be a blanket approach irrespective of extent of verifiable damage to define the nature and the extent of assistance to be provided is very difficult. Should the hon. gentleman have a specific proposal, then I shall be very happy to communicate it to Government.

Mr Speaker: So, the time taken by this question...

(Interruptions)

Bear with me. I am talking. You are talking.

Mr Uteem: We are doing a proposal.

Mr Speaker: Yes, whatever. This is between you politicians, okay?

(Interruptions)

Yes, quiet. So, I was telling you the amount of time that this question has taken will impede other questions. So, I stop there. I will move to the next question.

MP Foo Kune-Bacha!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 – ROADS DAMAGES – REMEDIAL ACTIONS

(No. B/24) Mrs K. 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 the roads in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin and Petite-Rivière, he will state if a survey has been carried out to identify the damages caused thereto after the passage of cyclone Belal, indicating the remedial measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the Municipal Council of Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill that following the passage of cyclone Belal on Tuesday 16 January 2024, its officers conducted surveys across the town, including the region falling under its jurisdiction as soon as the safety bulletin was waived in order to determine the extent of damage caused to the road infrastructure as per its established protocols. The survey revealed that damages had been caused as follows –

1. Due to water infiltration below the road surface, extensive damage has been caused in five roads in the region of Morcellement Chapman View, Coromandel, necessitating complete reconstruction of these roads as per the list at Annex 1, which I am going to circulate.
2. Damage to 14 roads as per list at Annex 2, necessitating extensive cut and patch work.
3. Three roads as per Annex 3 have been damaged requiring resurfacing works.

I am informed that cost estimate for the construction of the five roads which were extremely damaged in the region of *Morcellement* Chapman View, Coromandel, is Rs20 m. and financial clearance has already been obtained for the work. Bids have been launched on 01 March 2024 and the offers received are under evaluation. As regard to the 14 roads necessitating extensive cut and patch works, the cost estimate is Rs508,875 and financial clearance has been obtained. Bidding documents are being finalised and bids will be launched on 27 March 2024.

However, minor patching works have already been completed by the in-house labour the Council. Thirdly, the cost estimate for resurfacing of the three roads is Rs1,180,100 and financial clearance has been obtained. Work order has been issued on 15 March 2024 and the contractor is expected to start the work on 26 March 2024, that is, today. Thank you.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: D'après la réponse de l'honorable ministre, il est au courant de l'ampleur des dégâts de certains chemins, notamment à Chapman View à Coromandel où les chemins sont effondrés avec d'énormes crevasses à presque un mètre de profondeur. Puis-je demander à l'honorable ministre donc quand vont débiter ces travaux à Chapman View et quand ces travaux seront complétés ?

Dr. Husnoo: As I have just mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, bids have been launched on 01 March and offers received are under evaluation now. Once we have evaluated, obviously, we are going to start the work.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Est-ce que l'honorable ministre a l'intention de demander qu'un rapport soit fait pour situer les responsabilités sur l'effondrement de ces chemins qui sont de toute évidence le résultat d'une mauvaise construction et qui représente un gaspillage d'argent public pour réparer les erreurs d'une construction mal faite ?

Dr. Husnoo: We will have to look into it. I mean, if these roads have been a built a long time ago, it will be a little difficult to situate the responsibility now. Whereas if it is a recent construction, we will look into it, obviously.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Dr. Aumeer!

DENGUE FEVER – PREPAREDNESS PLAN & SAFETY MEASURES

(No. B/25) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Dengue fever, he will state the preparedness plan devised by his Ministry as at 05 February 2024 in relation thereto, indicating the –

(a) number of –

- (i) fogging machine available in use and trained personnel for the manning thereof, further indicating the frequency and timing of fogging, and
 - (ii) mosquito coils and repellent cream in stock at his Ministry available for distribution to the general public, and
- (b) number of active cases and deaths related to Dengue as to date.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, Sir, I shall be replying to this parliamentary question.

Dengue fever is caused by the dengue virus, which is primarily transmitted to humans through the bite of the infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. These mosquitoes are most active during daytime, particularly early morning and late afternoon. Dengue is not directly contagious from person to person, but spreads through the bite of infected mosquitoes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I am informed that since many years back, there is an operational plan for the prevention and control of Chikungunya, Dengue and Zika in our Republic and this plan has been prepared by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The plan was last updated in September 2021. It comprises the operational procedures for managing outbreaks, including overall planning, coordination for logistics of an outbreak, outbreak investigation, management of cases, situation monitoring, adult and larval control, social mobilisation and communication strategies.

Another component of the plan also encompasses the surveillance task for inter-epidemic period. Since the resurgence of Dengue in December last year, relevant actions were initiated as per the plan taking into consideration the specificities of the actual epidemic.

With regard to part (a)(i) of the question, I am informed that there are some 261 hand-held Thermal Fogging machines and two Vehicle Mounted Fogging machines currently in use.

As at date, the Ministry has 96 already trained personnel from the Public Health and Food Safety Department who usually carry out a routine vector control activities during inter-epidemic period, for example, if there is a detection of an imported case. Due to the evolution of the epidemic trend, the manpower was reinforced with the collaboration of the Ministry of Agro-

Industry and Food Security, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Mauritius Police Force and other institutions.

A total of 378 personnel have been mobilised for vector control activities. The additional personnel have, of course, been trained prior to starting the vector control exercise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that this fight against Dengue is not just restricted to fogging activities which mainly kill adult mosquitoes, but the fight also includes larviciding and destruction of mosquito breeding sites. Larviciding is carried out by spraying larvicide solution in stagnant water, water that cannot be disposed of and also by the destruction of mosquito breeding sites through the elimination of the stagnant water. For example, if you have a flowerpot which has water accumulated in it, it is as simple as tipping the pot over and getting rid of the water.

The established protocol for fogging activities is based on the activities of the female mosquitoes as has been advised by the entomologist of the Ministry of Health. This practice has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation consultants. Fogging can be carried out from 05.30 in the morning to 9 o'clock in the morning and 03.30 to 8pm in the afternoon. However, it has been deemed appropriate that larviciding activities be carried out every day in the morning and fogging activities be carried out in the afternoon from the hours 3.30 to 8 pm.

With regard to the frequency to repeat the fogging activities, the protocol defers based on the number of cases detected in that area. During the larviciding activities, an inspection of the premises is conducted and inhabitants are also educated on the elimination of mosquito breeding sites. Sensitisation of the population is also carried out via the Non-communicable Disease and Health Promotion Unit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to remind this august Assembly how crucial community involvement happens to be in the fight against Dengue. Without the support of the population, we will fail against its epidemic and therefore I thank the hon. Member for putting the question in the first place and I choose this platform to make an appeal to the whole population to ensure that they take the appropriate measures to keep their yards clean and to get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as to part (a)(ii) of the question, the House may wish to note that as at date, 25,000 boxes of mosquito coils as well as 618,750 repellent creams have been procured. In addition, 11,592 repellent lotions/jellies have been received as a donation from the World Health Organisation. The mosquito repellents are being distributed on a priority basis to the persons infected, as well as, in hotspot regions in an attempt to circumvent the spread of the disease.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, as at 24 March this year, there are 334 active cases. Unfortunately, four patients have passed away due to the Dengue Fever since the beginning of the year.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. I do not know whether the hon. Minister may have the information but what was the preparedness plan with regard to the therapeutic need of blood products such as platelets and fresh frozen plasma which are paramount in the treatment of severe cases of Dengue which was so scarce during the peak of the epidemic?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not privy to that level of information and I would invite the hon. member to appreciate and bring a substantive question to the substantive Minister whenever he is back.

Mr Speaker: So, let us move to the next question. Before moving to the next question, let me announce that PQs B/26, B/30, B/35, B/52, B/57, B/58, B/68, and B/75 have been withdrawn.

I now call hon. Abbas Mamode!

METHADONE TREATMENT – YOUNG DRUG USERS – INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATION

(No. B/26) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Methadone treatment, he will state if the induction thereon is being extended to drug users as from the age of 15 years and, if so, indicate if same is recommended internationally.

(Withdrawn)

**CYCLONE BELAL – DAMAGED ROADS’ RECONSTRUCTION – FUNDS
ALLOCATED**

(No. B/27) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to roads damaged with the passage of cyclone Belal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to the quantum of fund allocated thereto for the resurfacing thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Port Louis that following the cyclone Belal on 15 January 2024, several roads were damaged as a result of flooding. After the cyclone, all local authorities were requested to carry out a survey to assess the extent of the damages caused to secondary and lateral roads under their respective jurisdictions.

Following the survey, the Municipal Council of Port Louis submitted a list of 11 roads that were damaged and needed to be resurfaced or reconstructed to the tune of Rs41,165,500. A request for funds was submitted to the Ministry of Finance and the financial clearance was obtained on 14 February 2024. I am tabling a list of the 11 roads that needed to be resurfaced and I have been told that bids are being prepared and they are going to be launched pretty soon.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the Minister satisfied of the volume of work that has been done till now?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as we know after the cyclone, there was a lot of work as not only the roads but the drains were also damaged. So, there was a lot of work done by the Municipal and District Council as well.

It is taking a bit of time but there have been a lot of road and drain damages. The work is progressing.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

KANWAR FIRE INCIDENT, ARSENAL – BEREAVED FAMILIES – ASSISTANCE & SUPPORT

(No. B/28) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the fire incident involving a *kanwar* in Arsenal on Sunday 03 March 2024, she will state the assistance and support extended by her Ministry to the members of the six bereaved families and the twenty-two injured pilgrims and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I would once again extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved families.

I wish to inform the House that as soon as this tragic event was reported on Sunday 03 March this year, officers of my Ministry immediately intervened to contact the six bereaved families. I am informed that site visits have been conducted by the Family Counselling Officers and Psychologists of my Ministry on 04 and 05 March at the residence of all the bereaved families at Triolet, Trou aux Biches and Souillac where family members were provided with in-depth psychological counselling and, of course, follow up is being maintained in all the cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that a Psychologist of my Ministry conducted a site visit at the SSR National Hospital on 04 March to provide psychological support to the victims who were injured during this accident. However, the officer was informed that the victims who were admitted thereat were already discharged except for two of them. The officer was also apprised that all those who were injured have been attended to by both the Psychiatrist and the Clinical Psychologist of the Ministry of Health and Wellness and at their end, follow up was being maintained as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness that a psychological evaluation was done to determine the most appropriate intervention in each case. Emotional support was provided in helping the individuals to stabilise from the acute grief reaction.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, ce tragique incident a bouleversé l'île Maurice entière. La ministre...

Mr Speaker: No, this is a supplementary question! Put your supplementary! You asked for permission. I allowed you to put a supplementary question. So, put your question!

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I thank you to understand.

Ms Anquetil: La ministre peut-elle informer la Chambre la raison pour laquelle elle n'a pas considéré nécessaire de rendre visite à la famille du mineur décédé et aux autres mineurs blessés dans ce tragique incendie de *kanwar*, étant donné que son ministère est responsable des mineurs? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Parliamentary Question that has been put forward by the Fourth Member for Vacoas and Floréal is quite specific and self-explanatory and I have provided the answers pertaining to that Parliamentary Question.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Pann ale! Pann ale!*

Mr Speaker: Okay, let us move to the next question!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: *Pa kuman zot al fer politik!*

Mr Speaker: I will call MP Nagalingum!

Ms Anquetil: *Li pann ale mem!*

ROSE HILL & SURROUNDINGS – STRAY DOGS PROLIFERATION

(No. B/29) **Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to stray dogs in the region of Rose-Hill and its surroundings, he will state the measures taken to address the proliferation thereof.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! What is happening?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the source of the dog population problem in our country is the high number of unsterilised dogs across the island. Numerous pet owners do not sterilise their pets and allow them to roam freely in their localities.

The unwanted puppies born from their pets are often dumped and abandoned, thus adding up to the population of stray and free-roaming dogs in Mauritius.

In order to tackle the free-roaming dog population, the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare (MSAW) has implemented the “Sustainable Project for the Dog Population Control in Mauritius” since June 2022 whereby free mass sterilisation of dogs is carried out across the island.

Funds to the tune of Rs30 million have been earmarked under the National Environment and Climate Change Fund for implementation of the above project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the MSAW has, as at date, sterilised 10,480 dogs. I am also informed that the MSAW organised 38 sterilisation campaigns of dogs in the area of Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill wherein 609 owned dogs have been sterilised. Moreover, the MSAW has carried out a total of 74 catch-neuter-release interventions in the area.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the MSAW, in collaboration with the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin-Rose-Hill, will hold a major mass sterilisation campaign in the month of April 2024. The activities will comprise free registration, free sterilisation and adoption of dogs. The target of this campaign is to sterilise around 200 owned dogs during the event.

The hon. Member will also appreciate that numerous interventions are done in the region by the MSAW whereby cases pertaining to aggressive dogs are handled to ensure the safety of the public and injured dogs are also rescued. Furthermore, following a complaint made by the hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo. With regard to the presence of stray dogs in the yard of Stanley Municipal Centre and Pre-Primary School, two interventions were carried out by the MSAW.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would therefore like to make an appeal to the residents of the locality of Rose-Hill and its surroundings to take advantage of this campaign and have their dogs sterilised freely.

On a final note, I would like to again bring to the attention of my colleagues and public at large that the sterilisation of dogs is a *sine qua non* for a controlled dog population in our country.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Nagalingum: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister aware that on 19 February this year, several children attending the Municipal Pre-Primary School of Avenue Berthaud, Rose-Hill, were severely bitten by fleas transmitted by numerous stray dogs which are permanently present in the yard of the school?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned in my reply that hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, in fact, did contact me personally and straight away, I called the MSAW and asked them to intervene, which they did. In fact, on two occasions, they did intervene at that precise location to address this issue.

Mr Nagalingum: Can the hon. Minister tell us if he has an updated statistics in terms of number of stray dogs in Mauritius, and what is the responsibility of MSAW and its annual budget?

Mr Speaker: But your question was related to Rose Hill and its surroundings. Now you are asking a question for the whole...

Mr Nagalingum: ...

Mr Speaker: No, no, I am the Speaker! Excuse me. I have to regulate. I don't know if the Minister has the reply for the whole country, whereas you put your initial question for one region. You see, you are intelligent to understand this point that I am making.

Okay, let's us move on to the next question! MP Dr. Boolell!

**CEB & COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL (MAURITIUS) LTD – POWER PURCHASE
AGREEMENT**

(No. B/30) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to when the latest Agreement was signed between the Board and Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd., indicating the total amount of legal fee paid therefor to date, giving details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

RIVULET TERRE ROUGE ESTUARY BIRD SANCTUARY – OIL SPILL

(No. B/31) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary, he will state if –

- (a) consideration will be given for the setting up of an inter-Ministerial Committee to assess the impact of the oil spill thereat and to devise –
 - (i) an oil contingency plan, and
 - (ii) a rehabilitation plan with a view to coming up with an environmental and social governance report of the industries in the nearby zone, and
- (b) sanctions have been taken against the polluters thereof.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/31.

Provisions have been made under the Environment Protection Act (EPA) for the mechanism to deal with an oil spill. A National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP) was developed in 2003 and reviewed and updated last year, to provide an integrated organisational framework for the effective and prompt response to oil spill pollution. The NOSCP sets out the roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities before, during and after an oil spill. It also makes provision for a National Oil Spill Coordination Committee (NOSCC) to be constituted to, *inter alia*, coordinate with all stakeholders regarding remedial and containment measures, advise on

the scientific and technical aspects of environmental protection and management, and recommend clean-up operations and measures for the disposal of pollutants.

In line with the existing protocol, Mr Speaker, Sir, the NOSCC was set up following both oil spill incidents, that is, from Marine Biotechnology Products Ltd (MBPL) and Washright Services Ltd (WSL) in January and March, respectively.

This Inter-Ministerial Committee, chaired by the Director of Environment, comprises representatives of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre, the Special Mobile Force, the National Coast Guard, the Mauritius Ports Authority, the Road Development Authority, the National Parks and Conservation Service, the Forestry Service and the Water Resources Unit of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities.

In planning the response to both incidents, the Committee assessed the impacts on the Estuary in light of the findings of joint site visits carried out by public bodies concerned and on the basis of tests conducted by relevant authorities. These include –

- (i) water quality monitoring in Rivulet Terre Rouge and the Estuary;
- (ii) seawater quality monitoring and underwater ecological surveys;
- (iii) sediment testing;
- (iv) air quality monitoring, and
- (v) analyses of fish and shellfish specimen, daily monitoring of migratory bird species and monitoring of the health status of species growing in the Estuary.

To better gauge the impacts of the oil spills, monitoring exercises would be pursued by stakeholders in their respective field of expertise. Analyses would also be conducted to assess whether the food chain has been affected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a)(i) of the question, provision has been made in the NOSCP for clean-up strategies and removal of oil. In view that the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary

Bird Sanctuary is located within the port limit, the Port-Louis Harbour Oil Spill Response Plan would be activated forthwith in the event of any oil spill in the port area which may threaten the Estuary.

Notwithstanding existing legal provisions, my Ministry is envisaging to team up with the NPCS and other relevant authorities in regard to the drafting of an oil spill contingency plan dedicated for the Estuary.

As regards part (a)(ii) of the question, in line with instructions issued by my Ministry, MBPL submitted an Oil Spill Disposal and Remedial Plan to my Ministry on 24 January 2024. WSL has been requested to submit a remedial plan for the remaining works in the mangrove areas by the end of March.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the various oil spill incidents which have occurred over the past years have caused tremendous damage to our ecosystems. To hold polluters accountable for their actions, provisions relating to oil spill preparedness and response would be reinforced and new legal requirements with regard to environmental and social governance would be introduced in the context of the proposed review of the legislative framework governing environmental protection, very shortly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to part (b) of the question, an enquiry has been initiated by the Terre Rouge and Roche Bois Police Stations on the oil spill incidents. Concurrently, my Ministry is awaiting advice from the Attorney General's Office regarding relevant sections of the EPA under which the polluters could be held liable.

Pursuant to section 88 of the Act, the *Police de l'Environnement* issued a Fixed Penalty Notice of Rs25,000 to WSL for allowing oil to be deposited in Rivulet Terre Rouge.

Since the Forest and Reserves Act of 1983 has been contravened in both cases, sanctions are being also envisaged by the Forestry Service.

Dr. Boolell: Can we have a copy of the remedial plan till the Oil Contingency Plan is finalised?

Mr Ramano: Sorry, I did not understand.

Dr. Boolell: Can we have a copy of the remedial plan till the Oil Contingency Plan is finalised?

Mr Ramano: Il n'y a absolument aucun problème, M. le président. Comme je l'ai dit, le dernier NOSCP date de 2003, mais ce plan a été *reviewed and updated last year*. Si l'honorable membre souhaite avoir une copie de ce plan, cela ne me pose aucun problème, M. le président.

Dr. Boolell: *Merci*. Will the Minister inform the House if the Secretary General of the Convention on Ramsar Site has been apprised of the accident that happened in the Rivulet of Terre Rouge?

Mr Ramano: *Sorry*, je n'ai pas compris votre question, excusez-moi.

Dr. Boolell: Will the Minister inform the House if the Secretary General of the Convention Ramsar Site has been fully apprised of the incident?

Mr Ramano: Yes, the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary is a first Ramsar Site of international importance for Mauritius and that was designated on 30 May 2001. So, it covers an area of 26 hectares and is managed by the National Parks and Conservation Service. This site is known to harbour free endemic plants and is used to as feeding ground at least 14 species of migratory birds. Yes, Mauritius has rectified the Convention on Wetlands of international importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat Ramsar Convention in 2021. The National Parks Conservation Service of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security is the national focal point and all the necessary authorities have been duly contacted.

Dr. Boolell: ...the Secretary General...

Mr Ramano: Sure.

Mr Speaker: MP Lobine!

CAMP FOUQUEREAUX, BAZA LANE – ROAD DAMAGE

(No. B/32) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in

regard to the road at Baza lane at Camp Fouquereaux damaged since 15 January 2024 following the passage of cyclone Belal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to when rehabilitation, tarring and reconstruction works will be effected thereat, indicating the total costs to be incurred therefor, giving details thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix that the extension of Baza Lane at Camp Fouquereaux was undertaken by the National Development Unit in 2021.

Subsequently, the National Development Unit has informed that following a procurement exercise, the contract for the construction on Lachooa Lane and extension of Baza Lane at Camp Fouquereaux was awarded on 27 April 2021. The works started on 20 May 2021 and the intended completion date was 15 September 2021.

However, I am informed that the work could not start as the road alignment could not be provided by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix due to unavailability of a Sworn Land Surveyor. The project was consequently put on hold as from 20 May 2021 till 22 August 2022. The road alignment was confirmed by the Land Surveyor of the Council on 22 February 2022. The works started on 23 August 2022 and during that scarification and excavation works for the road, leakages were observed on the existing CWA pipes. The Central Water Authority had therefore to carry out the replacement of the existing pipes and same was completed on the 14 of April 2023. The road works were completed on 08 August 2023 by the contractor and handed over to the Council on 09 November 2023.

I am informed that after the passage of cyclone Belal, a stretch of 55 metres along Baza Lane had been damaged due to seepage of water under the road base. The contractor has already been instructed to carry out the remedial works on 18 March 2024 and the contractor has mobilised on site as from 25 March 2024 to complete the work by 08 April 2024.

Mr Speaker: MP Osman Mahomed!

NHDC LTD - MR R. A. M. - CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/33) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to Mr R. A. M., Chief Finance Officer of the National Housing Development Company Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the –

- (a) total remuneration being drawn by the latter, and
- (b) mode of recruitment resorted for the appointment of the incumbent.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Housing Development Company Ltd (NHDC) that in 2022, the Board of Directors decided to recruit a Chief Finance Officer for the NHDC and its subsidiary, the National Social Living Development Ltd (NSLD) to ensure good governance and transparency. I am further informed that a recruitment agency was for that purpose selected in early 2023 further to a bidding exercise.

According to information provided by the NHDC, the said recruitment agency proceeded to shortlist 12 potential candidates for the position followed by a further shortlisting exercise and interviews. I am given to understand that in February 2024, Mr R. A. M. was appointed Chief Finance Officer of the NHDC and of its subsidiary, the NSLD.

According to the NHDC, the relevant remuneration reflects the salary scale corresponding to the grading of internal positions and also takes into account the qualifications, experience, specific functions and salary benchmarking. The total monthly remuneration drawn by the incumbent is stated by the NHDC to be Rs252,000. This consists of a monthly package of Rs225,000, that includes extra hours, public holidays over time and weekends along with the travelling allowance of Rs25,000 per month for both commuted and official travelling and a monthly allowance of Rs2,000.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he is aware that the newly appointed CFO of the NHDC Ltd, Mr R. A. M., is the brother of the DPM's political activist and current board member...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me! Hon...

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, I withdraw that part. Okay!

Mr Speaker: No, excuse me.

(Interruptions)

I am the Speaker. I have the right. I am paid for that. When I start talking, you should stop. Okay? Let's agree on that. Okay? I am a very cool man.

Mr Osman Mahomed: So am I.

Mr Speaker: You are diverting from your main question. So, I allow you one supplementary. Put a straight forward question to the main question.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I am going to rephrase my first question so that it is compliant with your requirement.

Mr Speaker: But we don't have this in Parliament.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister...

Mr Speaker: Rephrasing or paraphrasing during question time does not exist.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay!

Mr Speaker: Either I allow you...

Mr Osman Mahomed: We will save time if you allow me to ask my question.

Mr Speaker: No, you will save time if you correct yourself.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I have agreed with you on this.

Mr Speaker: Okay, if you agree, go ahead. Put your question, straightforward!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, is in fact the brother of the current board member, Mr S. M.

M.?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the short answer is no, I am not aware. Now I have time and time again explained to the hon. gentleman in this House that the role of the Minister of Housing is neither to run the NHDC nor to interfere in the management of the NHDC. In fact, until the hon. gentleman put this question, I was not even aware that a CFO had been recruited earlier this year by the NHDC. Now, if the hon. gentleman has any doubt in his mind, a lurking doubt that there has been impropriety either on my part or on the part of any other official, I am inviting him here and now, to go out, to go to the relevant authorities whether it is the police, ICAC or whomsoever he considers appropriate and denounce the alleged impropriety.

Mr Speaker: Let's listen to MP Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

VEGETABLE IMPORT PERMITS – MARK-UP POLICY

(No. B/34) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to vegetables, he will state –

- (a) the number of permits granted for the importation thereof, and
- (b) amount thereof imported this year, indicating if a mark-up policy was applied to control the high price thereof.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that Mauritius is self-sufficient in most of fresh vegetables under normal climatic conditions. However, the volume produced varies according to seasons as well as prices which are according to demand and supply. Owing to our tropical climate and climate change, the island faces adverse weather conditions, impacting negatively on vegetable production. For instance, early this year, vegetable production was affected by more than 50% mainly due to cyclone Belal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the unforeseen shortage of vegetables on the local market at that time and to stabilise the consequential increase in prices, my Ministry initiated the actions through the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) to import fresh vegetables. On the other hand,

import permits are being granted all year round for the imports by private entities as various crops cannot be produced locally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect to part (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed that from January 2024 to 20 March 2024, the National Plant Protection Office (NPPO) of my Ministry issued 972 import permits for the importation of some 865 tonnes of vegetables, comprising carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, sweet pepper, lettuce, beans, beetroot, broccoli, fine herbs and chilli, out of which, imports by the AMB stand at 236 tonnes while the private sector imported 629 tonnes.

As local production of vegetables is expected to be back to normal by May 2024, no new imports will be made by that date. On the other hand, importation by regular private importers specific for the hospitality sector is being monitored closely by the NPPO.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the production of onions, potatoes and garlic is highly dependent on seasonality. Production season is from end of July to December for potatoes whereas for onions, it is from August to November.

In view of the fact that their storage lasts only for a few months, importation of same is undertaken by the AMB to ensure consistent supply to the market.

As regards strategic crops, I am also informed by the Agricultural Marketing Board that some 4,564 tonnes of onions and 3,806 tonnes of potatoes have been imported and the quantum imported for garlic amounts to 364 tonnes. At the moment, there is no shortage of these products and the local market is fully supplied with.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect of the mark-up policy, I wish to inform the House that all products imported by the AMB are sold at subsidised prices to the public, thus playing a key role in price stabilisation in the local market. A mark-up of around 22-25% is applied on the cost prices of potatoes and onions, as the wholesale price is fixed by the AMB and retail price is fixed by the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection. The auction prices and volume of locally produced vegetables traded at the National Wholesale Market are affixed on a daily basis on the website of the AMB. Hence, a comparison made in prices at the markets and supermarkets/hypermarkets shows a huge price difference.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to support the consumers at a time when the prices of vegetables went up following the passage of cyclone Belal, Government intervened through the AMB to import some highly consumed vegetables and put on sale at a reduced price and I can say, it brought some relief to the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the possibility of applying the same formula and mark-up policy as in the case of potatoes and onions to other vegetables is being looked into by my Ministry together with the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI), the Small Farmers Welfare Fund, Agricultural Marketing Board and the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection. All implications would have to be analysed to ensure a win-win situation for producers, consumers and stakeholders in the supply chain.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. He will agree with me that we have about 15 permits being allocated per day because you said 972 within two months. Are you confirming that you are granting 15 import permits to import vegetables per day on average?

Mr Seeruttun: I mean if you want to bring it to an average day, yes, that will be correct to say it. If you take the number of permits issued divided by the number of days during that period, you will come to that probably. I did not make that calculation though, I must say.

Mr Bodha: My question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that imported items, I am going to take two, a cabbage was sold at Rs300 in a supermarket and *patisson*, that is, custard squash was sold at Rs800. Can the Minister consider a mechanism together with the Minister of Commerce to see that such abusive prices cannot be practised in supermarkets in Mauritius for goods which are being imported?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that we are an island which is exposed to cyclones and other natural calamities. Every time we have been faced by those calamities, they had an impact on the production of vegetables and, of course, reflect on the price that has been practised. It is a question of supply and demand. That is why this time, at the level of the Government and the Ministry, we intervened to at least mitigate the price hike of certain highly consumed vegetables. In fact, for cabbage we did, through the AMB, import a certain quantity

and put it on sale at Rs50 per kilo at least to mitigate the high prices being practised by supermarkets. In fact, we did invite the consumers to go to those selling points of the AMB to buy those products that we imported and that are being sold at a subsidised price to alleviate the issue of high prices being practised by some supermarkets.

**SILVER BANK – PUBLIC FUNDS DEPOSITS – MATURITY & INTEREST
RATE**

(No. B/35) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Silver Bank, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the amount of public funds, deposited therein by Government, parastatal and government companies, indicating in each case the –

- (a) name of the depositor;
- (b) amount and date the deposits were effected, and
- (c) maturity date and expected interest rate to be earned on each deposit.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Ms J. Bérenger!

**FLORÉAL STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL – RECURRENT POWER CUTS –
MEASURES**

(No. B/36) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the recurrent disruption in electricity supply at the Floréal State Secondary School, she will state the actions that have been taken in relation thereto.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to parliamentary questions B/36 and B/73 together as they relate to the same issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the recurrent disruption of electricity supply at the Floréal State Secondary School was due to the theft of electrical cables. I am informed that on Friday, 11 November 2022 during school holidays, officers of the Energy Services Division of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development carried out a site visit and noted that electrical wires had been stolen from an electric panel at the school resulting in the interruption of power supply in the activity room, chemistry and physics labs. On resumption of school, arrangements were made to restore power supply in these specialist rooms and laboratories.

I am further informed that a second theft occurred on Friday 22 September 2023 whereby one of the main cables from the transformer room was stolen. This resulted in a power cut in the administrative block, laboratories and library. A contract was awarded to KC Electricals Ltd on 12 December 2023 for the repair works which were to be completed by 21 March 2024. While works were in progress, a third theft occurred on Saturday 02 March 2024 whereby all the remaining main electrical cables from the transforming room were stolen and this time, the whole school was deprived of electricity.

Subsequent to the third theft, the contractor was on-site on 07 March 2024 and was requested to carry out the necessary repairs as recommended by the ESD. Pending the completion of the works, the installation of generator was envisaged. However, the Energy Services Division advised that installation of the generator would also require repairs to the electrical cabling network and therefore it would be better to proceed with the electrical cable repairs itself.

I am informed that on Saturday, 09 March 2024, the cables were again stolen, but the contractor being on-site ensured that the works are completed and the power supply was subsequently restored on Thursday, 14 March 2024 at around 17 00 hours.

All four cases of theft were reported immediately to the Police and the latter has informed that investigations are still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the following actions also have been taken by my Ministry to strengthen security measures –

- (i) the doors of the transformer room have been reinforced;

- (ii) the metal gate at the rear of the school yard giving access to the transformer room has been reinforced with metal bars;
- (iii) the duct carrying the main electrical cables from the transformer room to the school have been covered with concrete;
- (iv) one additional security guard has been posted at the school;
- (v) furthermore, the police has been requested to effect regular patrol in the vicinity of the school.

Ms J. Bérenger: La ministre a fait mention elle-même de plusieurs vols de câbles qui durent depuis plus d'un an. Peut-elle nous dire précisément quand est-ce que le contrat avec une agence de sécurité a été alloué, à qui et pour combien de temps ? Merci.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will just give you the information.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the contract was initially allocated to RSL Security Ltd. for daytime security services and R.S.S Securities for night time security services. A new contract has been awarded to RSL Ltd. as from February 2024.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, je vous remercie. Madame la vice-Première ministre, pourriez-vous expliquer à la Chambre comment un problème d'approvisionnement en électricité qui a perduré pendant près de deux ans au SSS de Floréal, a soudainement été résolu en quelques heures seulement le jour même de la manifestation des étudiants ? Merci.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, au cours de ma réponse, j'ai bien fait ressortir qu'il y avait déjà un contracteur sur les lieux pendant que les câbles ont été volés et de ce fait, on a demandé au contracteur de s'assurer que les travaux se fassent rapidement. Les travaux étaient déjà en cours et bien sûr étant donné que le contrat devait être terminé ou plutôt le travail aurait dû être soumis le 21 mars, on a fait pression et de ce fait, le contracteur s'est assuré que les travaux soient complétés le 14 mars.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Tour!

BOULINGRIN LONG MOUNTAIN - ACCESS ROAD

(No. B/37) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of an access road to Boulingrin Long Mountain, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Development Unit/Road Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/1681 on 05 December 2023, I informed the House about the complexity for the construction of an access road at Boulingrin, as requested by the inhabitants of the region.

In this context, I am informed that the NDU and the RDA had further consultations on the matter and have taken cognisance of the situation whereby the inhabitants of Boulingrin village are having difficulties to access the Village of Long Mountain.

Furthermore, the existing access road is not in good condition and worsens during heavy rainfall, being prone to water and mud accumulation. The said road is narrow and risky, the more so, as vehicles and pedestrians use the same access to travel between Boulingrin and Long Mountain. In addition, there is no proper lighting on the road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to alleviate the difficulties being faced by the inhabitants and following discussions with officers of my Ministry and also with relevant stakeholders, including the hon. Member herself, some short term measures are being envisaged, namely –

- (i) the re-instatement/upgrading of the existing access road, as far as practicable;
- (ii) provision of proper lighting on that road;
- (iii) installation of traffic light to allow the vehicles to drive through the access road safely, and
- (iv) implementation of appropriate flood mitigating measures to prevent water/mud accumulation on the road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a long term measure, the possibility for the construction of an overhead bridge across the Motorway M3 to enable the safe movement of pedestrians to and from Boulingrin and Long Mountain is under study. In this context, a site visit with different stakeholders, namely the RDA, the NDU, the TMRSU would be held shortly to assess its feasibility.

The Local Authority concerned, namely, the District Council of Pamplemousses will also be invited for the site visit to consider the regular cleaning of the existing track used by the inhabitants to access Crève Coeur.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister give us a timeline for the measures he mentioned in his reply for his Ministry to implement?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, there will be a meeting that will be held along with a site visit with all relevant stakeholders and as soon as this site visit is done and whatever I have listed as measures is agreed upon, the work will start in the days to come.

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Woochit!

WASTE COLLECTION LORRIES – REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE & BREAKDOWNS – PROCUREMENT PROPOSAL

(No. B/38) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to waste collection lorries in the local authorities, he will state, in each case, the number thereof currently undergoing repairs or maintenance due to breakdowns, indicating if there is any proposal for the procurement of new lorries and, if so, give details as to the funds to be allocated to each local authority therefor for this financial year.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a list of the fleet of scavenging lorries of the 11 local authorities which provide in-house scavenging services together with their condition, is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

It is to be noted that the District Council of Black River outsources all its scavenging services.

With a view to improving the service delivery, my Ministry launched a procurement exercise for the acquisition of the following vehicles and after obtaining the required funds from the Ministry of Finance –

- (i) 28 tipper lorries, and
- (ii) 24 compactor lorries.

That is, 52 lorries together.

Contract has already been awarded for the acquisition of these vehicles and as at date, seven compactors have already been delivered to six local authorities namely: Municipal Council of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, Curepipe, District Council of Pamplemousses, Moka and Savanne respectively. The remaining 45 vehicles will be delivered during this year to the local authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has, in line with its objective of making Mauritius a green and a sustainable economy, decided to inject funds to the tune of Rs170 million in the modernisation of the scavenging lorries of the local authorities.

Mr Woochit: Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House of the measures being taken to ensure the timely acquisition of new lorries, particularly in the local authorities, experiencing poor services due to the breakdown issues in order to alleviate the reported backlog?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not providing poor services because normally when we have such a large fleet of lorries, you are going to have maintenance for the lorries. Firstly, a lot of the lorries is being maintained, that is why they are out of service and secondly, we are buying as I mentioned, 52 lorries to replace others. We have received seven already. It takes time to get the lorries. We are trying to purchase such a large number, it is not easy to get all at the same time. That is why it is taking its time but hopefully by the end of this year, we should be able to get all the lorries on site.

Mr Speaker: MP Armanche!

SAJ BRIDGE – SUICIDE DETERRENT SYSTEM – RISK MANAGEMENT STUDY

(No. B/39) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the newly inaugurated Sir Anerood Jugnauth Bridge, he will state if –

- (a) a Suicide Deterrent System also known as Safety Net and Safe City Camera will be installed thereat to prevent suicide and other crimes, and
- (b) any Risk Management Study was conducted.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to this Parliamentary Question with your permission.

In fact, as the House is aware, on 11 March 2024, the Sir Anerood Jugnauth Bridge has been opened to vehicular traffic. The bridge is a unique and complex structure spanning over a length of 330 metres and a height of 120 metres over the ground. With the opening of the bridge, I am informed by the RDA and the Police Department that the traffic flow has greatly improved during peak and normal hours and has drastically reduced travel time along the roads namely –

- (i) from Coromandel towards Port Louis;
- (ii) on Black River Road at the junction of Montée S;
- (iii) at Grand River North West junction at La Tour Koenig, Pointe aux Sables;
- (iv) at Cite Vallejee by Plaine Lauzun, and
- (v) from Port Louis towards Grand Rivière, La Tour Koenig, Pointe aux Sables, Cité Vallejee and Plaine Lauzun.

Moreover, according to feedback received from the general public, the opening of the SAJ Bridge has resulted in a marked improvement of the travel time during peak hours for road users and in a visible reduction in traffic in different locations, namely at Ebène, Réduit, Rose Hill, Vandermesch, Beau Bassin, Grand Rivière, Belle village, Coromandel, Gros Cailloux and Petite Rivière.

Traffic from the centre and the north has now started using the SAJ Bridge and the A1-A3 Road to the west, thereby significantly reducing traffic volumes along Phoenix – Beaux Songes Link Road and traffic congestion at Pont Fer, Sayed Hossen, Beaux Songes and to Cascavelle region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the RDA that, as a safety measure, prior to the opening of the bridge, a fencing of 2 metres high and comprising also barbed wires have been installed throughout the whole bridge railing.

Moreover, with a view to providing a more effective deterrent to any person with suicidal intention, I am informed that the RDA has already planned to install a more detailed system of angled and horizontal barbed wires protruding from the footpath. This system will act as an additional physical barrier to stop falls whilst also discouraging any climbing attempts.

The proposed system will also be implemented in such a way to blend aesthetically with the bridge. The design of the proposed system is being reviewed and refined, taking into consideration the impact of strong winds on this additional structure. Additional security measures will be provided at each end of the bridge such as security fencing to prevent access to the abutments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the installation of safe city camera along the bridge, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that action is being initiated for the implementation of same at the earliest. In addition, “No Waiting” signs posts and double yellow lines will soon be placed on both ways road sides of the bridge.

Furthermore, several measures have been put in place by the Police to ensure security of road users and vehicular traffic, such as –

- (i) performing stand by duty at the bridge during day time and frequent patrol during night time;
- (ii) preventing parking along the layby all along the road to prevent obstruction along both ways to minimise the risk of accident and damage to public infrastructure, and

- (iii) regular speed checks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, given the magnitude and complexity of the SAJ Bridge and also in view of the strong winds which prevail in that region, risk management studies/investigations have been carried out at different stages of the project, from conception to implementation and beyond.

Prior to the construction, various risk management studies/investigations have been carried out taking into consideration international norms and standards, the accepted practice of construction and safety requirements for the undertaking of such complex works.

During the construction stage, essential care was taken to ensure safety of workers and the site through a dedicated specialised unit to oversee any risky situation.

After the completion of the bridge, appropriate risk management tests have been carried out in accordance with internationally recognised requirements for such a complex bridge, including –

- (i) load test consisting of 28 heavy loaded truck each of 30 tons were aligned to reproduce the most critical load conditions on the bridge and to assess the deflection. I am informed that the deflection recorded was within the expected design deflection, implying that the bridge is operating within its design characteristics, with no risk of structural collapse, and
- (ii) a Road Safety Audit of the bridge and ancillary roads has been carried out by a team of independent professionals, specifically to address the risk of any possible hazard.

In addition, a team from the Road Development Authority and the Korea Expressway Corporation (KEC) of South Korea is also carrying out regular visits to the bridge for monitoring of all aspects, including safety of pedestrians, safety of traffic and safety of the public in general.

Besides, an assessment of the conditions of operations of the bridge is continuously being done by the RDA which includes stakeholders' management with the Police Department, the National Disaster and Risk Management Centre, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and the Fire Service with a view to mitigating risk of accidents and damage to infrastructure.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, Sir, I also had the chance to go and visit the bridge this morning and I have noted that there is a 2-metre height fencing of very poor quality and a barbed wire as flexible as my hair. So, may I know from the Minister when he intends to replace it?

Mr Speaker: No, no, excuse me! You are saying things as if you are an expert. You are not an engineer! This is your opinion. How can you express your opinion? Put a supplementary question! The same subject...

An hon. Member: Pourquoi?

Mr Speaker: Please, stay quiet!

(Interruptions)

Stay quiet! Who is...

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, *calme!*

Mr Speaker: Put a supplementary question! Put the same subject matter, but directly, without your opinion, without any hypothesis!

Mr Armance: I am just saying what I have seen on the SAJ Bridge!

Mr Speaker: So, I stop you there. No question!

An hon. Member: Oh! Shame!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Poor quality!

Mr Speaker: So, next question! You have a question, hon. Bodha?

Mr Bodha: A very simple question.

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister which company carried out the stress test on the bridge?

Mr Hurreeram: As you are aware, the RDA team was there, we had the Korea Expressway Corporation (KEC) which did the design, evaluation, risk and solution, we had SYSTRA International Bridge Technologies which is an international French design, and we also had COWI which counterchecked all the tests that were done.

Just for your information, you also have Olsen ApS International, Danish, that worked on the wind modelling; you have the ARQ Consulting Engineers International, South Africa, which worked with geotechnical engineering; you have SEFTIM from France which worked with the lighting protection. If all these international reputed companies are of poor quality, so, I do not know what good quality would have been. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Sik Yuen!

CUREPIPE, FREDERIC BONNEFIN STREET – ILLEGAL WALL CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/40) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction of a wall across a river on Frederic Bonnefin Street in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to if the Council is in presence of any complaint from the inhabitants regarding same.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe, that two complaints were received at the level of the Council regarding illegal construction of a wall across a river on the Frederic Bonnefin Street in Curepipe.

The first complaint, dated 30 January 2024, was addressed to the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and copy to the Municipal Council of Curepipe, amongst others. The second complaint was received via the Citizen Support Portal on 12 February 2024.

On 23 February 2024, the Municipal Council of Curepipe carried out a site visit and observed that a concrete wall of 5.25 metres long and 2 metres high had been constructed across a watercourse. Consequently, on 28 February 2024, a pulling down notice was served on the offender pursuant to section 127C of the Local Government Act in order to pull down the wall on the river course within a delay of 30 days from the time of the service of the notice.

I am also informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that the offender has submitted an undertaking in writing that he would pull down the legal boundary wall by 28 March 2024. Should the offender fail to take necessary action within the prescribed delay, a case will be lodged by the Council in court against the offender and the court will be requested to issue an order for pulling down of the illegal structure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also being told by the Council that the DPM has contacted them for some time now to expedite matters as far as this project is concerned.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware that many houses were flooded because of this illegal construction?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I was told. As soon as we came to know about it, the Council has acted very quickly as we have seen.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he can reassure the House that the authorities will not tolerate such illegal construction in the future?

Dr. Husnoo: It goes without saying, Mr Speaker, Sir. I mean, naturally, we will not tolerate. That is why we are acting against that particular person.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: It took 2 years.

Mr Speaker: No, it is okay. Your question is over! Let MP David put his question.

**CANAL DAYOT REGION – JANUARY 2024 FLOODING – CAUSES & REMEDIAL
MEASURES**

(No. B/41) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the flooding of the region of Canal Dayot in January 2024, he will state –

- (a) if an assessment has been conducted to identify the causes thereof and, if so, indicate the –
 - (i) conclusions thereof, and
 - (ii) consequential damages caused to private houses and public infrastructure, and
- (b) the measures envisaged by his Ministry to avert the recurrence thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, following the passage of tropical cyclone Belal, Mauritius witnessed a torrential rainfall on 15 January 2024, causing inundation across Mauritius, but which was more pronounced in the region of Port Louis. In fact, a high intensity rainfall of more than 120 mm of rain in a short span of time was recorded in Port Louis, coupled with a high tide of the sea.

The region of Canal Dayot was indeed impacted by major water accumulation on that day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the region of Canal Dayot was declared a high-risk flood prone area by the Land Drainage Authority (LDA) in 2019 and attempts to implement flood mitigating measures in that region were unsuccessful, on which I will give details later in my reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) (i) of the question, a post assessment survey was conducted by the Land Drainage Authority on 19 January 2024 in order to take cognisance of the causes of flooding in the region of Canal Dayot. And, it emerged that the reasons attributed to the flooding were –

- (i) the inadequate hydraulic capacity of the canal to convey the peak flow generated during the cyclone Belal;
- (ii) the limited capacity of the Rousel Bridge to convey the flow, and
- (iii) the surge as a result of the increase in sea level during the cyclone, which means here, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in fact it was sea water that was getting in land.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) (ii) of the question, I am informed that some 25 houses/commercial buildings were impacted and the flood mark recorded was around 1.7 metres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Member that the history of flooding at Canal Dayot dates back to a decade. The House will recall that Canal Dayot was impacted in 2013 following which, several measures were initiated as a matter of urgency by the NDU under the Emergency Rehabilitation Programme. These include –

- (i) cleaning and dredging of River St Louis;
- (ii) deepening and widening of the river wherever necessary, and
- (iii) supply and laying of rock bunds on the banks of the river, wherever required.

Following another episode of flash flood on 30 March 2018, the NDU was called upon to undertake remedial works at Canal Dayot, comprising the enlargement and desilting of the river, securing both river beds with rock bunds and the construction of internal drains in Canal Dayot Village.

On 13 March 2022, several regions around Mauritius were severely hit by heavy rain which led to significant flooding and water accumulation. The region of Canal Dayot was again affected as the river was running at its full capacity which led to backflow of water in the drainage network resulting in water accumulation and flooding of several houses.

Although it was observed that the retaining wall constructed at Canal Dayot following the flooding of 2013 proved to be effective in preventing major inundation as experienced in the flooding of 2013, it has run short of capacity due to climate change unpredictability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following a survey carried out by the Land Drainage Authority after the March 2022 flooding, the following measures were recommended –

- (i) desilting of River St Louis to increase the hydraulic capacity;
- (ii) removal of illegal dumping at St Louis River;
- (iii) raising of the existing flood wall by one metre on approximately 400 metres on both sides along the residential settlement of Canal Dayot to cater for peak flows for a return period of 1 in 100 years;
- (iv) provision of a flap valve at the outlet of the drain from Macpherson Street to ensure that there is no backflow in the event River St Louis is running at peak flow, and
- (v) upgrading of Rousel Bridge on A1 Port Louis-St Jean Road, to cater for peak flows.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the priority of this Government has been and will continue to be the safety of our citizens, our population for which my Ministry has left no stone unturned to implement the measures recommended by the LDA for Canal Dayot.

In this respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the raising of the existing flood wall and provision of flap valve at the outlet of the drain from Macpherson Street, the NDU had appointed a Consultant on 13 April 2022 for the design, supervision and contract management of the upgrading works at Canal Dayot. Following approval of the design reports, a contractor was appointed on 23 May 2022 for an amount of Rs13.7 million for the execution of the works.

The scope of works of the project comprised, amongst others, the following –

- (i) cleaning of River St Louis;
- (ii) raising of the existing flood wall along River St Louis;
- (iii) drain and associated works at discharge point, that is, at end of Macpherson Street, and
- (iv) cleaning of existing drains within the village.

Works were scheduled to start 01 June 2022. However, prior to the start of construction works, the contractor needed to access the flood wall through the premises of some 13 inhabitants whose houses are located near the river bank and also from Les Gaz Industriels Ltd.

Several Public Relation Exercises were carried out with the inhabitants in the presence of the then PPS of the constituency, representatives of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis and officers of my Ministry to secure the right of entry on the concerned private lands.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed unfortunate and a matter of regret that due to the reluctance of a few inhabitants, led blindly by certain politicians *de mauvaise foi*, the right of entry to carry out the works was denied. Therefore, the contract was cancelled on 11 October 2022 and all those owners who had granted right of entry on their land to implement the mitigating measures were informed that in view of the fact that despite our unrelenting efforts, few owners had categorically refused to allow access on site for the works which led to the termination of the contract.

Mr Speaker, Sir, had we been allowed to implement the mitigating measures as requested by the LDA in 2022, the situation of January 2024 would have been otherwise but again, unfortunately!

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated in this House on several occasions, climate change impact worldwide is very unpredictable and all measures taken can only mitigate its effect. No country is able to talk of alleviation or elimination because the matter is so complex and dynamic that the infrastructures run short of capacity in extreme weather conditions.

Subsequent to cyclone Belal, the Land Drainage Authority has carried out a survey at Canal Dayot and the following measures have been proposed –

- (i) Upgrading of wall at Canal Dayot Street;
- (ii) Reconstruction of the Rousel Bridge to ease the flow, to increase the hydraulic capacity, and
- (iii) Drainworks in the region of Pailles.

I sincerely hope that my Ministry or any implementing agency and the designated contractor will be given appropriate right of entry during the implementation phase.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the cleaning and desilting of the Saint Louis Stream including Canal Dayot and Mont Ory Stream was carried out in September 2022 over a total stretch of 9 km for a total amount of Rs13.6 million.

For the current financial year, I am advised that an amount of Rs9.6 million has been earmarked for the desilting works of River Saint Louis, including Canal Dayot and is expected to start in April 2024 under the supervision of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: That's a long reply, I give you one question.

Mr David: One question?

Mr Speaker: Of course!

Mr David: M. le président, le ministre a répété ce qu'il a déjà dit en conférence de presse, à savoir la résistance...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr David:... de certains habitants.

Mr Speaker: Please, whatever mistake the Minister makes, this is his problem. Your problem is to put a supplementary question. Put the question! I want to listen to your question.

Mr David: Par rapport à la résistance évoquée par le ministre sur certains habitants face au soulèvement de ce mur de rétention le long de la Rivière St Louis, le ministre peut-il nous dire s'il existe un document en bonne et due forme où cette opposition de certains habitants a été minütée et si lui, peut-il déposer ce document à la Chambre?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, we got all the required documents. Meeting has been held by the then PPS, hon. Mrs Dorine Chukowry. We have had several meetings. We have had meetings with the Lord Mayors, with the Deputy Lord Mayor, the then Deputy Lord Mayor, Mr Daniel Augustin was there. So, yes, it's all minütée. Whether it's appropriate to table it, I will consult my officers to see but we have absolutely no issue. I don't think we have time to come here *et dire n'importe quoi*. We know what we are talking, we are people that work.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to inform the House...

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram: *Kin arrive twa?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order! I am talking! I am talking! Please quiet! You quiet!

The questions B/44, B/56, B/59, B/61, B/64, B/67, B/74, B/81, have been withdrawn.

I now move to the other questions. MP Ramful!

MAHEBOURG MARKET FAIR – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/42) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the renovation of the Mahebourg Market fair, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Grand Port, information as to the –

- (a) details of the works order;
- (b) costs thereof, and
- (c) duration of the project.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the District Council of Grand Port that the renovation works of Mahebourg Market fair will be implemented by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development through its framework contract.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the renovation work concerns the demolition of an existing iron sheet covering which is in a deplorable state and unhygienic conditions. The scope of work consist of the following –

- (i) demolition of the existing structure and carting away of debris;
- (ii) casting of reinforced concrete floor;

- (iii) provision of corrugated iron sheet roofing;
- (iv) provision of the gutters;
- (v) upgrading of drain networks, and
- (vi) provision of firefighting equipment.

As regard parts (b) and (c) of the question, the total cost of the project is estimated at Rs17,275,000 and the project is expected to be completed in three months' time after the work orders issued by the MNI.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the District Council of Grand Port that presently it is undertaking the relocation of a 203 stallholders, that is, 187 dealing in vegetable and fruits and 16 dealing in cake and beverages prior to handing over the site to MNI. In this context, a meeting was held by the District Council of Grand Port on 02 February 2024 with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, the Police and MNICD to decide on the relocation of the stallholders. The District Council of Grand Port expect to complete the relocation exercise by the first week of April 2024 and subsequently hand over the site to the MNICD for implementation of the project.

Mr Speaker: We move to the next question, B/46! MP Armance!

E-HEALTH PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION & COST

(No. B/43) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the E-Health project, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, indicating the cost incurred therefor to date.

(Withdrawn)

CANAL DAYOT & SABLE NOIR – SEWERAGE SYSTEM – PIPES CONNECTIONS

(No. B/44) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the regions of Canal

Dayot and Sable Noir, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the connection of pipes to the reticulated sewerage system thereat.

(Withdrawn)

YOUNG DRUG USERS – METHADONE TREATMENT

(No. B/45) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the decision of his Ministry to allow young drug users to have access to methadone treatment as from 15 years, he will state the reasons therefor, indicating –

- (a) the number of drug users concerned therewith, gender wise;
- (b) how same will be distributed and the conditions attached thereto, and
- (c) if Non-Governmental Organisations engaged in the treatment and rehabilitation of drugs users have been consulted prior to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

GRNW, CANAL DAYOT – FLOOD MITIGATING WORKS

(No. B/46) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Canal Dayot at Grand River North West, he will give details of the flood mitigating works carried out thereat since March 2022 to date to avoid the recurrent flooding in the region, indicating –

- (a) the total amount disbursed therefor to date and
- (b) if there is a preparedness plan for an urgent evacuation following a flooding.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal City Council

of Port Louis that desilting of St Louis River and upstream has been carried out as early as 25 July 2022. The project cost was Rs13,673,494.25. The site comprises Canal Dayot upper stream, Mont Ory stream and St Louis River motorway M1.

Cleaning and desilting work have completed on 15 March 2024 along St Louis stream on a stretch of about 400 m. The cost estimate is Rs308,200.

Moreover, cleaning and desilting works along Canal Dayot and St Louis River starting from aqueduct towards the outlet have started on 22 March 2024 for a duration of about 12 days on a stretch of 400 m approximately. The cost estimate is Rs358,800.

Furthermore, I wish to point out that bids were launched for cleaning and desilting of river St Louis, number one and number two, that is, including Canal Dayot region for the year 2024. The cost estimate is Rs9,600,000. The bid is at evaluation stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to preparedness plan, you may wish to note that the contingency plan for flooding of Canal Dayot has been devised for the region of Canal Dayot by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre. The Municipal City Council of Port Louis follows the same plan as it already defines the roles and responsibilities of the concerned stakeholders in the event of imminent flooding within the region of Canal Dayot so as to ensure the safety of inhabitant through timely and effective evacuation.

I am further informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, that a contingency plan for the canal aqueduct for slope failure, soil erosion and rock fall have also been devised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the flood emergency plan, a Community Disaster Response Programme has been implemented at Canal Dayot whereby some 28 volunteers have been empowered on the concept of mutual help. It is worth pointing out that the Community Disaster Response Team has contributed in the development of the emergency plan.

Flood simulation exercises were carried out on 28 October 2017 and in August 2019, respectively. Furthermore, a sensitisation campaign of disaster risk reduction was held on 10 May 2023 for the inhabitants residing at Canal Dayot highlighting the precautionary measures in the event of hazard or disaster. As a compliment to the flood contingency plan, first responders

are being prepositioned at Canal Dayot the safety of inhabitant including evacuation in case of needs.

Mr Armance: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether Canal Dayot is considered to be a flood prone area and if necessary, he will think about relocation of all inhabitants there?

Dr. Husnoo: I do not have the information. I presume it may be, but I do not have information. As you are aware, there has been a reply by my hon. friend that the work would have been completed a long time ago if we were allowed to raise the wall of the river. Unfortunately, because of some people, this work was not done.

Mr Armance: Can the Minister confirm that during the last rain fall from cyclone Belal, whether there has been a survey determine how many households have been flooded by the water from the river St Louis.

Dr. Husnoo: I do not have this information with me now, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Wochit!

**ARSENAL – KANWAR FIRE INCIDENT – BEREAVED FAMILIES –
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE**

(No. B/47) **Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the bereaved families of the six pilgrims who lost their lives in the fire incident involving a *kanwar* in Arsenal on Sunday 03 March 2024 whilst proceeding to Ganga Talao, she will state if her Ministry proposes to provide any psychological assistance thereto and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would very kindly refer the hon. Member of the Opposition to my reply, today itself, to B/28.

Mr Speaker: So, we move to the next question! MP David!

Mr Wochit: Supplementary!

Mr Speaker: You have been referred to the reply. So, what supplementary do you want to ask? What supplementary? You have no right to put new questions, you know that.

An hon. Member: Those are new rules.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Pena dan* Standing Order.

Mr Speaker: I have already ruled! MP David, go ahead with your question!

BEAU BASSIN, SERGE ALFRED SWIMMING POOL – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/48) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the renovation works to be undertaken at the Serge Alfred Swimming Pool at Beau Bassin, he will state where matters stand, indicating if a proposed reopening date has been scheduled and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

RIVULET TERRE ROUGE ESTUARY BIRD SANCTUARY – OIL SPILL – DAMAGES & RESTORATION MEASURES

(No. B/49) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the oil spill in the region of the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary since January 2024 to date, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof, indicating in each case the source and volume of oil spilled;
- (b) consequential damages caused to the environment and the ecosystem;
- (c) cleaning and restoration action plan put in place, indicating the costs thereof, and
- (d) measures envisaged by his Ministry to avert the recurrence thereof.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, as indicated in my previous reply to PQ B/31, there has been two oil spills in the region of Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary from January 2024 to date.

The first incident occurred on 18 January 2024 and resulted from a leakage in the heavy fuel oil line feeding the boiler of Marine Biotechnology Products Ltd situated at Riche Terre, Terre Rouge. An estimated of 1500 litres of HFO were spilled and reached the estuary through Rivulet Terre Rouge.

An area of around 2500 m² of the estuary was in fact affected. Oil stains were observed on at least for migratory birds, mangrove roots, rocks, the banks of Rivulet Terre Rouge and grasses in the mud flats and high level of oil and grease were detected in the water at Pont Bruniquel and the estuary.

However, no casualty among migratory birds was reported, no dead fish was seen in the rivulet, at sea and in the estuary. Total hydrocarbon and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon were not detected in fish and shellfish specimen collected in the lagoon at Baie du Tombeau. The seawater was within the limits of the coastal water quality guidelines and no oil and grease was detected. The underwater ecological survey showed no adverse impact on the marine ecosystem of the lagoon or in the estuary. No odour was discernible during ambient air screening exercises and all volatile organic compounds screens were below the detectable limits.

With regard to cleaning and restoration, Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan was activated immediately upon my Ministry being informed on the incident and the National Oil Spill Coordination Committee, comprising relevant public bodies, was set up to coordinate the oil spill response. The MBPL caused a ruptured pipe to be sealed on the same day to prevent further entrainment of oil. The company also enlisted the services of Virgin Oil Company Mauritius Ltd and of Polygreen Mauritius Ltd for the pumping of oil and cleaning of the rivulet and the estuary. To prevent the dispersion of oil, sorbents and fence booms were deployed by Polygreen Mauritius Ltd, the National Coast Guard, the Special Mobile Force and the Mauritius Ports Authority at various locations including Pont Bruniquel in the rivulet and in the estuary. By 22 January 2024, oil and grease was below detectable levels in both the rivulet and the estuary. Cleaning operations were completed by the end of February.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second incident which occurred on 11 March 2024 involves a spill of 1,175 litres of low sulphur fuel oil due to a defective valve in the piping system supplying fuel to the boiler of WashRight Services Ltd, situated at Le Hochet, Terre Rouge. The oil reached the

estuary through Rivulet Terre Rouge and as per observations made and tests carried out, rocks in the rivulet and mangrove roots in the estuary were stained with oil and tar, although no oil was seen on birds in the mudflats at the estuary. No fish killed were seen in the rivulet, at sea or in the estuary. Oil and grease and total hydrocarbon were detected in the water in Rivulet Terre Rouge and in the estuary near the bird hide but not in the sediment and sea water samples and no odour was discernible during the ambient screening exercises and volatile organic compounds screened were below the detectable limits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the time of the second oil spill, the NOSCP was still in activation mode to coordinate the oil spill response. Four meetings of the NOSCC have been held so far. WSL took appropriate measures to stop further leakage of oil from its defective valve and enlisted the services of Polygreen Ltd for the containment of the oil and clean up exercise with Virgin Oil Company Ltd which was appointed to pump and cart away the contained oil. Sorbents and fence booms were again deployed in the rivulet and the estuary to contain the oil. As at 22 March 2024, 875 litres of oil have been recuperated from the oil pump. The clean-up exercise is expected to be completed by next week. In the meantime, WSL has been requested to submit a remedial plan for the remaining works in the mangrove areas by the end of March.

To ascertain whether fish and crabs from the estuary are fit for consumption, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping would be testing samples for the presence of heavy metals. I am informed that the assistance of the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands would be sought by the NPCCS for the restoration of the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary in case significant impacts to the ecosystem are observed during forthcoming monitoring exercises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 32(3)(a) of the Environment Protection Act (EPA) provides that the owner of a pollutant shall be presumed to be liable for any damage caused by a spill. Furthermore, section 33(1)(b) empowers the Director of Environment to recover from the owner of a pollutant which is spilled, all costs and expenses incurred from the clean-up operation and from measures taken to prevent, eliminate or reduce the adverse effects of a spill on the environment and for the disposal of the pollutant. Costs incurred by the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry in terms of waste disposal as well as costs for laboratory tests outsourced by my Ministry and other public bodies would accordingly be claimed from

MBPL. Claims for costs incurred by different stakeholders in responding to the oil spill by the MBPL are expected at my Ministry by 31 March 2024 for an internal assessment prior to submission to the company for reimbursement. The same legal provisions would be applied for the oil spill incident provoked by WSL.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (d) of the question, provisions relating to oil spill preparedness and response will be further reinforced in the context of the forthcoming review of the legislation framework governing environmental protection. In this respect, it is proposed to review the legislation to provide oil spill and environmental emergency instead of only spill and environmental emergency with a view to strengthen legal provisions to better address preparedness and response to oil spills and environmental emergencies.

In the meantime, a letter has been issued to 112 industries of which 13 within the catchment area of Rivulet Terre Rouge, requesting them to take appropriate measures to prevent any oil spill from the liquid fuel being stored at their level. Joint site visits would be undertaken by relevant public bodies to verify the adequacy of measures put in place.

In light of findings which will be examined by an Interministerial Technical Committee at the level of my Ministry, further measures would be recommended to address risks. This Committee would comprise representatives of the Ministry of Local Government, Disaster Risk Management, Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, including the Water Resources Unit, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security including the Forestry Service, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Mauritius Fire Rescue Service amongst others.

The Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has been approached for information regarding companies operating steam boilers storing fuel and companies, industries storing liquid fuel and chemicals of hazardous nature. I have been requested by way of a communiqué dated 21 February 2024 to ensure that tanks, valves, piping systems are properly secured to minimise risks of spillage during adverse weather conditions. My Ministry and the Police Information and Operation Room should be contacted in case of an oil spill and the industry should immediately activate their response plans to contain the spill.

I am also informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the NPCS is envisaging the procurement of sorbent booms that would be stocked at Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary and would place permanent mooring structures for these booms. A dedicated oil spill contingency plan for the estuary would also be worked out by the NPCS in collaboration with my Ministry and other stakeholders.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQs B/50, B/77 have been withdrawn.

Time is over by four minutes...

Mr David: M. le président, une question...

Mr Speaker: ...the question. Let me! Let me talk! The question contained four parts. The Minister took almost 5-6 minutes to answer.

Mr David: Give me one supplementary question.

Mr Speaker: I have an Order Paper...

Mr David: I have one question.

Mr Speaker: Please do not discuss! This is a ruling. It is my discretion and you cannot question it.

So, we move on.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

The Deputy 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.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

(4.37 p.m.)

13TH AFRICAN GAMES – MAURITIUS PERFORMANCE

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a Statement on the performance of the Republic of Mauritius at the 13th African Games.

It is with immense pride that I address the House today to highlight the outstanding achievements of the Republic of Mauritius at the recent 13th African Games held in Ghana from 08 to 23 March 2024.

Mauritius has excelled in this edition of the Games, clinching a total of 25 medals. Our athletes showcased their talents by securing 9 gold medals, 5 silver medals and 11 bronze medals. This remarkable performance at continental level placed the Republic of Mauritius in the top 10 on the medal table among 54 countries.

Mauritius has surpassed its previous performance at the Games, held in Morocco in 2019, where we secured 24 medals, including only 6 gold.

The Mauritian flag soared high in Accra and it is with great pleasure that we extend our heartfelt congratulations to all our athletes and our medallists for their resounding victories. Their dedication, tenacity, and selfless commitment to our nation have been truly commendable.

Despite daunting challenges and scorching temperatures nearing 40 degrees Celsius, the African Games displayed the unwavering determination and resilience of our athletes. The prevailing team spirit, solidarity and mutual support propelled our cyclists to claim 10 medals, including 3 gold and our weightlifters to secure 9 medals, including 4 gold. Mauritius won its first-ever gold medals, one in swimming and one in tae kwon do.

The relentless efforts and strong desire of our athletes to exceed their limits and proudly wave our national flag in Ghana's skies cannot be understated. Our medallists will be duly rewarded for their exceptional achievements.

Long live our athletes and long live the Republic of Mauritius!

Thank you.

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

**THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES BILL**

(NO. XXIII OF 2023)

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo.

(4.40 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you very much. It is indeed a pleasure to be back.

With your permission, I move that the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as Minister responsible for disability inclusion, I could not have missed this opportunity to introduce a comprehensive and landmark piece of legislation for persons with disabilities. This Bill marks a pivotal moment in the history of Mauritius. Nobel Prize winner and humanitarian, Pearl Buck, once wrote –

“(...) the test of a civilization is the way that it cares for its helpless members.”

Very true, indeed, how we care for the most vulnerable of our society reflects the quality of it.

Today, with a profound sense of duty and purpose, I present to this Assembly the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill. I would like to seize this moment to acknowledge fellow citizens with disabilities and to extend my appreciation to all

of the wonderful individuals who care for them and provide support in different ways. I congratulate them for the tremendous efforts they make in order that their rights are respected in society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to take a moment to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, under whose leadership this Bill is a reality. The Prime Minister has been the driving force behind this unprecedented move.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are committed to the principle that everyone is born equal and everyone should be given equal opportunities. We all should be included and valued. Disability is a fact of life. It can either be acquired by birth or in the blink of an eye due to a road accident, accident at work or *en vieillissant*. It could happen to anyone of us at any time. Unfortunately, none of that is foreseeable. So, of course, we got to think and act properly. Persons with disabilities face very unique challenges. As parliamentarians, we need to make sure that we provide the support necessary to improve their lives.

It is important to note that according to statistics 2022 Population Census, the number of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Mauritius stands at approximately 84,500, representing 6.8% of the total population. 34,273 suffer from a disability of 60% and derive the Basic Invalidity Pension.

On this side of the House, we have long since 2014, started a process of inclusion of persons with disabilities in our decision-making. We have, over the years, increased provision in the budget for persons with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals pave the way towards a future where no one is left behind. To deliver the Sustainable Development Goals for, with and by persons with disabilities, disability inclusion must form part in every development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before we reach where we are today, there are major achievements which we have brought forward to promote an inclusive society. Allow me to go through them. First, the increase in the budget of my Ministry from Rs13.9 billion in 2014 to Rs51.1 billion in 2023 is unprecedented. As you can see, we have, over the years, effectively worked out an excellent social safety net.

In 2014, when we took office, the Basic Invalidity Pension was less than the Basic Retirement Pension, Rs3,267, compared to Basic Retirement Pension which was at that time Rs3,623. The Basic Invalidity Pension increased from Rs3,267 to Rs13,500 today. In fact, one of our first actions has been to align all pensions. No discrimination, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In 2005, the Basic Invalidity Pension was Rs2,025. From 2005 to 2014, over a span of nine years, there has been an increase of Rs1,242 in the Basic Invalidity Pension. Whereas from 2014 to date, for the same period of time, our Government increased the Basic Invalidity Pension by Rs10,233.

I am so pleased to remind the House that we have waived the age criteria for children who are less than 15 years to benefit from the Basic Invalidity Pension. Can you imagine, previously, children less than 15 years were not deriving an invalidity pension just because of an age criteria? This was so unjust.

Let me share with you a personal memory. Allow me to take you back to the year 2016. I was reading the newspaper about a mother who was not deriving an invalidity pension for her child aged five who was severely disabled as he had only half a body. You can imagine how her daily challenges were significant. Her husband was the only bread winner of the family. She could not work as she had to take care of her severely disabled child. I was very disturbed and puzzled as to why that child was not benefiting from pension. For me, it was unacceptable. It was a brutal reality at that time. It was so shocking, and I must say, a very worrying situation indeed.

This remained on my mind. At that time, parents were very anxious. I have been told that they had called for Government actions but the answer has always been – “you have to wait until your child turns 15”; the most awful thing that was said to parents. I am sure we all have examples we could share. The age criteria had a disproportionate, detrimental effect on those children. Fortunately, we changed that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you would agree with me, illness is not an indulgence for which people have to pay. It is also not an offence for which they should be punished. This injustice was there for some 40 years. Parents had been waiting too long, 40 years to obtain this right. *C’était une discrimination flagrante*. We could not tolerate such injustice. I immediately took it with our Prime Minister who was then Minister of Finance and he showed serious concern. Immediate

and meaningful action was taken to correct this gross injustice. I have to thank the Prime Minister for that. He has been able to scrap the age criteria. Now all children, irrespective of age, are eligible. In fact, I must say policy is the art of the possible, *n'est-ce pas?*

In 2022, we have made major amendments to the Building Control (Accessibility and Gender Compliance in Building) Regulations 2017. The new regulations integrate a disability perspective. They promote physical independence for users of new buildings. Now all new buildings and those undergoing major renovations are designed with access to persons with disabilities.

Let me take this opportunity to urge all Local Authorities to avail themselves of these regulations and to monitor closely that the regulations are being respected *in toto* to the best interests of all people.

M. le président, on doit reconnaître pour qu'une personne, à mobilité réduite, sorte de son environnement quotidien n'est pas une chose facile. In the present Bill, we have included a schedule which puts an obligation on owners of new buildings to ensure that the building is accessible to any person with disability. As per the Building Regulations, accessibility features should be included in existing buildings whenever there are major renovations. For the time being, the legislation does not address the issue of accessibility to existing buildings. This remains a major challenge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would be the first to say that our existing buildings should be fully accessible. However, we do realise that it is something that cannot be achieved overnight. I therefore make an appeal to all building owners to see to it that their buildings are accessible to persons with disabilities, that some changes where possible are brought to the existing buildings so as to make it accessible to all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to accessibility to public transport. True it is, our buses are not fully accessible. We agree it should not be so. However, we need to acknowledge that our roads are not designed for fully accessible buses. This is a major hurdle but rest assured, we are doing our best to address accessibility issues. Currently, I am having discussions with my colleague, hon. Alan Ganoo to see what can be done to introduce better bus transport for disabled people. A good thing is that the newly introduced Metro Network has been designed to facilitate

access to all. All platforms and trains are accessible and include digital text panels and a voice module. Our Government is working towards extending the Metro Services around the island which I am certain will facilitate access to persons living with a disability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to continue, in 2018, the age criterion to be eligible for duty-free facilities for the purchase of an adapted car was waived and the exemption was increased from 55% to 100%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to now address a major component of this Bill – ‘Education’. As the saying goes, “education is the most powerful weapon to change the world”. The Minister of Education will no doubt elaborate on the tremendous efforts that Government has made for children with disabilities for their education. The Special Education Needs Authority established in 2019 is in itself a testimony of the comprehensive manner in which our Government approaches their educational needs. The National Empowerment Authority which we are proposing in this Bill will surely work hand-in-hand with the SENA. The Authority, by virtue of its objectives and functions, will have the framework necessary to assist the SENA. The Ministry of Education is working towards an increase in the number of children with disabilities participating in mainstream classes at all levels; Primary, Secondary and Public Tertiary Institutions. A challenge, one must say which will be tackled to the best of our ability to empower our children although we do know that integration of all children with disabilities with the peers in mainstream is a long-term process. But you would agree with me where there is a will, there is a way and we will find the way for sure.

It is worth mentioning that some 200 Educators have been trained in the Special Education Needs Courses run by the MIE where a module on hearing impairment has been incorporated and the teachers are exposed to the teaching of Mauritian Sign Language.

In 2020, with the waiving of the age criteria on medical visits at home, we had around 15,000 additional beneficiaries to cater for. We recruited 250 Medical Practitioners. Today, we have a pool of 331 doctors to provide better medical facilities and medical visits at home to those who are severely handicapped or bed-ridden. In the 2022-2023 Budget, our Government introduced a Disability Allowance of Rs2,500 for persons with a disability of 40 to 59% in an effort to provide financial support to more people. As at date, 473 persons are benefitting from

this allowance. In the same Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, Government took another important decision to lift persons with disabilities out of poverty.

The Basic Invalidity Pension is no longer taken into account while assessing the eligibility of a person on the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM). If a person is deriving a Basic Invalidity Pension, this pension is not categorised as an income. This is, I must say, really important, *un grand soulagement pour beaucoup de familles pauvres*. Thanks to this measure, some 594 households are benefitting from the financial assistance and other assistance provided by the NEF. In the same Budget year, the cash grant for the purchase of assistive devices was increased. We have also increased threshold for assistive devices from Rs30,000 to Rs35,000 for more people to benefit.

We have also trained 60 public officers in the Mauritian sign language and I must say that this is an ongoing exercise.

Increase in the frequency of the Mauritian Sign Language News Bulletin from once to twice per week as from September 2022. As the Prime Minister stated in his reply to PQ B/521 by hon. Ms J. Bérenger, much effort is being made to increase the number of programmes and bulletins in the Mauritian Sign Language.

Mr Speaker, Sir, formerly, only certain types of amputations was eligible for the invalidity pension. This was a gross injustice towards persons who suffer other forms of amputations. We have now ensured that irrespective of the degree of amputation, all persons are eligible for the pension.

Extension of *Prime à l'Emploi* scheme to employers employing persons with disabilities in the Budget 2023-2024. Mr Speaker, Sir, even in the social housing project, persons with disabilities have not been forgotten. For the first time in history, their housing needs are being taken care of. In all its projects, Government is doing its best to include accessibility features to promote their physical independence. For example, no more hurdles for persons in wheelchairs. I wish to thank the hon. DPM, Steven Obeegadoo, for his support in this project to move towards an inclusive society. Thank you very much, hon. DPM.

We have recently taken another important step to facilitate access to the services provided by my Ministry to persons with disabilities: the relocation of Disability Empowerment Unit from the first floor of the NPF building to ground floor. This was long overdue. Now, persons with mobility issues will easily access the unit and avail of the services and facilities. We have also renamed this unit as the Empowerment Unit instead of the Disability Empowerment Unit. This change is in line with what we want to achieve through the present Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you can see, all the measures that I have just mentioned reflect Government's commitment to protect and advance the rights of persons with disabilities. With the progressive measures taken by Government over the years, persons with disabilities are now better off.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to briefly comment on the rationale of this Bill. Government is committed to upholding and safeguarding the protection and promotion of the rights of people living with disabilities. We have tried to the best of our abilities to make this Bill consistent with the UN Convention requirements. As you know, the Republic of Mauritius signed the UN Convention in 2007 and ratified it in 2010. The Convention consists of 50 articles. We have reservation on accessibility at Article 9(2)(d) & (e) and on education at Article 24(2)(b).

Now, having said that, as far as the other articles are concerned, there were some which deal with fundamental rights. For example –

- Right to life: Article 10,
- Liberty and Security of Persons: Article 14;
- Freedom from Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: Article 15,
- Liberty of Movement and Nationality: Article 18, amongst others.

These rights are enshrined in the Constitution. So, all the articles of the Convention have not been inserted in the present Bill as they are adequately covered in the Constitution. As for the other articles, they have been taken on board in the Bill and adapted to the Mauritian context.

The Bill, I must say, brings us closer to realising UN's Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Bill addresses barriers preventing disabled people from enjoying the lives. This legislation will challenge discriminatory attitude and encourage people to be aware of the abilities of persons with disabilities.

This Bill will bring a paradigm shift; we are moving from a medical approach to a more social and human approach. Now the question is: does the Bill do better? Of course, not only better; it is bringing a tremendous change in the lives of persons with disabilities. *D'ailleurs, M. le président, avant la rédaction de ce projet de loi tant important, on a été à l'écoute de tout un chacun.* We have involved persons with disabilities, I must say, in every step of the Bill from start to finish. I have fully engaged with all my colleague Ministers. No matter how good the legislation is, it should be properly enforced.

A workshop was organised by my Ministry to gather views on the provisions of the Bill. 78 NGOs in the disability sector and 36 disability focal points of different ministries participated. The NGOs have made submissions on how the Bill could be shaped for the best impact. In developing the Bill, we have consulted key independent government agencies such as the Commissioner of Police, Commissioner of Prisons, Master and Registrar, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, delegation from Rodrigues Regional Assembly, National Human Rights Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission, Special Education Needs Authority, Statistics Mauritius. We have also worked alongside the private sector and organisations such as Business Mauritius, Mauritius Bankers Association, Association of Human Resources of Mauritius, Professional Architect Council Mauritius, Construction Industry Development Board, the Building and Civil Engineering Contractors Association, the Council of Registered Professional Engineers of Mauritius and Insurers Association of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Explanatory Memorandum sets out the objectives of the Bill. I do not intend to dwell longer on this as you must have all taken cognizance of the objectives of this present important piece of legislation. However, in a nutshell, the Bill aims at providing better protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities giving effect to the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, establishing a National Empowerment Authority and encouraging the employment of persons with disabilities.

I shall now address the House on the salient features of the Bill. I would like to draw the attention of the House on the definition given to the term ‘disability’ under the interpretation clause, clause 2 of the Bill –

“Disability” means a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment of a person which substantially hinders his ability to carry out normal day to day activities;”

This definition has been aligned with the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Disability is no longer defined as a medical condition only. Person with disability is defined as meaning –

“A person who has one or more disabilities;”

Clause 3 binds the State. Every government department, local authority and statutory body shall be required to take into account the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in their policies and programmes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, part II of the Bill brings us to detailed provisions regarding prohibition from discrimination and abusive treatment. This part aims at prohibiting discrimination and abusive treatment in respect of persons with disabilities. Discrimination and acts of abuse shall constitute an offense punishable by law. Indeed, clause 5 of the Bill provides that –

“(1) No person shall discriminate against another person on the basis of his disability.”

Sub-clause 5(2) makes it an offense to discriminate on the basis of disability. This legislation will challenge discriminatory attitude and encourage people to be more aware of the abilities of persons with disabilities as I have just mentioned. Changing one’s attitude is fundamental to the overall success of disability reform. We all know it is because of attitude allowing people to be treated differently that we need legislation such as this one. People with disabilities can do amazing things, they simply need trust and empowerment and not to be discriminated against or abused.

I would like to inform the House that it is the first time that discrimination will be criminalised. The biggest challenge that people with disabilities face is, in fact, stigma and

discrimination. This results in exclusion. We have, Mr Speaker, Sir, to move towards a society, free from unnecessary barriers and discrimination.

Further, clause 6 of the Bill provides for prohibition from abusive treatment. Sub-clause 6(1) sets out the Acts which constitute abusive treatment and sub-clause 6(2) makes it an offense to commit an act of abuse. Any person who discriminates on the basis of disability or commits an act of abuse on a person with disabilities will, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs200,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill confirms the willingness of the Government to convey a strong message to perpetrators of persons with disabilities by putting the fine up to Rs200,000 and an imprisonment up to five years. We are here saying no to discrimination and saying yes to inclusion.

Clause 7 captures the prohibition of any research, medical or scientific experimentation on a person with disability without his free and informed consent. We have restored the respect and dignity that every person with disability is entitled. Contraveners will be sanctioned on conviction by fine and imprisonment. We believe it is Government's responsibility to provide leadership in these areas.

Part III of the Bill favours protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very important part of the Bill. Clauses 8 to 14 promote training and education, employment, protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situation of risk and habilitations and rehabilitations. It also sets out the obligation of different stakeholders to ensure their continued protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The Bill lays emphasis on the obligation of the State and other institutions I specified in the First Schedule to take reasonable measures to achieve the progressive realisation of their rights.

The Bill stresses on statistics and data collection under clause 12. The Government recognises that collecting accurate statistics and data on disability is important to an understanding of the needs of people with disabilities. For too long, we have not been able to collect accurate details and statistics. Statistics Mauritius does collect data but the data is not detailed. This clause will be of great help to collect disaggregated data on prevalence, nature,

duration, cause of disability and age group. Data collection is vital for disability inclusion and to deliver the greatest impact.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to turn to part IV - Protection and Promotion of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit which is being renamed as the Empowerment Unit. I will move for amendments at Committee Stage. These amendments have already been circulated. Presently, there is a Disability Empowerment Unit which has been operating under the purview of my Ministry since 1987. This unit provides services such as the provision of assistive devices, parking coupons, concessionary air fares amongst others.

With a view to providing better support and assistance to persons with disabilities, the existing unit is being revamped and replaced with a new Empowerment Unit entrusted with additional responsibilities as set out in clauses 15 to 18. For instance, officers of the unit may now enter any premises and make inspections, seek information, examine records and make copies of them at any reasonable time. Presently, officers of the unit are not mandated to take any action in cases of abuse on persons with disabilities. Officers can only refer such cases to relevant institutions such as the Police and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. However, in this Bill, officers of the unit will be empowered to report the case of abuse to the nearest Police station, arrange for counselling or such other support as may be required in the circumstances, apply for a protection order under clause 23.

Clause 23 gives powers to the Court to issue protection orders. It is important to highlight that presently protection orders can only be applied under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997, the Protection of Elderly Persons Act 2005 and the Children's Act 2022. Persons with disabilities not falling under the purview of the abovementioned legislations are unfortunately left with no recourse to apply for a protection order. This was a major shortcoming which needed to be addressed. I am happy that the proposed Bill now cures the defect. Under clause 23 of the Bill, a person with disabilities, a family member or officers of the unit can apply to the Court for a protection order where there is reasonable ground to believe that an act of abuse has been, is being or is likely to be committed against a person with disabilities.

Coming to clauses 25 to 38 of part V of the Bill, provision is made for the setting up of a National Disability Authority. The Authority is being renamed as the National Empowerment

Authority. I will move for amendments at Committee Stage. These amendments have already been circulated. The Authority will take over the functions and powers of three institutions currently operating under the aegis of my Ministry created under the following enactments –

- (i) The Lois Lagesse Trust Fund Act 1983;
- (ii) The National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act 1986, and
- (iii) The Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board Act 1996.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I go into the main functions and responsibilities of the new Authority, let me briefly state the reason for the new set up. The legislations which I have quoted no longer sit comfortably with a social approach to disability. The institutions created under these Acts have, over the years, served to the best of their abilities and I thank them all.

However, we have to admit that those institutions provide scattered services. Accordingly, the three institutions will be repealed and replaced by a new legal framework.

Merging the functions of various disability focused institution under the National Empowerment Authority will create a unified streamline approach. This consolidation will eliminate duplicative efforts, improve resource allocation and promote efficiency in providing services and support to persons with disabilities. In fact, many countries have adopted the approach of having one institution providing services to persons with disabilities. We have had a look at different jurisdictions such as Australia, India and Singapore, amongst others.

The objects of the Authority are defined in clause 26. The Authority shall be responsible, *inter alia*, to assist persons with disabilities, to reach and maintain their optimal human potential and to ensure that the environment is barrier free to enable them to lead independent and meaningful lives. Our Government is committed to giving the authority all the necessary resources to achieve these objects.

Clause 27 sets out the numerous functions of the Authority. To highlight a few: to take action to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities; to facilitate their social integration in mainstream society and to ensure their participation in society and community life. So, you can go through pages 17 and 18 of the Bill for more details.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to pause here to draw the attention of the House that the objects and functions of the Authority, clause 26 and clause 27, illustrate the determination of this Government to have a proactive approach towards the betterment of persons with disabilities. By way of example, the object at clause 26 is to ensure that the environment is barrier free to enable our citizens with disabilities to lead independent and meaningful lives. This requires that we start being proactive in upgrading our infrastructure, be it in the transport sector where the metro has set the example, or better access to building or improving the road and pavement network. Again, by way of example, at clause 27(e), the establishment of centres of training, and at clause 27(g), the development and implementation of measures for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities by ensuring access to education, training, employment, participation in sports, recreational and cultural activities. Clause 29 of the Bill sets out the composition of the Board which will be responsible for the administration of the Authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part VI concerns detailed provisions regarding employment of persons with disabilities, a very crucial component of the Bill. Training and employment of persons with disabilities is a social and economic challenge throughout the world. In fact, it depends on several factors such as, the type of disability and, unfortunately, it is difficult for persons with complex disabilities to be in employment; also, the willingness and the ability of the employer to create a fully accessible environment.

Having said this, I wish to highlight that our Government is really concerned about discrimination and employment opportunities. We know very well that persons with disabilities do not want to be dependent. They want to live full independent lives. Employment therefore is a key pillar in our plan. It is very important to focus on the abilities of persons with disabilities.

At the outset, I wish to inform the House that clause 39 of the Bill is being amended to introduce an obligation on employers to employ persons with disabilities. In the Bill, there was no obligation on the employer to employ them. The duty of the employer was only to endeavour to employ persons with disabilities. However, we have had several representations from persons with disabilities to make it an obligation on employers to employ them. The new Clause 39 of the Bill states with no uncertain terms that every employer shall employ such number of persons with disabilities. The number to be employed is specified in Part I of the Second Schedule.

Failure to meet the target of employment of persons with disabilities entails a monthly contribution for each person with disability not yet recruited. This contribution has been increased from 4,000 to 6,000. I will move for amendments at Committee Stage. These amendments have already been circulated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that employment of persons with disabilities is indeed a challenging task, and under the TEDBP Act, employers having a workforce of not less than 35 persons are required to employ persons with disabilities representing 3% of their workforce. However, it is difficult to implement this quota. With the new amendments to clause 39 and through the introduction of the Second Schedule, if an employer employs 50 to 100 employees, he shall employ at least one person with disability. For a workforce of 101 to 200, the employer shall employ at least two persons with disability. For a workforce of 201 and above, we are keeping the quota at 3%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you can see, we have tried to the best of our ability to introduce a gradual quota with a view to striking a right balance. I would like to draw the attention of the House that under the TEDBP, this obligation to employ persons with disabilities was applicable only to the private sector and statutory bodies. In a spirit of fairness and equity, in the present Bill, we are extending this obligation to the public sector also. Our Government has always set the right example.

Under clause 39(3), an employer who fails to comply with the requirements of employing persons with disabilities must inform the Authority of reasons of such non-compliance. The Board may, after a hearing by the Hearing Committee, under clause 32, determine whether the employer cannot reasonably be expected to create suitable employment opportunities for the employment of persons with disabilities. It can give direction to the employer which it considers reasonable or exempt the employer from his obligation from employing persons with disabilities. The employer shall of course have a right of appeal against any decision of the Authority. This is provided for in clause 33.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 40 of the Bill provides for the duty of employers to provide suitable employment to persons with disabilities having regard to the nature of his disability. The employer should also ensure that there is a suitable environment for that person. I would like to

inform the House that the Bill provides for the definition of reasonable accommodation at the workplace under clause 2 of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all the above mechanisms that I have explained aim at promoting employment of persons with disabilities. We are also, through clause 41 to 44 of the Bill, providing incentives to encourage the private sector to employ persons with disabilities. These fiscal incentives will surely prevent companies from holding themselves back when it comes to hiring them. Provision is being made for employer to be eligible to deduct an amount equal to 300% of the expenditure incurred by him in an income year for the purpose of computing his chargeable income.

Additionally, the *Prime à l'Emploi* Scheme is being extended to persons with disabilities over a period of five years. I wish to highlight that the *Prime à l'Emploi* was initially for a period of two years. We have now extended it from two years to five years to give more opportunity to persons with disabilities. Therefore, the State will pay up to Rs15,000 to an employer employing a person with disability. The employer will only have to pay the difference in salary. Like-wise, additional incentives may be introduced through regulations to encourage employment. We are opening up access to work so that more young people with a disability can get a foothold in the jobs' market.

Mr Speaker, the success of this Bill will, of course, be in its enforcement. Yes, the Bill is a great leap forward. Nevertheless, there are many hurdles ahead and we need to live up to the aim of this Bill. Concerted efforts, both in public and private sector, are vital to improve our infrastructure so as to give better access to persons with disabilities to all services; be it at home, at work, in transport, on pavements and roads, at sports and recreation centres. This is not an aim that can be achieved overnight but we, on this side of the House, are confident that we will be able to bring more positive changes steadily as we have done since 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as legislators, we have the responsibility to get things right. This legislation is ambitious and bold. It reflects best practices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to end, I would like to, first of all, thank the hon. Prime Minister for his unflinching support in the introduction of the Bill, my colleague- ministers for their participation in the Bill, the Office of the Attorney General and his staff, put on record the contribution of all

institutions – NGOs and other stakeholders for their valuable inputs. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in all stakeholders, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank them all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a concluding note, I wish to reaffirm the commitment of our Government to build a society that cares and values our persons with disabilities. Important progress has been made and is being made to advance their rights. We are going to be there to ensure that persons with disabilities get the necessary support so that they can fully participate in all spheres of life.

With these words, I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the sitting for 45 minutes.

At 5.31 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.24 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, 13 Members of the Opposition will take part in the debate on this Bill today and next week. This is a sign that the Opposition cares for the less fortunate. We wish tonight to be the voice of those unable to voice out their issues and their problems and, of course, this subject, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will not over-politicise it, but we will say what there is to be said and the aim surely will be to put disable people first, and that, I think is very a typical phrase for today.

I thank the hon. Minister for her second reading that was explicitly explained but we have a lot of criticisms nevertheless which I am going to start off with. I am sure the other Members of the House will take it up further but firstly, I would like to pay tribute to the thousands of persons forming part of NGOs who are helping persons with disabilities but also and especially, to all the family members who toil day and night literally to assist their parents, sisters, brothers, children, Mr Speaker, Sir, who have disabilities. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a life-time commitment and family members in Mauritius, maybe in not so many other countries but in Mauritius, family members do this work extremely well and we need to recognise this and be thankful to them.

The last census of 2022 noted that there were 84,400 persons in Mauritius having some form of disability. This is nearly 7% of the population and I will come to the various categories in a moment; 7% up from 5% a few years ago.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it also commensurates with the increase in the ageing population of Mauritius, another sign that the population is ageing. Now this Bill, long as it may be, comprehensive as it may be, let's make no mistake – it is being presented on the eve of the General Elections. Last year, in November when the Parliament closed, there was apparently time no time to present the Bill. Although it was an important Bill apparently, the Government could not find the parliamentary time to bring this Bill to the House. So, now, on the very eve of the General Elections, we have this important Bill being presented to the House. Now this Government has been in office for the last nine years, first assumed office far back in 2015.

Now, I have listened to the Minister and she said: 'where there is a will, there is a way'. Well, we can only deplore that in the last nine years, there were no will to find any way to bring this Bill. So, we had to wait nine years for a Disability Bill to be brought before this House because obviously, by the own averments of the Minister, there was no will because otherwise, there would have been away.

The Minister herself, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not new to the job. In fact, out of last nine years, she spent seven years in that post. We were together in 2015 and 2016 and then, for a short period she was posted elsewhere and then she came back from 2019 to today as minister in charge of social security, minister in charge of the disabled. So, there is no excuse. She has herself been there seven years out of the last nine years, since 2015.

Now, she has given us a long list of monetary benefits and we welcome that; we are happy that taxpayers' money for once is not going to be wasted on Côte d'Or or whatever else, but it is going to the disabled, to the people with disabilities. I am happy with that. I have got no problem with that and we welcome that. But that is not enough and the Minister herself has acknowledged that not only monetary benefits but gainful employment, remunerated employment is also important. And this is where this Government has failed totally, total failure since taking office in the important field which the Government itself and the Minister has acknowledged, that is, the need to find gainful employment. Who would like to receive money –

especially if you are disabled – and just sit there in the house and do absolutely nothing and have nothing to occupy yourself because you have not been trained for it; because the Government has not find a way to force, coerce, induce employers to find employment for you? So, you are sitting there. Okay, you have money, you have some dignity but dignity cannot only be monetary. It has to be people who are employed, have gainful employment, who are respected by their peers and who have something to occupy themselves with during the day, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is what this is also all about - respect and dignity going beyond merely monetary hand outs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, of course now I am talking about the infamous Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board which the Minister herself has been directly responsible for the last seven out of the nine preceding years. And it is not, in fact, something to be very proud of; it is not a track record that anybody at all will be proud of. Since 2017, I am told that that then General Manager, one Mr Bundhoo, left for some reason or other (fired or left) and very irresponsibly, there was no General Manager replacing him since 2017. So, since 2017, we are talking about seven years, the Act which is going to be repealed apparently, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board has had no General Manager. And the General Manager's responsibilities were in fact quite extensive. He was meant to coordinate activities with the stakeholders. He was supposed to be in charge of providing training to disabled persons. He was supposed to find employment for the disabled persons. What possible reason could there have been from 2017 onwards and if we care about disabled persons that this General Manager of this important Board whose job was to provide training to disabled persons, whose job was to find employment for disabled persons, that this post was not field since 2017. What possible reason will the Minister give us in her summing up?

This Board has a budget of about Rs12 m. per annum, about Rs1 m. every month and since this Board has been completely dormant, this parastatal body has been completely dormant, for all these years it has rented a complete waste of money but even more importantly, a complete waste of opportunity for all persons with disabilities. 15 persons are employed in that Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board and they do nothing apparently all day. And the Minister under clause 9 of the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act 1996, the Minister has the power to give directions of a general character to the Board. Did she over the last so many years give any directions of any character to the Board as to filling its important

statutory responsibilities? That is, Mr Speaker, Sir, a question that every person with disability will want an answer for, because you cannot replace time; you get older. People have been waiting for nine years and they need to know what has happened over the last nine years because according to my information, there has been no training of any sort provided to persons with disabilities since 2017. No one placed in employment, again, since 2017. All the time, the taxpayers are paying, there is not so also important, but all the time and that is very important, disabled persons are waiting, and no one trained, no one placed in employment since 2017.

Now, there is also a Hearing Committee which hears cases where employers do not respect the law that says that you have to recruit 3% of your workforce if you employ a certain number of people over, I think, 35 employees. That Hearing Committee, since 2017 has heard only one case. Only one case was brought before the Hearing Committee. And now we have this Bill at the eve of the election as if it is the main priority of the Government now to do this, but what was the priority of Government over the last so many years? Where was the will to do what was right?

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk about employment of disabled persons, Statistics Mauritius tells us what sort of disability people have: walking disabilities – 37%; hearing disabilities – 18%. That means, the number of people with walking disabilities is 31,000 in Mauritius according to Statistics Mauritius and the census of 2022. People with hearing disabilities, as I said they account for 18%, that is, 15,000 people. And Mr Speaker, Sir, I will tell you something, when I was working as a young Chartered Accountant in the UK, my Manager, who was a Chartered Accountant, was deaf. He could not hear a thing and all the time he was lip-reading and yet he was a Manager in a very respectable firm of chartered accountants, not in Mauritius, in the UK. So, all these people, although they have some disability, they are totally employable especially now when you have work-from-home and supposedly better transport facilities. These people are totally employable. I am not talking about people who may be intellectually disabled and again, you can employ them in supermarkets and other places, in doing perhaps more manual work. So, a lot of these people with disabilities are totally employable and ought to be employable except that the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board has done absolutely nothing to help them over the last nine years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a register in the old Act, there is a register in the new Bill, both basically the same wording and it is there to register people who may wish to be registered with the Board. I mentioned that there were 84,000 people with disabilities. Do you how many people are on the register of the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board? 3,000 people. 30 times less than what Statistics Mauritius has actually identified. 30 times less!

Data, according to the Minister, is apparently so important to the Government. It is what she just said: “Data is so important to us!” Ah yes, the last 10 years – I am repeating myself a little bit – but the last 10 years, why was data not important? Why? Tell us later please. What effort has been made to mass the register of the Board with actual disabilities in Mauritius? What has been done? Because it is quite easy, well relatively easy, to draft a Bill – there are a lot of people from State Law Office, from UNDP, everybody sits together – and a Bill is a set of no doubt good intentions. I have no doubt that the Minister has good intentions, but these good intentions must be put into practice and what we have seen since this Government came to power has been, in fact, that we have not been able to match practice with good intention. Good intentions have been there, practice completely absent as far as training and employment of disabled persons is concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now this new authority which was called National Disability or something, now it is called National Empowerment Authority? Now, you are dealing with people who are disabled and who may be intellectually perhaps less able than others. Isn't there going to be a huge confusion between National Empowerment Authority and National Empowerment Foundation? Who is going to know the difference? Three quarters of the people will be ending up at Garden Tower. Mr Seeruttun, you may be a bit more intelligent than most, but National Empowerment Foundation and National Empowerment Authority, that is not the right name. It is confusing and the first thing – I have been Minister for Social Inclusion – that you do when you deal with people who are less able is to be clear in your message and in what you offer in terms of incentives and to be clear in the institutions that are supposed to help them. It is totally confusing to have the National Empowerment Authority and the National Empowerment Foundation together. And obviously, since the other one has been there for 20 years, people will get confused and most of the people will end up trying to climb the stairs and the *perrons* of the National Empowerment Foundation instead of going to the National Empowerment Authority.

So, to me, although it is the right intention, ‘empowerment’, it is an unfortunate name which will lead to confusion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what guarantee will there be that there will be any change under this law? I had noted while preparing my speech that this obligation of employing 3% of employees had disappeared. It had instead been replaced by fiscal incentives, by monetary incentives to be given but let us be clear. Fiscal incentives, monetary incentives may be important to those who pay tax; will be important to those who have to generate revenue but where is the importance of fiscal incentives or monetary inducement to parastatal bodies? Parastatal bodies pay no tax, so you cannot give them 300% deduction of their taxable income because they have no taxable income. Very few parastatal bodies have any revenue that they care about anyway. So, telling them that you are going to give them *Prime à l’Emploi* is not going to work. Anyway, *Prime à l’Emploi*, as we all know, does not concern parastatal bodies, Ministries, Government departments. It does not concern these institutions. I am referring to the MRA here concerning *Prime à l’Emploi* –

“The following employers are not eligible for the scheme:

- A Ministry, a Government department, a local authority, a statutory body or the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (...)”

So, as *Prime à l’Emploi* will not be covered, that inducement is out. As I mentioned, fiscal incentives to these category of people: a Ministry, a Government Department, Local Authority, Statutory Authority, RRA, that is not also going to work because none of these pay tax. So, what is going to actually induce these important institutions to recruit disabled persons? And that is why I am in a way happy that the 3% minimum rule has been reduced now because it was 35 employees before, you had to have 3%; now it is 200 employees, you have to employ 3%. It seems the lower categories employ less. Okay, we can always fight about that but it is a positive step because the other incentives will just not work.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one problem though. Section 39 of the Bill does put the onus on every employer to employ disabled persons, the Board may summon an employer to show cause etc. and the employer also includes the State. I am not a lawyer but you do not need to be a lawyer to know that the PSC is set up through the Constitution of Mauritius and the Constitution

of Mauritius does make it very clear. Article 118: the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. The Minister will be kind enough in her summing up to tell us how is it that the, is it called now, National Empowerment Authority will give itself the power under section 39 to summon the Public Service Commission which is a recruitment body for the whole of Government; how will it manage to summon, sanction, and fine the Public Service Commission. It is an important question. I am sure other Members on this side of the House will also raise the same issue because we all have the same question to ask the hon. Minister. Obviously, much recruitment is done wrongly, I believe, through delegated powers. Ministries get delegated powers from the PSC to recruit healthcare assistants and all these persons. And now, will it change anything if the PSC is recruiting directly or through delegated powers given to Ministries? How will that apply also to this clause 39 and other clauses of this Bill which seem to be in direct collision with the section 118 of our Constitution, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, let me also say, I talked about the need for Government to employ, but there is also the need for Government to rehabilitate; to habilitate and to rehabilitate persons with disabilities. If you look at the BBC or the UK – I was there recently– if you look at the television there, you will often see that the newscaster is a disabled person. Maybe through the hand or something, you can see that he or she has a disability. Weather men or weather women who present the weather forecast, often, you see that they have a disability. This is a way for the UK to say: ‘Look, disability is, in fact, normal. Disability is acceptable. Disability is not a problem. It does not mean that you cannot be someone great, someone popular or someone famous if you have a disability.’

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, is regrettable that whatever may be the law – I do not watch the MBC a lot – I have not seen this happening here. I have not seen this anywhere in Government where you put forward, deliberately showcase in a way, encourage, habilitate and rehabilitate people with disabilities so that the rest of Mauritius can say: ‘I could do the same. I can also recruit.’ *L'exemple vient d'en haut!* But where is the example that the Government is giving? I cannot see that. Maybe I will be corrected in a moment, I hope so. Because the idea is not politics. Although we are at the eve of the election, I am saying the Government should do this,

should do that, but it only got a few months left. God knows whether the Bill will be even promulgated before that! But still, what I am saying will go in Hansard.

So, Government has a role and the PSC has a role. How do we encourage the PSC to recruit? How do we encourage parastatal bodies to recruit? I do not believe at all in section 39, that we are going to bring a hearing and people should endeavour. The last 10 years, the Hearing Committee only sat once, according to my information. There is no guarantee that this new Hearing Committee will sit longer or more frequently than the one before.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have reached near the end of my speech. A few points on schooling. I am told, Mr Speaker, Sir, that for Special Education Needs Schools, Government has a habit of mixing people with physical disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities. Now, that is a problem because you can have a class with different physical disabilities of persons, that is not a problem at all, but you cannot have a class with people with physical disabilities and those that are perhaps slower at learning. So, if it is happening, it has to stop and we need to put people in a segregated way so that they can continue to learn and make something of their life and build a great career. So, it all starts with education and it starts with the Special Education Needs Schools which need to be more adapted.

The second thing that I have been told, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that Special Education Needs Schools stop at the age of 20. Now, this may be fine if you have a physical disability. At the age of 20, you may already be studying for a degree or you may be doing something fantastic in your life. But if you have an intellectual impairment, age 20 physically may not be age 20 mentally. So, again, before we were talking of age 15; this is age 20. Some of these children, if I may say so, may not be age 20 mentally. So, I think this limit of age 20 for intellectual impairment should be abolished and people should be encouraged to learn at their own speed.

We were talking just now about housing – the Deputy Prime Minister is here – apparently, now, there is going to be easier access. But the houses also need to be adapted for the people with disabilities, not just the access. So, we hope that these apartments will be provided with special facilities.

Before I end, I am going to come to something which I really feel strongly about. It is the granting of Basic Invalidity Pension. The Minister and I had a sparring moment, I think it was at the end of 2022, concerning what I considered to be a major fraud of hundreds, if not thousands, of cases in the south of the island where, since 2022, two years almost now, it seems people are using falsified medical certificates and bringing these medical certificates to medical boards with very lax control at the level of the Medical Board. No fault of the doctors, I will come to that in a moment, but very lax control at the Medical Board. Those people, even from a young age, were being illegally and fraudulently given pensions for the rest of their lives at the detriment of many people who are genuinely entitled to pensions and often do not get the disability pension. These people had found a much organised way of faking their illness and faking their medical certificate. Perhaps the Minister can tell us where the Police case has reached and how many people have been arrested, charged, and hopefully, prosecuted for this case.

I have made some enquiries and what I am worried about is that there seems to be little improvement that has been made to the system to prevent further fraud. I would have expected, having taken the time to ask a PNQ, that there would have been improvements to the system. What improvements have there been? Apparently, now, it needs to have a stamp of the hospital in some cases and a signature from the Medical Superintendent! Now, you can fake the signature and you can easily buy a stamp! So, where is the control? These medical certificates are not numbered. If I am not mistaken, the same form is used in every hospital and in every dispensary. It does not even have the name of the hospital on the medical certificate. It is not numbered. The name of the doctor signing is not clearly printed and we all know what people say about doctor's handwriting. Often, the doctors on the Board do not even know which doctor has signed. This is still the situation. So, it is still easy for wrong-minded people to fake the system and get away with this. This is wrong, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I do not blame the Board. The Board, I think, is made up of two doctors. Each session is 90 minutes and in these 90 minutes, they are meant to see 30 patients. So, a quick calculation, we will find it is three minutes per patient. In these three minutes per patient, they have to decide whether to grant or not to grant the pension to this person maybe for one year, maybe for much longer, God knows! If it is an amputation, maybe it is for life. So, I am saying now that it is

irresponsible of the Ministry to continue with this system. The system has to be re-thought and restructured to give a better and a fairer service to people, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I understand there are around 32,000 people receiving a State Invalidity Pension. That is a lot of people and so, we need to be fair to these people with a fair system. There should be a Secretariat attached to each board. What should a Secretariat do? The Secretariat should be able to check these medical certificates. These should be pre-numbered. These should have the name of the doctor on it. These should have the name of the hospital on it. And there should be some crosschecking, not every single one but let us say half of them or 20% of them, you check with the doctor and ask whether the latter issued this number. Yes! Did you issue to this person? Yes! Did you sign this? Yes. That's it! At least you know it's not a fake. It's a minimum that you can expect an efficient government to do and yet it is not done!

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's hope that it will work, with the PNQ and now maybe this paragraph in my speech, the Government will wake up and improve the viability of the State Invalidity Pensions as they are given. To ensure, Mr Speaker, Sir, the people entitled benefit fully and people who are not entitled to benefit, do not benefit, and finally this is the Capital of Mauritius. Do you know where the board of the Social Security Office in fact sits? This Medical Board sits in the parking of Astor Court, there is a parking. Yes, I will take you there if you wish. There is a little office in the parking of Astor Court; it is there, there are about 20 chairs which are there, mixing with the cars and that is where in the State of Mauritius 2024, we receive disabled persons who are to be interviewed for the Board. I leave it to the appreciation of the Members of the House, as to whether we are doing justice to the people and if you say no, I will send pictures tomorrow. I will bring the pictures because we have an office in that building. That is how I know, this how I see and it is very sad. Very sad for this to be happening!

And finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to reintroduce Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as it was before. We are after all talking about a sector that requires volunteers, money, passion, people on a mission. This is what this sector requires and I am sad. I have always been sad that since 2015, I think a bit later, 2016-2017, the CSR system as it previously existed under the previous Government and even under Minister Lutchmeenaraidoo, was completely destroyed in favor of some sort of National CSR Foundation which in fact now is a state control of CSR.

CSR is now for the great majority merely a tax which is administered by the National CSR Foundation and the National CSR Foundation gives out money often very late and what are we missing? We may still have some money but what we are missing is the passion and the expertise. That was the case when companies, businesses were directly funding NGOs because when you fund an NGO – let's say you fund an NGO for drug abuse or disability, it may be because you have a child who is a drug addict, it may be because you have a parent who is disabled, then, as a businessman, you feel that you will give money to that NGO and therefore you put the passion in it, you give the expertise of your company in it and this has been destroyed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opposition has committed itself in its programme to re-establish the Corporate Social Responsibility under a superb form than it was prior to the Government destroying same. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

(7.02 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will begin by congratulating my colleague, hon. Minister Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, for bringing this vital piece of legislation to be debated in the House.

I have obviously listened to the Leader of the Opposition and I must admit that I have very rarely seen the Leader of the Opposition, so flustered and short of arguments, going to the length of saying or looking through his papers and saying – “now where was I”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition has reminded the House and rightly so that he used to be at some point, the Minister in charge of this particular portfolio but I think the House and Social Integration...

Mr X. L. Duval: Not disabled!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: So, I think the House and the population would have actually loved to hear you share with us, maybe a summary of your achievements because you were rightly positioned...

Mr X. L. Duval: I was never in charge of Social Security!

An hon. Member: *Li pa au courant!*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I said Social Integration!

Mr X. L. Duval: It's not the same!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Okay and again, there goes the Leader of the Opposition trying to discuss nomenclatures and giving us a lesson on definitions of what integration is or what a foundation is or an authority. Instead of saying that this Government lacks the will, he should focus his attention to that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing could be more preposterous. The Bill is here being debated. I think this is testimony of our commitment, our willingness, our political willingness to bring this important Bill to be debated in the House and it is not about being brought to the House on the eve of election. Maybe he is privy to information that we are not because he kept mentioning that this is not the eve of the election, is the election tomorrow? It is not about bringing the Bill on the eve of election despite the global context of so many humanitarian, economic crisis happening plus, we are still suffering the setbacks of the pandemic which we all know has increased inequalities. Despite that global context, the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, this Government has not pushed disability inclusion down our agenda. *Au contraire*, this Bill is testament to our commitment to championing disability rights and inclusion. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is completely incorrect for the Leader of Opposition to be putting a timeline to this Bill coming for debate into this Parliament today.

In fact, I think the Leader of the Opposition has no excuse. I have just mentioned that at some point, he occupied this portfolio of social integration. Let me repeat it – in 2010 until, if I recall, August 2011, you were perfectly positioned, you were perfectly placed to come up with the right policy measures in order to stop discrimination against our fellow citizens suffering from disabilities. Nothing that could make a palpable difference was done at that time.

So, I think it is a bit pretentious for the hon. Leader of the Opposition to profess himself today. When this Government is bringing this important Bill, he is professing to be the *ardent défenseur des droits de nos citoyens autrement capables*. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader

of the Opposition was a Member, an influential Member, I reckon of successive governments led by the previous Prime Minister, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, during all those years. He has served as Vice-Prime Minister from the period 2005 to June 2014. Where was all this portrayal, all these great sentiments? There were nothing concrete, Mr Speaker, Sir, and when I listen to him today, I fear for those who had been marginalised for years, not to mention decades.

When we see the hon. Leader of the Opposition being associated today, once again, with the same ex-Prime Minister! *Enfin*, it looks like you are re-assessing whether to become bedfellow with that kind of leader again; if it is worthwhile or not! But what will be the trust of people?

Mr X. L. Duval: You want to take my place?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I did not interrupt you when you were speaking! Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened to him in very good decorum. So, I would beg for the same courtesy to be extended.

It is unfair to the people who suffer from disabilities to go and tell them or make them believe that they would now do better than what hon. Pravind Jugnauth and his Government are doing for those at the bottom of the ladder and for those in a vulnerable situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly and eloquently put by my colleague, the mover of the Bill, this Bill is about upholding the rights of the segment of our population and about restoring respect and dignity. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I go back when the Leader of Opposition was giving us a lesson about why this Bill took the length of time it took to come to Parliament for debate. Mr Speaker, Sir, at that time, the number of opportunities during the number of years the Leader of Opposition was in a position of power, he had so many chances to make concrete and palpable difference in their lives. Nothing was done! It took this amount of time, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Today, we would have had a tree if he had rolled up his sleeves at the right time and put some effort and sown the seed for this Bill. Maybe today, we would have a sapling or a tree because the mightiest oak tree was once a nut. But the Leader of Opposition forgets that because they have wasted so much time *koz koze dan ler*, they forgot for what they were mandated to do when they were in power. Therefore, I once again congratulate my colleague for bringing this

Bill into the Parliament. I am not going to refute each and every point that was put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. I will leave that pleasure to my other colleagues.

The hon. Leader of Opposition mentioned lengthily about the invalid pension. Is this what is causing this *agitation*? Is it because today, the Government, the hon. Prime Minister who has his heart in the right place, has offered *enn pansion dign à nos citoyens autrement capables*? Is this what is causing the frustration to the Members of Opposition? Should the House be reminded, should the population be reminded of the pittance that was being allocated to people with disabilities by the previous government? I am not going to rack their brain. I think the population *est tres éclairée*. They are not going to be forgetting the pittance – I think ‘pittance’ is the apt word here.

You have been waiting for this Bill to come to Parliament? They have been waiting as well; people suffering from disabilities have been waiting for you and previous governments as well to come up what today, our Government, this Minister, and this Prime Minister have been able to encapsulate in the provisions of this very vital Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very clear from the provisions/clauses of this Bill that we are inching closer to our international obligations to begin with. We are signatory to so many international instruments. We have to remember that the word ‘disability’ itself is mentioned all throughout the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular sections pertaining to human settlement, accessibility, education, growth, employment, inequality. So, Mauritius is doing the right thing by bringing this Bill to fruition. Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by the mover of the Bill, this Bill is going to be sitting alongside other key legislations. There are not many countries in the world that have provision in the Constitution which prevents and criminalises discrimination towards people with disabilities. Just to illustrate how our country values our differently abled citizens. We shouldn’t take it for granted.

As I said, there are not many countries in the world that have enshrined these provisions in their Constitution. We have the National Pension Act, the Mental Health Care Act, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act, referred to as the Disability Act and it is now going to be repealed with the provisions of this Bill. Even the Equal Opportunity Act of 2008 prevents discrimination. It prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination based on handicaps. Therefore,

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are putting within the legal framework the protection and promotion of rights with people with disabilities.

There is a creation of the unit. Again, I will go back to what the Leader of Opposition stated earlier on about the Board having been without a General Manager.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Oh, I will miss you. Bye.

Hon. Members: Ha! Ha! Ha!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of Opposition should not try to make as if the board was not functioning because there was not a General Manager despite a bid exercise has been launched. There was an Officer-in-Charge! So, the Board was functioning. I think it is completely misleading when the Leader of Opposition tries to portray as if that Board was *à genoux* and not functioning. It was! In any case, when there is no appointment of a General Manager or the highest position, there is an Officer-in-Charge who takes care and who steps in. Therefore, I think he got mixed up in his arguments because he was so short of them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, we have facilities: wheelchair, accessible transportation like the Metro, semi low-floor buses and the constant increase, like I said, of the Invalidity Pension. It is good to remind the House and it is good to remind the population that in December 2019, the Basic Invalidity Pension increased from Rs6,200 to Rs9,000. Then, in 2022, it increased from Rs9,000 to Rs10,000. Again, it has increased from Rs10,000 to Rs11,000. Next month, in April, much to the joy...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Oh, you are here! Welcome back. You did not give me time to miss you!

So, next month, in April, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Invalidity Pension will be raised to Rs13,500. A reality! This is what I call concrete, giving back dignity, *une pension digne*. This is factual. I am not inventing anything here. This Invalidity Pension of Rs13,500 is welcomed by

all the citizens of Mauritius who suffer from a disability. They are not only receiving a dignified pension, they receive a variety of additional services.

For instance, in case the Opposition has forgotten, the Government provides free travel bus passes, Metro cards, refunds on bus and taxi fares, dedicated parking facilities, wheelchairs, walking sticks, elbow crutches, hearing aids, spectacles, concessionary airfares and so many assistive devices, offered by this Government. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government's commitment to developing and defending the rights of those individuals with disability is centred on providing them with facilities, resources, a legal framework to do precisely what the Leader of Opposition was saying, so that they can reach and realise their full potential.

He mentioned his qualms about education; we have the Special Needs Education Authority. Now, let us not go into the details of what is an authority and a foundation again. So, it is a cross-cutting issue which has been taken on board during the drafting of this Bill.

Government Agency, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, the general public; it is a collective effort for us as stakeholders with one objective to significantly change the lives of these individuals. So we're not going to leave any stone unturned when it comes to promoting the human rights of those vulnerable people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will focus a bit on my Ministry and I can affirm that my ministry stands resolute in our mission to foster this inclusive, equitable and just society. The Ministry of Gender Equality has adopted a comprehensive and a multi-faceted approach so that we can ensure the protection, the empowerment, the inclusion individuals with disabilities in our society and our commitment extends policies to tangible actions which I will enumerate very briefly.

My ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir, actively considers the needs of children with disabilities in our developmental and protective programmes in compliance with the Children's Act of 2020. This includes awareness campaigns, support systems designed specifically to embrace and to address the unique challenges faced by our children with disabilities and such initiatives go a long way along to underscore our belief in a society where every child is given the full and equal opportunity to thrive and develop to their fullest potential. We have the Child Services Coordinating Panel providing for the enforcement of provisions dealing with disabled children in our country at all levels of intervention. We have very valued and close collaboration with the

'Association Pour Les Handicapées De Malherbes' which again, goes to exemplify our commitment to providing specialised care and accommodation for disabled children who have been victims of abuse or violence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our response to violence and abuse, particularly concerning individuals with disabilities is victim-centred. It is comprehensive. Our services range from temporary housing to therapy and legal assistance and they are designed specifically to address victims with disabilities. Mr Speaker, Sir, recognising the added difficulties or vulnerabilities that they may face, we, at the level of ministry, have instituted measures to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of such victims.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are implementing programs and structures so that all these individuals with any level of impairment can have access to opportunities in a society or in an economy which is rapidly developing. Mr Speaker, Sir, I recall in July 8, last year, the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, hon. Ramano and the mover of this Bill, hon. Jeewa-Daureeawoo, launching the Beach Management Plan (Phase 1) at Flic en Flac Public Beach, as well as the Floating Beach Wheelchair Project which provides floating beach wheel facilities to disabled persons, therefore allowing these people with disabilities to access the beach area and engage in more activities. So the effort is there. The commitment is there. We are doing to the best of our abilities. They might appear to the Leader of Opposition as baby steps but they are steps which were missing altogether during your time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am conscious that people who experience disabilities differently and that people accept disabilities in a different way and here, I have in mind people with disabilities who have achieved a certain way to inspire others.

For example, our differently abled athletes, sportspeople, competing both at the local, regional, and international levels, going out there, making us, making the whole nation, our Republic proud. These are people who deserve our encouragement, our admiration, and congratulations. They are inspirations and role models for others. This does not come easily. We recognise that it comes due to lots of hard work, discipline, and tenacity. The hon. Leader of Opposition mentioned earlier on about the fabulous job carried out by the families of people who suffer from disability; be it the sister, the parents, the immediate support system, the familial

support system. Unfortunately, there are also parents who find it extremely difficult to let go and to enable their child to become independent when they have a certain disability.

And here, I join my voice to that of the Leader of the Opposition. I make a humble request to those parents not to shield those children with disabilities. We are putting together the appropriate care, the consideration in order for these children, these individuals to take part in the transformation of our society. Of course, we understand that all activities must be done within the confines of their limits but they still need to be given the chance and the opportunity and all the support so that they can go out and step out of the confines and enjoy life to their fullest.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, again, with this commendable Bill, under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, we have demonstrated as a compassionate Government that we are operating in the best interests of our people as a whole. People's lives will alter significantly as a result of this new legislation. With the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, we are definitely headed in the right direction, towards an inclusive society that is going to be supporting the participation of individuals with disabilities who must be given the proper attention and respect so that they can participate fully in our Republic's growth.

I am going to end my intervention, Mr Speaker, Sir, by quoting Mahatma Gandhi –

“Caring for the disabled is a religion; serving them is like serving God.”

I again thank my hon. colleague and the Prime Minister for supporting this Bill, for bringing this Bill into the Parliament for debating.

Long live the Republic of Mauritius and I thank you all for your attention.

Mr Speaker: MP Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(7.25 p.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci. Longtemps attendu et finalement atterri, serait-on tenté de dire. Le *Disabilities Bill* était attendu depuis longtemps. L'idée serait de venir avec des propositions qui assureraient la protection et la promotion des personnes en situation de handicap mais surtout s'assurer qu'elles puissent bénéficier des mêmes droits que leurs concitoyens et que ces droits soient respectés.

Ce projet de loi comporte peut-être de bonnes intentions, je n'en disconviens pas. Mais cela ne suffit pas. En effet, le projet de loi ne va pas assez loin et ne répond pas aux attentes des personnes en situation de handicap et encore moins à la convention des Nations unies. C'est un premier pas certes, mais *could have been better*. Les Nations unies définissent les personnes handicapées comme étant celles qui ont des déficiences physiques, mentales, intellectuelles ou sensorielles à long terme, qui, en interaction avec divers obstacles, peuvent entraver leur participation pleine et effective à la société sur la base de l'égalité avec les autres. Maurice est signataire de la convention des États-Unis relative aux droits des personnes handicapées depuis 2007.

La convention a été ratifiée en 2010 ; ratification assortie de réserves aux articles 9, 11 et 24. Selon les dispositions de la convention, des rapports périodiques doivent être soumis au comité des Nations unies en application de l'article 35 de la convention. Le dernier rapport avait été soumis en 2015 et le prochain est attendu incessamment, et le gouvernement arrive à la fin de son mandat, d'où la présentation du projet de loi devant cette Chambre. Lors de la soumission du dernier rapport en 2015, l'État avait pris l'engagement de retirer ces réserves aux articles 9, 11 et 24, tout en revoyant certaines législations et pratiques. Huit ans se sont écoulés, mais il semblerait que c'est le statu quo ; les réserves sont toujours là. Les législations n'ont pas beaucoup évolué et les mesures prises ne sont pas à la hauteur de nos engagements. L'article 9 concerne l'accessibilité aux bâtiments, aux routes, au transport et aux autres infrastructures, y compris les écoles, les logements et les lieux de travail. Les Etats membres se doivent de prendre les mesures appropriées pour élaborer, promulguer et contrôler la mise en œuvre de normes et de directives eu égard à l'accessibilité aux services, au public, et également veiller à ce que ces installations soient fournies par des entités privées également.

Malgré le fait que certaines dispositions auraient dû être prises dans la construction notamment, que les bâtiments devraient être équipés de certaines facilités, tel n'est pas le cas. Par exemple, les bâtiments devraient être équipés d'une signalisation sonore et visuelle, y compris en braille pour les guichets automatiques de banque et les ascenseurs des bâtiments abritant des services situés au premier étage appelés à accueillir des personnes handicapées.

Deux, des dispositifs visuels et sonores installés dans les ascenseurs et de panneaux tactiles indiquant les différents étages des immeubles.

Trois, l'accès à des magasins et même à certaines banques est un autre obstacle. Plusieurs des grands centres commerciaux sont aujourd'hui pourvus d'escalators mais point d'ascenseurs pour accéder à ne serait-ce qu'au premier étage. Ainsi, le *Passport Office* au *Sterling Building* n'est pas accessible aux personnes ayant un handicap. Il y a des marches à gravir et c'est difficile pour eux.

Les transports publics, soit les bus ne sont pas *friendly* pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Il y a toujours des marches pour y accéder. Même si le métro peut accueillir des personnes en chaise roulante, comment cette personne se rend-t-elle aux stations de métro, tenant en compte que nos trottoirs ne sont pas accessibles aux non-voyants et aux personnes circulant en fauteuil roulant ? Qui plus est, provision n'est faite nulle part dans ce projet de loi concernant l'accès aux modes de transports publics, comme les autobus adaptés pour des personnes circulant en fauteuil roulant.

Aucune mention n'est faite dans ces présentes propositions. Les routes et les trottoirs ne sont pas adaptés aux personnes en situation de handicap. Sur nos routes, les *curb ramps* sont nécessaires. Les *curb ramps* sont des rampes avec plusieurs inclinaisons qui permettent à la personne à mobilité réduite de se déplacer avec moins de difficulté.

Lors de son intervention, la ministre a fait un appel pour que les constructions à venir soient accessibles aux personnes à mobilité réduite. Cela n'est pas suffisant. Il faut légiférer et amender les lois existantes telles que le *Road Act*, le *Morcellement Act*, le *Town and Country Planning Act*. On a perdu trop de temps.

L'article 11 mentionne 'situation de risque et urgence humanitaire'. Cet article exhorte les Etats signataires d'assurer la protection et la sécurité des personnes handicapées dans les situations de risque, y compris lors des catastrophes naturelles. Lors de la présentation du dernier rapport en 2015, la délégation mauricienne a affirmé que des dispositions sont prises pour évacuer les personnes en cas de désastre naturel.

Une personne sur 20 en République de Maurice souffre d'un handicap, soit environ 59 870 personnes handicapées selon le rapport publié par le ministère des Finances en 2015. Le rapport prend en compte le recensement de la population de 2011. Ma question est la suivante: quelles ont été les mesures prises, ne serait-ce que lors des dernières inondations et du cyclone

Belal pour protéger ces personnes, surtout celles qui vivent seules ? Ce matin, à une question parlementaire, je suis restée sur ma faim eu égard au secours porté à ces personnes pendant les dernières inondations.

En ce qui concerne l'article 24 - éducation, les experts des Nations unies ont beaucoup insisté sur la nécessité de mettre en place un système éducatif inclusif avec un plus grand investissement et soutien de la part de l'État.

La partie III, section 8 du projet de loi, parle de formation et éducation.

Premier point. Ce paragraphe ne tient pas en compte que l'étudiant portant un handicap intellectuel, comme l'a souligné le leader de l'opposition juste avant, incluant autiste profond et intelligent et trisomie 21, peut ne pas avoir toutes ces compétences à l'âge de 20 ans ; âge où il est appelé à quitter l'établissement qu'il fréquente.

Deux, toujours concernant les étudiants portant un handicap intellectuel. Au vu de leur handicap, ils ne peuvent participer dans le *mainstream*. Rien n'est prévu à la fin de leurs études pour valider leurs compétences.

Trois, inclusion est un mot injustement utilisé pour qualifier la réussite de notre système d'éducation. Toutefois, comment peut-on parler d'inclusion sachant que tous les enseignants ne parlent pas le langage des signes et ne maîtrisent pas le braille pour les non-voyants ? Bon nombre d'enfants à mobilité réduite ont un bon quotient intellectuel. Malheureusement, ils ne sont pas admis dans le *mainstream*. Encore une fois, le problème d'accessibilité aux infrastructures. En 2011, seulement 7,7 % de la population handicapée fréquentait actuellement l'école contre 25,6 % dans l'ensemble de la population. De plus, 21,2 % de la population handicapée n'a jamais été scolarisée contre 5,7 % dans l'ensemble de la population. Et en l'absence de chiffres précis, il est impossible de savoir le nombre d'enfants exclus. Dans les rares cas où ils se retrouvent en *mainstream*, il existe souvent, et c'est malheureux, une ségrégation de ces enfants dans ces écoles.

Dans le système éducatif, les ONG déplorent le fait que l'Etat n'ait pas pu faire la différence entre un système éducatif intégré et un système éducatif inclusif. C'est pourquoi il est important de travailler en étroite collaboration avec les ONG. Les ONG connaissent mieux les

besoins et les préoccupations des personnes ayant un handicap. Il y a plusieurs types de handicap et plusieurs degrés de handicap. C'est pourquoi il est important que les personnes en situation de handicap puissent participer pleinement à tout processus législatif.

Les femmes en situation de handicap. Quel est le nombre total et le pourcentage de femmes handicapées à Maurice ? Environ 30,900 femmes vivent avec un handicap à Maurice. Ce qui représente 51,6% de la population des personnes handicapées.

Selon le rapport du ministère des Finances, je cite –

« Une disparité entre les sexes est notée en faveur des hommes handicapés, caractérisée par une proportion plus élevée de scolarisés ou ayant fréquenté l'école dans le passé ; 86,7 % contre 69,6 % pour les femmes handicapées. Il est à noter que la proportion de femmes handicapées qui n'ont jamais fréquenté l'école était plus de deux fois plus élevée que celle de leurs homologues masculins en 2011. »

Plus loin, on peut lire ceci –

« Une étude du niveau d'instruction selon le sexe révèle que les femmes handicapées sont beaucoup plus désavantagées que leurs homologues masculins. En 2011, 31,1 % des femmes handicapées n'avaient pas d'éducation formelle ou n'avaient fréquenté que l'école maternelle contre 13,7 % pour les garçons. En outre, seulement 18,1 % des femmes ont atteint le niveau de l'enseignement secondaire contre 29,7 % des hommes.

En 2011, 2,655 personnes handicapées ont déclaré fréquenter des écoles spécialisées dans le passé. Là encore, la participation des femmes à ces écoles était inférieure à celle des hommes, soit 3,4 % et 5,5 % respectivement. »

Maintenant, quelles sont les mesures prises pour corriger ces disparités, pour les *empower*, pour conseiller ces femmes sur leur santé reproductive ? Quelles sont les mesures prises par le ministère de l'Égalité du Genre pour s'assurer que les personnes en situation de handicap, surtout les femmes, puissent vivre leur vie normalement en toute indépendance ? Parce qu'il faut reconnaître qu'il existe des personnes qui veulent et peuvent être autonomes. La ministre a parlé des mesures prises par son ministère, mais dans la pratique cela n'est pas visible et encore moins accessible.

Pas un mot sur un logement adapté pour les personnes portant un handicap. Pourtant, dans tous les pays qui se respectent, un logement adapté est mis à la disposition de la personne handicapée. Il faut revoir la politique du logement également dans ce sens.

Le *outdated medical approach*. Les experts des Nations unies se sont également penchés sur ce qu'ils appellent le *outdated medical approach*. Il est temps de revoir ce système. Il est impensable, par exemple, de faire revenir tous les ans, devant le *Medical Board*, un non-voyant ou une personne ayant été amputée de deux jambes pour renouveler sa demande de pension. Entre-temps, cette personne n'aura pas recouvert la vue ou se voir pousser les deux jambes. Cela est une aberration. La personne déjà en situation de handicap doit payer un taxi. Très souvent, le taxi n'est pas adapté à son handicap et c'est encore une souffrance que l'on inflige à ces personnes. Il faut revoir cet état de choses.

Le projet de loi prévoit la création d'une *National Empowerment Authority*, selon les amendements circulés, pour remplacer trois organismes existant : le *Lois Lagesse Trust Fund*, le *National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons* et le *Training and Employment of Disabled Persons*. Est-ce que ces nouvelles dispositions ont été discutées avec les ONG concernées ? J'espère que les emplois de ces trois organismes cités seront sauvegardés et les droits acquis respectés.

Voyons maintenant la composition du *Board*.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mrs Navarre Marie: Oui. Deux minutes.

Le *Board* comprendra seize membres, dont quatre personnes en situation de handicap, nommée par le ou la ministre. Là, je félicite la ministre pour avoir voulu respecter l'équilibre genre. Quatre personnes en situation de handicap, dont deux femmes, c'est très bien. Cela va dans le sens de la parité. Mais pourquoi est-ce que c'est le ministre qui choisit?

À la clause 29(1)(k), on peut lire ceci –

« *4 persons with disabilities, 2 of whom shall be women, to be appointed by the Minister;* »

Pourquoi est-ce que c'est la ministre qui choisit? Il existe 85 ONG enregistrées auprès du ministère. Le mieux serait de permettre à ces ONG de choisir leurs représentants de manière démocratique. C'est cela respecter les droits des personnes en situation de handicap ; le droit de choisir. Il existe sous la présente législation un système de quota que le ministère avait enlevé

dans un premier temps, dans le premier projet de loi, mais des amendements ont été circulés pour garder le système de quota sous une autre forme.

Les ONG que j'ai rencontrées émettent plusieurs avis sur la question. Est-ce que la nouvelle formule proposée dans ce projet de loi sera plus efficace ?

Je ne peux que souhaiter qu'elles aient été consultées, comme l'a déclaré la ministre. L'objectif étant que les personnes en situation de handicap puissent entrer sur le marché du travail, pour ceux et celles qui le souhaitent.

Il faut savoir qu'au recensement de 2011, il y avait 8,435 personnes handicapées en emploi, dont 70 % d'hommes et 30 % de femmes. Le leader de l'opposition a parlé de recrutement dans le service civil. Cela est important, mais je m'étonne que le ministre du service civil ne soit pas sur la liste des orateurs.

Pour conclure, le projet de loi sur la protection et la promotion des droits des personnes handicapées a été attendu depuis longtemps. C'est un premier pas pour la protection de nos concitoyens vivant avec un handicap, mais le projet de loi est incomplet et est loin de répondre aux attentes des personnes en situation de handicap. Les vrais problèmes soulevés par les experts en termes d'accès aux infrastructures et d'éducation ont été escamotés et n'ont pas été pris en compte et l'Etat aura la lourde tâche d'y répondre non seulement devant le comité des Nations unies mais également devant la communauté des personnes en situation de handicap.

J'en ai terminé.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. François.

(7.47p.m.)

Mr F. Francois (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I have the floor, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, allow me to extend a word of congratulations to our newly appointed Mgr. Michel Moura, Vicar Apostolic of Rodrigues and for his memorable blessed ordination to serve God and the people of Rodrigues. May the Lord's grace shine upon him for a successful mission.

Mr Speaker sir, coming back to the Bill, this is a really important Bill for many of our brothers and sisters of our Republic who are living with some form of disability. The Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023) is a continued

commitment of Government's vision for our society and to human rights for persons with disabilities which is based on equality, self-determination, participation, involvement and inclusion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my thinking process for my speech, what came to mind was the image of my neighbours, the family of Loriana and a young lady I name Corinne, always helping and carrying on her back her mother with disabilities, I name Fifi, with pride and dignity were going to church, to hospital or attending a recreational activity. I am deeply inspired by both Loriana's family and Corinne's and Fifi's care, love and protection for each other. What I feel is that Fifi and Loriana as persons with disabilities deserve to be fully included and to be able to participate in our society throughout their lives as well as any other persons with any disabilities like them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my intervention relates to my commitment as an MP and a normal citizen to protect and promote the rights of people like Fifi and Loriana and any person with disabilities against all exploitation and all treatment of a discriminatory, abusive or degrading nature for a fair and better life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities states that –

“persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

In the same breath as the UN Convention, this Bill will ensure and promote the full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedom for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability.

This Bill is shifting the approach to disability from medical or welfare response to a more human, rights-based proactive approach. There is inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities which are certainly preconditions for a sustainable welfare society and for individuals to be able to leave a free and independent life. Surely, our Constitution does provide sound legal protection against any form of discrimination in our Republic as rightly pointed out by hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo.

This Bill, I believe, is a major social Justice initiative for Government's commitment to social justice for all persons with disabilities, no matter what are their social or economy disadvantages. I subscribe to this Bill in its quest that any person with disability has the right to human dignity and the right for that dignity to be treated equally, respected and protected and in particular not to be referred by any demeaning, embarrassing, derogatory and any other terms that may be considered as lowering his or her dignity.

This has a strong bearing on how one will judge our society and how it treats its persons with disabilities. We will all agree that we are committed to a fair and just society irrespective of who we are or where we are in our Republic, be it in Mauritius, Rodrigues and Agalega. I believe it is part of our Government's roles and responsibilities to provide leadership in this area by bringing this legislation before the House. Here, I do congratulate hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, the Minister for Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is well known to us all that in our society, attitudes towards persons with disabilities remain negative, though they have improved over the last few years. Changing one's attitude is fundamental to the overall success of disability reform. This Bill will definitely allow for a change of attitude and practices that stigmatise and marginalise people with disabilities. This Bill will further place obligations on Government, employers and all citizens to remove the barriers that currently prevent the realisation of the rights of adults and children with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I concretely hope that this Bill will align us towards achieving sustainability goals which underpin the Government's ambition that all persons should have opportunities for progress and development. Yes, no one should be left out of implementation of the UN Sustainability Goals. While eliminating discrimination in the public sphere, this Bill shall encourage additional benefits such as reservation in higher education at university level, government jobs – certainly with necessary legal amendments where necessary – reservation in allocation of land and housing, poverty alleviation schemes etc. for persons with disabilities and those with high support needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is observed that quite a few persons with disabilities are generally poor. While poor people are more at risk of becoming disabled, I press upon Government that

this Bill shall not allow a person with a disability in our Republic to live in poverty, but to live decently, especially those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. I extend my appreciation to the various budget measures being implemented by Government as lengthily enumerated by the hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that under the New Social Living Development Ltd, a subsidiary of NHDC, I have been informed that 4% of all houses built by the NSLD Ltd are reserved for persons with disabilities under the same criteria. However, my question is whether Government shall review the criteria when assigning a social house to a person with disability through a moderately priced programme, through a mortgaged loan offered at a lower interest percentage below the normal market interest rate?

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 10(2) of the Bill provides that the Ministry responsible for the subject of disaster management shall take suitable measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of disasters. Mr Speaker, Sir, to fulfil this clause, in that regard, I would plead that during the next budget exercise at national level, the Ministry of Disaster, in consultation with the Regional Assembly, do urgently make provisions to equip the completely empty new Rodrigues Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre also occupied by the Rodrigues' Emergency Operating Command Team at Mon Plaisir Fire and Rescue Station in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to allow a person with disability to live a dignified, productive, creative life and to reduce income inequalities is what we dream to see, for them all to achieve economic and financial independence. Here, I put on record the laudable work by Care-Co Rodrigues Ltd, a rehabilitation productive service care of 11 staff with disabilities and 55 students with disabilities seeking to provide creative and remunerative employment and production activities for persons with disabilities in Rodrigues. The main activities for young persons with disabilities thereat are bee hiving and honey making production, chain-link making, soap making and handicrafts jewellery, table and chair making, maintenance of buildings and other educational training which are being done at the Gonzague Pierre Louis Special Learning School despite a low financial support. Those disabled persons thereat are involved as full participants, not only

as beneficiaries of social aids, but in creating and developing their own economic programmes. This is simply their economic rights while creating opportunities for them all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all our citizens have a constitutional right to vote. I do appreciate the valuable effort of the Electoral Commissioner's Office, responsible for establishing polling stations to take into consideration the elderly and people with mobility limitations by guaranteeing access to them all at polling centres during elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite that, our Republic must go for the extra miles with regard to political rights for persons with disabilities. In promoting people with disabilities, I propose that in the future our constitutional law on elections be amended for a fair representation of persons with disabilities through reservations of one or two seats for persons with disabilities in our Parliament. This may include consideration for a male and a female who shall be elected or nominated to represent persons with disabilities.

In the first instance, I will propose that this be considered at the level of Local Government and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to remedy the imbalances that existed in our society. Mr Speaker, Sir, the total population of persons with disabilities is a major point of interest for us as policy makers. In the population census of 2000, there were 40,790 persons enumerated with a total of 51,064 disabilities. Then, one social characteristic for persons with disabilities thereof is that 96.5% were living in private households and only 3.4% were living in institutions as per the report on Disability in Mauritius - pattern, trend and policy implications by Ramachandran and Sunkur.

In 2024, as mentioned by the hon. Minister, there are 84,500 persons with disabilities out of which, 34,273 have disabilities of more than 60% and here, I note that in Rodrigues there are 1,367 persons under basic invalidity pensions and I am not quite sure what the exact number of persons with disabilities is. This is where clause 12 of the Bill details an accurate statistics and data collection on persons with disabilities to formulate and implement policies is mandatory.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Act shall bind the State as per clause 2. However, it has to be aligned pragmatically for its applicability in Rodrigues. As per clause 29(1) of the Bill, the Authority shall be administered by a Board which shall consist of members as per the list defined in the Bill. I propose that one representative of Rodrigues shall also form part of the Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if not, with regard to its application in Rodrigues, this Bill should cater for the creation of an empowerment unit or committee under the same principle as defined in clause 5 of the Protection of Elderly Persons Act which stipulates that there shall be, in Rodrigues, a Rodrigues Committee for the Elderly and at sub-clause 2 the Rodrigues Committee for the Elderly shall perform in Rodrigues such functions as conferred upon the Monitoring Committee in Mauritius. Thus, if agreeable in that regards, again I will propose that there shall be in Rodrigues, a Rodrigues Committee or empowerment unit for persons with disabilities which shall perform such functions pertaining to disability issues as conferred by the present Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to clause 19 – Disability Rights Watch, you will note that in 2012 in Rodrigues, the Commission for Social Security held a workshop in regard to the promotion of rights of people with disabilities and some volunteers were listed to form part of disability watch for Rodrigues. Rodrigues was divided into four regions, each with their distinct villages and with six *agents de santé* enlisted for its region. I am happy that clause 19(4) of Disability Rights Watch provides for payment of such fee to them as the Minister may approve.

The statistics for Rodrigues show that there are around 1,367 as I said BIP as at February 2024. Mr Speaker, Sir, from statistics received from Rodrigues Regional Assembly for Social Security, the number of people suffering from different types of disabilities which have been worked out apparently for each local regions are classified according to its nature of disability. What I am given to understand for –

- (i) physical disability, it is about 23.8%;
- (ii) intellectual and brain related – 18.9%;
- (iii) social, emotional and behavioural –16.6%;
- (iv) hearing and visual impairments – 14.3%;
- (v) multiple disabilities –6.5%;
- (vi) communication disorders – 4.9% ;
- (vii) other health related disabilities around 10%.

And here I have to say there are about 34 or more cancer cases.

With regards to Special Education Needs (SEN) in Rodrigues, there are only three NGOs, schools registered with the Commission for Education and the Commission for Social Security, namely –

- (a) The EDYCS Rodrigues – Help to Grow Educational and Rehabilitation Centre;
- (b) The Development Learning Centre for Children with Disabilities;
- (c) The Gonzague Pierre Louis Special Learning School, and
- (d) two Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCA) SENS Unit at Lataniers, Antoinette Prudence RCA School, and La Ferme St Esprit School.

Government must extend full support to these NGOs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government's objectives in health and care policy is that everyone should have equal access to health services, irrespective of diagnosis and place of residence. However, I have a few questions –

- 1) What is the percentage of persons with disabilities reported to having other health issues in our Republic?
- 2) What is the percentage of persons with disabilities that require a decent house?
- 3) What is the percentage of persons with disabilities that have psychological problems?
- 4) What is the rate of visits on a regular basis by a Psychologist? I said it right, a Psychologist.

From my general observations made and suggestions received, I will propose that it should be mandatory that any person with disabilities through the e-Health card system is being followed on an appropriate frequency also by a Psychologist and not only by medical practitioners.

Further, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am made to understand that the Regional Assembly, the Commission for Social Security in Rodrigues, has sought the expertise of one Mr Ragoodoo, Head of Social Studies Department, Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities of the University

of Mauritius to act as Consultant to work out a comprehensive analysis of the situation regarding people with disabilities in Rodrigues, those who are less than 60 years old in order to provide Rodrigues with necessary information which will help them to devise the right strategies to help and assist further the people with disabilities in the various sectors like capacity and health conditions, education and others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another fundamental right of a person with a disability that I would expect this Bill to cater for is 'the right to privacy'. Notwithstanding clause 21 of the Bill – Powers of entry of officers of Unit, I believe that every person with disabilities has a right to privacy and shall not be subjected to arbitrary interference and intrusion with his or her privacy, family home, correspondence and other types of communication.

Mr Speaker, Sir, finally any person with a disability has a right to take part of an equal basis with others in sports, recreation, leisure and cultural activities at the national, regional and international level. This Bill will undoubtedly allow the Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Culture and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to continuously ensure the provision of adequate facilities programmes and incentives to enable persons with disabilities to have access to sports, leisure and culture facilities and events as per clause 27(g).

Our Republic is today proud of our regional and international champions and here, allow me to congratulate our world class sports persons with disabilities like Miss Noemi Alphonse, Anaïs Angéline, Brandy Perrine, Denovan Rabaye, Cédric Ravet, Mehfooz Oozeer amongst others and certainly my two Rodriguan world class sports champions namely, Eddy Capdor and Brigila Clair. They are role models for the other young persons with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not go any further. I will stop here and with these words, I thank you for your kind attention. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: MP Uteem!

(8.07 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):
Mauritius ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as

far back as 2010. So, it is only 14 long years later that we are finally debating a Bill for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

We welcome the Bill to the extent that it protects disabled persons from all forms of discrimination, protect them from abusive treatment. We welcome the provisions of the Bill that make it an offence to discriminate against disabled persons and subject them to abusive treatment. However, we are disappointed; we are disappointed that some provisions simply mirror existing provisions in other legislations, and some provisions are simply unacceptable. We are disappointed with this Bill because it does not go far enough.

Back in 2016, in answer to a PNQ, the hon. Minister of Social Security, who was still hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, announced that the Government would be coming up with constitutional reforms to remove any form of discrimination on the basis of disability. Where are those constitutional amendments? Why is Article 3 of the Constitution, dealing with fundamental rights of individuals, not being amended to enshrine the rights of persons with disabilities? Why is Article 16 of the Constitution, providing protection from discrimination, not being amended to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability, impairment? The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, back in 2015, recommended that Articles 34(1) and 43 of the Constitution be amended, but, again, there is no provision in this Bill in this regard. There is also no constitutional amendment being proposed to ensure that Government, public bodies and parastatal bodies employ people with disabilities.

It is only yesterday that we received a proposed amendment, which would make it compulsory on Government, parastatal bodies to employ 3% of its workforce as people with disability. But as rightly pointed out by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Article 118 of the Constitution, especially subsection 4 of that Article, provides that in the exercise of its functions under this Constitution, no Commission shall be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. You cannot have an Act of Parliament which is binding on the Commission set up under the Constitution. And the hon. Minister of Social Security knows this fully well, because when I asked her a question back in June 2016 as to whether she would consider extending the 3% quota to the public service, this is what she said, and I quote –

“As you know, recruitment of officers in the civil service is done through the PSC, Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Disciplined Forces Commission. So, introducing the 3% quota in the civil service will inevitably entail constitutional amendments.”

And yet there is no constitutional amendment being proposed in this Bill. Only yesterday, we were told that Government will henceforth have to employ 3% of its workforce with people with disabilities. Whether this is enforceable or not, I leave it to the hon. Minister of Social Security to enlighten us during her summing-up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as my colleague hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie has very ably set out before me, this Bill does not give effect to the full Convention, despite what the Explanatory Memorandum says. The Explanatory Memorandum says that this Bill will give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It does not do that. It only selectively implements certain provisions. I am not going to repeat everything that has been said by my learned friend.

Mr Speaker: That’s a good thing.

Mr Uteem: Suffice to say that there is no obligation in this Bill for anyone, be it in the private sector or Government, to make any modification to any existing building to make it more accessible to persons with disabilities. The Bill only concerns future buildings. Future buildings must be accessible to people with disabilities, but there is no obligation to make any modification to existing buildings.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to spend some time on one institution on which I have asked several PQs and which, for me, epitomizes the failure of this Government to adequately empower persons with disabilities. I am talking about The Training and Employment of the Disabled Persons Board whose functions will now be taken over by the National Empowerment Authority under this Bill. The TEDPB was supposed to provide training to disabled persons to eventually allow them to get an employment. They use to run courses in two training centres; one in Rose Belle and the one in Calebasses.

Under Section 6 of the Act, the Board, with the approval of the Minister, must appoint a General Manager who is responsible, amongst other things, for providing training to disabled persons. Soon after the MSM Government took over, back in 2015, they terminated the services of the General Manager. And do you know, hon. Members, who they appointed as General Manager for the past nine years, since taking office? No one! No one was appointed as General Manager. There was only an Officer-in-Charge. And do you know who the first Officer-in-Charge was? The Board appointed her in 2017. She was the Secretary to the Board! The Secretary to the Board, with no experience in training of disabled persons, was appointed Officer-in-Charge responsible for training and ensuring the work placement of people with disabilities.

I will swing to a PQ in 2017, where the then Minister of Social Security, hon. Sinatambou was so embarrassed that he added that the Board appointed this lady in charge as a purely temporary measure. As a purely temporary measure, this Secretary became the General Manager, and she stayed there until she retired. After she retired, the post was not filled and the Ministry delegated officers from the Ministry to be Officer-in-Charge. At the moment, there is an APS on a part-time basis; not even full-time. And with no competent captain on board, what was bound to happen happened.

First, the Rose Belle Training Centre closed down in August 2017 and then the Calebasses Training Centre closed down in January 2018. Back in May 2019, when we asked the hon. Minister of Social Security Minister what will happen to training as all these training centres were closing down, we were informed by hon. Sinatambou that the Board was considering to decentralize training. There were going to be six training centres across the island. That was back in 2019 before the elections. After the elections, what happened? Zero! Zero training centre! For the past five years, this institution, which is legally empowered to train people with disabilities, to empower them, not only does not have a General Manager, does not have a training centre, does not do any training for these handicapped persons, yet they have staff sitting there. They have three instructors and assistant instructors, receptionists, gardeners, drivers, everybody on its establishment in the National Pension Fund building. Doing what? Hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah said that even when you have an Officer-in-Charge, an institution still works. I agree! But not in the case of this institution! What is the Board doing? This is where

the problem lies, Mr Speaker, Sir. This Chairperson is not required to have any qualification; no experience in training, no track record dealing with people with disabilities. So, what do you have? You will have a political appointee! Someone from the constituency of the hon. Minister of Social Security! And this is why so many institutions fail! Political nominees; political interference! Institutions are not functioning under this Government because of political nominees.

And, unfortunately, it will not get any better with this Bill. In fact, the situation will get worse, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the National Empowerment Authority, which is being set up under Section 39 of this Bill, will replicate very much the same thing. The Chairman still does not have to have any background in disability, in training, in experience, whatever. The Chairman will be appointed by the hon. Minister. There will be nine representatives of ministries, four people with disabilities appointed by the Minister and two persons from the private sector appointed by the Minister.

The Minister will have a total *mainmise* on the Authority. The Minister will decide what fees to pay to each member; not the Board, not PRB, but the Minister. If the Board decides to co-opt a person who may be of assistance, again, it is the Minister, not the Board, who will decide on the fees to be paid. The Board will appoint a Chief Executive Officer, the equivalent of a General Manager, but, again, they won't be able to choose whoever they want, however much competent that person maybe because under law, the appointment of the CEO must be approved by who? By the hon. Minister! If the Board wants to appoint any officer, again, it will need the approval of the Minister. Worse, it is the Minister who will approve the terms and services of each of these officers. The Minister is obviously, according to this legislation, a better HR person than the Board or any General Manager. The Minister will control the purse. The Minister will not only approve estimates of income and expenditure of this Authority, but she can also amend the estimate, she can disallow expenses. That is how much power they are giving to the hon. Minister under this Bill.

Seriously, Mr Speaker, Sir, what independence will that Authority have? And yet, we are talking about an Authority that will take over the work of the Lois Lagesse Trust Fund, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and the TEDPB.

I pause here, M Speaker, Sir, and ask a question to the hon. Minister of Social Security, and I hope she will enlighten me and the House during her summing-up.

Why is this new Authority, the National Empowerment Authority, not taking over the functions of the Society for the Welfare of the Deaf, which provides training to people suffering from hearing issues.

The Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund, formerly known as Society for the Welfare of the Blind, has the objective to train and educate all blind persons in Mauritius. But the Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund is being taken over by the National Empowerment Authority. But why not the Society for the Welfare of the Deaf? And why not also the Mauritius Mental Health Association which has been set up back in 1974, which runs a school in Rose Hill for the mentally and intellectually disabled children?

I will end on the issue of employment. As the matter currently stands, there is a legal obligation on every employer who has 35 or more employees to employ disabled persons, making up 3% of workforce. If they fail to do so, the TEDPB, sets up a hearing committee to determine whether the employer cannot reasonably be expected, having regard to the nature of his business, to provide suitable employment to disabled persons. And the Board can then decide to exempt the employer or make him pay a contribution of Rs4,000 per month per disabled workforce.

In answer to a PQ on 11 August 2020, we were informed by the hon. Minister of Social Security that 589 companies were non-compliant with their statutory obligation for the employment of persons with disabilities; 589 companies. So, very innocently, I told the hon. Minister that there is a deliberate flouting of the law and what I expect from the hon. Minister is to take a commitment to sue each and every company that is not employing the 3% quota imposed by the law. And do you know what the answer of the hon. Minister was? I quote it –

“Do you think it is the moment to sue companies? Do you want me to punish companies? I am not at that point because this is not the time. If we start suing, this might push companies out of business for the time being.”

And then, when asked, with a supplementary question by hon. Lobine, about how many prosecutions have been envisaged, have ever been brought against any company which was not compliant, her answer was: “Yes, I have already answered the question. We have never sued.”

So, what is the point of having a law? What is the point of making it a legal obligation for companies to recruit 3% of their staff among people suffering from disabilities? And today, we are doing exactly the same thing. Same thing! The same empowerment Authority will still ask employers - depending on their workforce - to employ 1%, 2% or 3 % of their workforce, and if they do not do that, just like in the previous law, there would be a hearing committee, and if they do not comply, they would have now to pay Rs6,000 instead of Rs4,000. But what is the point of doing it if you are not going to enforce it? Albert Einstein is reported to have said, although this is disputed, and I quote -

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

So, what we are doing? The failure of The Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board. We are replicating exactly the same thing in this Bill; nothing new, no innovation. With the same cause, we will get the same result and the same failure. With due respect, hon. Minister, what we need is to integrate people with disabilities.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude.

Mr Uteem: What we need is to give them an inclusive education, a proper training, developing their necessary skills for them to earn a decent living. According to the 2022 population census published by Statistics Mauritius in November 2022, some 84,500 persons reported some sort of disability, up from 59,900 in 2011. Today, people with disability make up 6,8% of the population. However, according to the population and vital statistics for year 2023, as at June 2022, only 30,338 benefitted from the Basic Invalidity Pension, the main reason being that a disabled person no longer gets the Basic Invalidity Pension once he reaches the age of 60. He only gets the Basic Retirement Pension. I think it is so unfair because a disabled person has special needs, even after he reaches 60. He needs special equipment, special medication and special assistance.

Therefore, I am making an appeal to Government, when presenting their final Budget *sirop diabete*, to extend Basic Invalidity Pension to all disabled persons, irrespective of their age.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 02 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment matters!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

MATTERS RAISED

(8.27 p.m.)

BALFOUR, BEAU BASSIN – RECURRENT THEFTS – CAMERAS INSTALLATION

Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci. Je m'adresse à l'honorable Premier ministre concernant les préoccupations que m'ont faites les habitants de la région de Balfour à Beau Bassin par rapport à l'insécurité grandissante de la région vu que les habitants ont été victimes d'un nombre grandissant de vols et autres crimes. En conséquence, les habitants m'ont aussi fait part de leur frayeur, surtout pour sortir le soir et

surtout que beaucoup d'habitants se rendent à des heures tardives à la mosquée de la région pour les prières. Je demande donc au nom de ces habitants que des caméras de sécurité soient installées à la croisée de la rue Trotter et Henri Lemaire afin de dissuader les voleurs et criminels. Merci.

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le Premier ministre étant absent de la Chambre en ce moment, je m'engage à lui transmettre les remarques et observations de Madame la députée.

(8.29 p.m.)

TEMPLE ROAD, CRÈVE-COEUR – RETENTION WALL – REHABILITATION

Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre des Infrastructures nationales et du développement communautaire concernant l'effondrement partiel d'un mur de rétention à Temple Road dans la région de Crève-Cœur. Je demande donc à l'honorable ministre de bien vouloir faire le nécessaire pour la réhabilitation de ce mur, car cela représente un danger pour les usagers de ce tronçon de route à Crève-Cœur. Merci.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, we are already aware of that situation. A site visit was carried out on Friday 22 March with concerned authorities, the Land Drainage Authorities, the Geotechnical Department, the District Council and the NDU and we are expecting a report from the Geotechnical Unit so that we can decide on what are the remedial measures to be taken. We are looking into it. Thank you.

(8.30 p.m.)

NICOLAY ROAD, NOOR-E-ISLAM MOSQUE – ROAD MARKING & HUMPS

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I shall raise a matter regarding road safety tonight to be addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. At the pedestrian traffic lights at Nicolay Road near the Noor-e-Islam Mosque, the absence of road marking, more specifically the absence of road marking on the crossing itself. It is a totally blank space. When drivers come, we cannot

find that there is a crossing though there is one as there are traffic lights for that. This has caused several road accidents as vehicles do not stop when the traffic lights turn yellow or red.

So, therefore, I am requesting on behalf of the inhabitants of the surrounding, that is, Nicolay Street near Noor-e-Islam Mosque, the crossing be painted as soon as possible. Also, if consideration can be given for the installation of road humps because in the vicinity of Port Louis now we have road humps painted red. This acts as *un ralentisseur* for the vehicle coming on high speed, especially on this busy road. This is my request to the hon. Minister. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, for having drawn my attention to that situation. I will certainly look into the matter and tomorrow, I will get in touch with the TMRSU.

(8.32 p.m.)

PLAINE LAUZUN – HEALTH TRACK – ROAD SAFETY MEASURES

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail regarding *un parcours de santé* that was constructed by Metro Express Ltd some time ago in Plaine Lauzun. There seems to be some safety issues there because recently a child, while coming onto the road, he stampeded on the road immediately and had a road accident. My request to him today is to request the Metro Express Ltd to implement mitigating measures to reduce this kind of risks. Thank you.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, once again. True it is that this park with green space is on the other side of the road and the habitations are on the other side. I will certainly ask MEL to look into the matter because it was MEL who came up with that project.

(8.33 p.m.)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE WAR – UNSC RESOLUTION – CEASEFIRE

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Attorney General, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is not here. It concerns the ongoing attacks of the State of Israel on the people of Palestine. Yesterday, there has been a resolution of the UN Security Council with regard to immediate ceasefire. I would like the Government of Mauritius to join Colombia and other countries of the Non-Aligned Movement to move...

Mr Speaker: I think you are going out of premises.

Mr Lobine: I am sorry?

Mr Speaker: Why don't you limit your question, your request...

Mr Lobine: It is not a question; it is a request to the Government.

Mr Speaker: ...your request to your constituency.

Mr Lobine: To my constituency?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Lobine: Adjournment matter? Does it stick only to constituency? It is for the country, for the world. There are people dying there.

Mr Speaker: I know. I know, but...

Mr Lobine: What?

Mr Speaker: This is abnormal.

Mr Lobine: This is not abnormal!

An hon. Member: Not at all! This is against the Standing Orders!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Any matter!

Mr Speaker: During adjournment matters, you address issues concerning your constituency. This is a policy matter! What you are talking of is a policy matter and this is my ruling! This is my ruling. Now, I change.

Hon. Doolub!

(8.35 p.m.)

LE BOUCHON TO CUREPIPE – BUS SERVICE

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre du Transport. J'ai une requête venant des habitants du village le Bouchon dans ma circonscription qui se trouve juste à côté de Camp Carol et Kenya, travaillant à Curepipe, il se trouve qu'ils n'ont pas un moyen de transport efficace surtout dans l'après-midi quand ils terminent vers les 16 heures pour rallier le village Le Bouchon. Actuellement, ils doivent voyager par deux bus. Donc, ils m'ont fait une requête si le ministre pourrait bien considérer l'option d'un bus desservant cette ligne entre Curepipe et Le Bouchon directement à partir de 16 heures. Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will look into the matter and I will get in touch with the NLTA and do the needful.

(8.36 p.m.)

RAOUL RIVET & ENNESKILLEN STREETS – STREET LIGHTING

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): The issue I want to raise concerns the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, who is not here. It concerns the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, there is a request from inhabitants of Raoul Rivet Street and Enneskillen Street for there to be installation of lighting at the corner of Raoul Rivet Street and Enniskillen street because it is very dark and very unsafe for people at night to walk along. If the message could be communicated to the responsible officer of the local authorities concerned.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun): I will certainly convey to my hon. colleague your request.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

(8.35 p.m.)

PETRIN PARKING – JUNCTION – TRAFFIC LIGHTS INSTALLATION

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir concerne la sécurité routière et s'adresse au ministre du Transport public, qui est très sollicité ce soir. Cela concerne la croisée à Grand Bassin là où il y a le parking de Pétrin qui est en quelque sorte un *boundary* pour les circonscriptions 16, 13 et 14. Voyez-vous, M. le président, avec l'énorme succès que connaît le Link Road La Brasserie-La Marie, il y a un gros flux de véhicules. Je demanderais à l'honorable ministre s'il pourrait intervenir auprès de la TMRSU pour faire installer des feux de signalisation à cette jonction qui devient de plus en plus fréquentée. Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will convey the message to the TRMSU and it will be up to this unit to decide whether the proposal of my friend is a reasonable one.

(8.37 p.m.)

ST LOUIS METRO STATION – AGGRESSION & THEFT –

POLICE OFFICERS - POSTING

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci. J'adresse ma requête au ministre des Transports et du métro, concernant la station de métro de St Louis. En effet, cette station est devenue un véritable repère de voleurs et ceux qui utilisent ce service de jour comme de nuit sont souvent agressés et dépouillés de leurs biens, ce qui a eu pour effet de créer une psychose parmi les habitants de Grande Rivière. Je demande de ce fait au ministre de s'assurer avec Metro Express que des policiers soient postés de façon régulière non

seulement à la station, mais aussi sur l'escalier qui mène sur Pailles Road puisque c'est là précisément que les gens se font agresser. Je demande aussi au ministre de voir comment aménager un parking pour permettre aux gens de déposer et de récupérer leurs familles sereinement. Je vous remercie.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I will look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Member. It is a matter which concerns MEL and also the Commissioner of Police, but I will certainly take up the matter with the concerned authorities.

Mr Speaker: No more questions? So, let us call it a day. Thank you very much, hon. Members.

At 8.38 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 02 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE, ADMINISTRATIVE & INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS – ALLEGED ASSAULT CASE – INQUIRY

(No. B/2) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to an alleged case of assault reported to the Police by one Mr R. K. B. against Dr. the Honourable Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms on 10 February 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, where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

MV WAKASHIO – COURT OF INVESTIGATION REPORT – INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FINDINGS

(No. B/4) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Report of the Court of

Investigation set up to look into the grounding of the MV Wakashio, he will state the findings of the Inter-Ministerial Committee set up to examine the implementation contained therein, indicating –

- (a) where matters stand as to implementation thereof, and
- (b) if he will now table copy thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

AGALÉGA – NEW RUNWAY & JETTY – STAFF REQUIREMENTS

(No. B/5) 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 new runway and jetty in Agaléga, he will state if the staff requirements for Mauritians and expatriates for the operation of the facilities thereof have been finalised and if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

AGALÉGA – COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS OPERATION

(No. B/6) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Agaléga, he will state when commercial flights will be operational thereto, indicating if discussion has already been initiated between his Office and Air Mauritius thereon and, if so, the outcome thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

AGALÉGA – AIRSTRIP & JETTY FACILITIES – BENEFITS

(No. B/7) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Agaléga, he will state how the construction and operationalisation of the new airstrip and jetty facilities thereat fit in the developmental agenda of the Republic of Mauritius.

(Withdrawn)

**TERRE ROUGE ESTUARY – OIL SPILLS – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT &
RESPONSE**

(No. B/8) Mr Osman Mahomed (First 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 two successive oil spills in the Terre Rouge Estuary, in January and March 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Environment Commission, information as to its response to the environmental impact resulting therefrom.

Reply (The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change): I shall reply to PQ B/8 which relates to the two unfortunate oil spill incidents involving –

- (i) leakage of around 1500 litres of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) from the line that feeds the boiler of Marine Biotechnology Products Ltd (MBPL), located at Riche Terre, into the storm water drain located adjacent to the MBPL site, reaching Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site, on 18 January 2024, and
- (ii) leakage of around 1175 litres of Low Sulphur Fuel Oil due to a defective valve in the piping system supplying fuel to the boiler of the laundry at Washright Services Ltd (WSL), Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, which also reached Rivulet Terre Rouge, on 11 March 2024.

Part V of the Environment Protection Act (EPA) establishes the mechanism to deal with an oil spill. A National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP) has been developed at the level of my Ministry to provide an integrated organisational framework for the effective and prompt response to an oil spill. The roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities before, during and after an oil spill have been clearly spelt out in the plan.

Provision is made in the NOSCP for a National Oil Spill Coordination Committee (NOSCC) to be constituted to, *inter alia*, coordinate oil spill response, advise on the scientific and technical aspects of environmental protection and management, and recommend clean-up operations and measures for the disposal of pollutants.

Pursuant to sections 5 and 6 of the EPA, the National Environment Commission (NEC), on the other hand, *inter alia*, sets national objectives and goals and determines policies and priorities for the protection of the environment.

In view that as per the established protocol, the NOSCP was promptly activated, the intervention of the NEC was not solicited by my Ministry. Accordingly, the NOSCC, chaired by the Director of Environment was set up. Representatives of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre, the Special Mobile Force (SMF), the National Coast Guard (NCG), the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA), Forestry Services, Road Development Authority (RDA) and the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) formed part of the Committee.

In planning the response to the two oil spills, the Committee assessed the impacts on the Estuary in light of the findings of joint site visits conducted by public bodies concerned, and on the basis of tests conducted by relevant authorities which include –

- (i) river water quality monitoring in Rivulet Terre Rouge and the Estuary;
- (ii) seawater quality monitoring and underwater ecological surveys;
- (iii) sediment testing;
- (iv) air quality monitoring;
- (v) analyses of fish and shellfish specimen;
- (vi) daily monitoring of migratory bird species, and
- (vii) monitoring of the health status of species growing in the Estuary.

Acknowledging that the full impacts of the oil spills cannot be gauged in the short-term, stakeholders would pursue the monitoring exercises falling under their responsibility and all necessary analyses, including an assessment of the incidence of the oil spills on the food chain, will be conducted.

Several measures have been taken and many others are being initiated, as follows –

- (a) an enquiry is ongoing by the Terre Rouge and Roche-Bois Police Stations on the oil spill incidents;
- (b) advice from the Attorney General's Office is being awaited on legal provisions that can be applied against the company;

- (c) pursuant to section 88 of the Act, a Fixed Penalty Notice of Rs25,000 was issued by the Police de l'Environnement to WSL, for allowing oil to be deposited in Rivulet Terre Rouge;
- (d) in view that the Forest and Reserves Act 1983 has also been contravened in both cases statements from both companies, have already been taken by the Forestry Service, in the light of which, appropriate sanctions would be taken against them;
- (e) pursuant to request made by my Ministry, MBPL submitted its Oil Spill Disposal and Remedial Plan on 24 January 2024. On the other hand, WSL has been requested to submit the Remedial Plan for the remaining works in the mangrove areas by the end of March 2024;
- (f) preventive actions have been concurrently initiated by my Ministry to ensure that sufficient measures are being taken by industries where liquid fuel are stored to prevent any oil spill hazard. Accordingly, on 21 March 2024, a letter was issued to 112 industries around the island, including around 13 industries located within the catchment area of Rivulet Terre Rouge. Joint visits by public bodies concerned will ensure to verify whether the measures in place at the level of those industries are adequate;
- (g) a request has also been made to the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, on 26 February 2024, for a list of companies which are operating steam boilers and storing fuel;
- (h) a communiqué was additionally issued on 21 February 2024, advising all companies/industries storing liquid fuel and chemicals of hazardous nature, to take necessary precautions to ensure that tanks, valves and piping systems have been properly secured to minimise the risk of spillage into the natural environment, especially during adverse weather conditions. They have also been requested to promptly notify my Ministry and/or the Police Information and Operations Room in case of an oil spill incident during natural calamities, and to immediately activate their response plans to contain the spill;
- (i) I am made to understand that, on its part, the NPCCS is envisaging the procurement of sorbent booms to be stocked at the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary and to place permanent mooring structures for those booms;

- (j) the establishment of a dedicated oil spill contingency plan for the Estuary is also being envisaged by the NPCS in consultation with my Ministry and other relevant authorities, and
- (k) to hold polluters accountable for their actions, provisions relating to oil spill, preparedness and response capacity would be reinforced very shortly in the context of the review of the legislative framework governing environmental protection.

I am informed that, by 22 January 2024, oil and grease was below detectable levels in both the Rivulet and the Estuary. Cleaning operations were completed by the end of February 2024 by MBPL. Concerning WSL, cleaning has been completed in the Rivulet and the Estuary. Clean-up of the mangroves is expected to be completed by next week.

Close follow up on the clean-up and monitoring exercises are being maintained by my Ministry in collaboration with the NPCS and other stakeholders.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS – COUNTING OF VOTES

(No. B/9) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) 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 next National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to if arrangements will be made for the counting of votes to be effected on the polling day and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

DIEGO GARCIA – SRI LANKAN REFUGEES’ INTERCEPTION – ACTIONS

(No. B/10) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees intercepted and reported to be detained in an inhuman condition on Diego Garcia since 2021, he will state the diplomatic and/or other follow up actions taken, if any, by Government thereon to date.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE OFFICERS – RECRUITMENT – PROMOTION

(No. B/15) **Mr Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Police Officers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof on a yearly basis since 2015 to 2023 and from January 2024 to date –

- (a) recruited, and
- (b) promoted gradewise.

(Withdrawn)

ROCHEBOIS – OVERHEAD PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE – COLLAPSE

(No. B/16) **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 overhead pedestrian bridge in Roche Bois which was damaged following a road accident involving a lorry on 24 February 2024, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto, and
- (b) state the measures taken to ensure the security and safety of the inhabitants when crossing the motorway thereat.

(Withdrawn)

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – FALSE INFORMATION & FAKE VIDEOS
CIRCULATION**

(No. B/17) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Artificial Intelligence and the recourse thereto to create and circulate false information and fake videos, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the mechanism put in place to deter and prevent such practices, and

- (b) state if consideration will be given for amendments to be brought to existing legislations to sanction same.

(Withdrawn)

HEFORSHE CLUBS – MODUS OPERANDI – MEMBERS

(No. B/50) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether in regard to the HeForShe Clubs in Community Centers, she will give a list thereof, giving details of the –

- (a) modus operandi thereof, and
 (b) members thereof, indicating their age groups.

(Withdrawn)

DENGUE FEVER PROLIFERATION – MEASURES

(No. B/52) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Dengue fever, he will give details of the measures taken to contain the proliferation of cases thereof in Mauritius, indicating the weekly trend of new cases as at date.

(Withdrawn)

SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS – 2024 PROVISION

(No. B/54) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the textbooks to be provided to school children for the current academic year, she will state where matters stand.

(Vide reply to PQ B/22)

DRUGS CONSUMPTION – MINORS – DEATHS & TREATMENT

(No. B/56) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to minors consuming drugs, he will state the –

- (a) reported number thereof since 2019 to 2023 on a yearly basis and for the period January 2024 to date, indicating their respective age and sex;
- (b) number having been successfully treated against drug addiction, and
- (c) number of deaths thereof resulting from overdose.

(Withdrawn)

LOCAL AUTHORITIES – REFORM

(No. B/57) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Local Authorities, he will state where matters stand as to the recommendations to be made by the Ministerial Committee set up for the reform thereof.

(Withdrawn)

UTILITY REGULATORY AUTHORITY – CEO RECRUITMENT & SUSPENSION

(No. B/58) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Utility Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the –

- (a) recruitment process resorted to for the employment of Mr M. N. as Chief Executive Officer thereof, indicating the terms and conditions of employment, including his duties and responsibilities and table copy thereof, and
- (b) reason as to why the incumbent was suspended as Chief Executive Officer.

(Withdrawn)

CEB & COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL (MAURITIUS) LTD. – PPA – TERMINATION & ENCASHMENT

(No. B/59) Mr J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement signed between

the Central Electricity Board and Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd., for the purchase of electricity from Renewable Energy Hybrid Facilities, in particular in relation to 2 projects of SPV 30 mw, he will state if the delay in fulfilling the Conditions Precedents continued for more than 120 days from the Long Stop Date and, if so, indicate if the Board will terminate the entire agreement and encash the entire development security.

(Withdrawn)

PLANTERS – SUPPORT SCHEME

(No. B/61) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the support extended to planters whose cultivations have suffered damages following the passage of cyclone Belal, he will state the different schemes put in place therefor by his Ministry, indicating the –

- (a) number of planters who applied for compensation thereunder, and
- (b) quantum disbursed to date.

(Withdrawn)

CANAL LE POUCE – KFC & PARKING AREAS – DEMOLITION

(No. B/62) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed demolition of the premises of the Kentucky Fried Chicken and parking areas constructed on canal Le Pouce, following the recommendation of the Judicial Inquiry of 2014, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

BANK OF MAURITIUS – ASSETS & LIABILITIES – NON-PUBLICATION REASONS

(No. B/64) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the assets and liabilities of the Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to the –

- (a) reasons for the non-publication of its monthly return since August 2023, and
- (b) current amount of the –
 - (i) Official Foreign Reserve, giving a breakdown thereof, and
 - (ii) Special Reserve Fund.

(Withdrawn)

E-HR PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

(No. B/67) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the E-HR Project, he will state the –

- (a) status of the project including its coverage in Ministries and Departments;
- (b) number of public officers accessing the system;
- (c) cost of the project;
- (d) transformative impact thereof in service delivery, and
- (e) plan to interface same with other government IT systems, if any.

(Withdrawn)

CYCLONE BELAL – FLOODING ASSESSMENT – COMPENSATION SCHEME

(No. B/68) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to flooding caused during the passage of cyclone Belal on 15 January 2024, she will state if –

- (a) her Ministry has carried out an assessment of the damage caused to property and furniture loss resulting therefrom by the residents living in the vicinity of rivers and streams, and
- (b) any compensation scheme has been put in place for these residents.

(Withdrawn)

**RIVULET TERRE ROUGE ESTUARY – OIL SPILL –
ACTIONS TAKEN**

(No. B/69) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the recent oil spill at Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary, he will state when same was reported to his Ministry, indicating –

- (a) the immediate action initiated thereon, and
- (b) if any study has been commissioned to assess the impact thereof on the Terre Rouge bird sanctuary.

Reply: Two oil spill incidents at Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary have occurred since the beginning of the year.

The first incident concerned an oil spill of around 1500 litres of heavy fuel oil (HFO) that occurred at Riche Terre on 18 January 2024 due to a leakage from the HFO line that feeds the boiler of Marine Biotechnology Products Ltd (MBPL). The HFO had leaked into the storm water drain located adjacent to the MBPL site and reached Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary, a Ramsar site.

Immediately upon being notified of the incident by the MBPL, at around noon, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre, the on-scene commander of oil spill on land of the

Special Mobile Force (SMF), the National Coast Guard (NCG), the on-scene commander of oil spill at sea in the Port area of the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA), the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) and the Solid Waste Management Division (SWMD) of my Ministry were informed of the incident and requested, as a matter of urgency, to take such necessary actions as may be required. Concurrently, a team comprising officers of the Department of Environment, the *Police de l'Environnement* and the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) proceeded on site forthwith to take cognizance of the situation.

The MBPL was directed, as per provisions laid down at section 30 (2) of the Environment Protection Act (EPA) 2002, to, *inter alia*, take such necessary measures to prevent, eliminate, or reduce the adverse environmental effects of the spill and restore as far as is practicable the environment to its previous state. The MBPL was also directed to submit a remedial and disposal plan, including remedial measures already initiated, to clean up and properly dispose of the contaminated wastes and waste oil collected, to the satisfaction of the Solid Waste Management Division, within one week.

The MBPL contracted the services of Virgin Oil Company (Mauritius) Ltd and Polygreen (Mauritius) Ltd for the pumping of oil and the cleaning operations. Sorbent and fence booms were deployed by Polygreen (Mauritius) Ltd, NCG, SMF and the MPA to contain the spill.

The National Oil Spill Coordination Committee (NOSCC), which is an Inter-Ministerial committee, chaired by the Director of Environment, had several meetings to, *inter alia*, coordinate with all stakeholders regarding remedial and containment measures; advise on the scientific and technical aspects of environmental protection and management and recommend clean-up operations and measures for the disposal of pollutants.

Monitoring by key stakeholders is still ongoing, although the MBPL has stated that end point has been reached.

The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP) was still in activation mode when the second incident at Washright Services Ltd (WSL) occurred on 11 March 2024. At around 07 40 hours, my Ministry was notified of the oil spill into Rivulet Terre Rouge involving an approximate amount of 1175 litres of Low Sulphur Fuel Oil due to a defective valve in the piping system supplying fuel to the boiler of the laundry at (WSL), located at Le Hochet, Terre Rouge.

The assistance of stakeholders, including the SMF and the NCG, was again sought for the containment and response measures pending the appointment of cleaning contractors by the company. The latter retained the services of Polygreen (Mauritius) Ltd for the containment and clean-up of the spill, and Virgin Oil Company (Mauritius) Ltd for the pumping and carting away of the contained oil. Sorbent and fence booms were deployed by Polygreen (Mauritius) Ltd, SMF and MBPL.

In line with section 30 (2) of the Environment Protection Act (EPA) 2002, WSL was also requested to initiate immediate remedial actions to prevent, eliminate, restore the environment to its previous state; dispose of any pollutant; and inform my Ministry of daily actions taken at the level of the company for clean-up operations. A Fixed Penalty Notice of Rs. 25,000, for allowing oil to be deposited in the rivulet, was also served on WSL by the *Police de L'Environnement*.

Pumping and cleaning operations started on the day of the spill, that is, 11 March 2024.

As regards part (b) of the question, assessment of the impacts of the spillage was conducted by public bodies concerned. Joint monitoring has been carried out on a daily basis by officers of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, SMF, NCG and the NPCS and my Ministry in both cases. As from the occurrence of those incidents, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources Fisheries and Shipping and the National Environmental Laboratory of my Ministry respectively collected samples of sea water and river for analysis. These monitoring exercises are ongoing.

River water quality monitoring carried out by the NEL showed that on the day of the spills for both MBPL and WSL, the values for oil and grease were high and subsequently decreased to undetectable levels. No Volatile Organic Compounds were, however, detected during ambient air screening exercises carried out. Results of the seawater quality monitoring were also within the limits of the Coastal Water Quality Guidelines for the parameters tested. No oil and grease was detected at the monitoring stations.

The analysis result of fish and shellfish specimen relating to the MBPL spill showed no trace of Total Hydrocarbon Index and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons. As regards the spill which originated from WSL, analysis of fish and shellfish would be carried out in due course.

Underwater ecological survey was conducted in the lagoon and at the estuary at Baie du Tombeau on 02 February 2024 in relation to the MBPL spill. No material impact on the marine ecosystem was observed.

Several surveys on the impact of the oil spill on the mangroves at the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary were conducted. It was observed that the mangroves roots were affected by the oil spill. Following the recommendations of my Ministry, MBPL carried out cleaning of those areas.

No fish kill was observed at sea or in the estuary following the oil spill incidents.

The NPCCS estimates that only around 2500 m² out of the 26 ha of the estuary have been affected by the oil spill from MBPL and around 3500 m² have been affected by the oil spill from WSL.

I am made to understand that since those incidents, the NPCCS has set up seven permanent quadrats to assess the impact of the oil spill on the estuarine ecosystem and for long term monitoring. Furthermore, daily monitoring of migratory birds and walk-through surveys are being maintained. On 15 March 2024, the NPCCS and WSL conducted a survey of the mudflats near the bird hide in the estuary and no oil was found thereat. On 18 March 2024, WSL was requested to effect a risk assessment and to prepare and submit a contingency plan to my Ministry.

During a joint survey conducted on 21 March 2024, no mobile oil in the mangroves areas or in the sediment was discerned nor any sign of yellowing of mangrove leaves was observed. Stains of oil were, however, visible on mangrove roots at a few places. Clean-up is ongoing and is expected to be completed by next week.

I am informed that WSL has recruited Mrs Anne Reglain, a freelance international expert, to advise on clean up required at the Rivulet Terre Rouge, including the estuary. A report is expected by the end of March 2024.

Close follow up on the cleaning operation and regular monitoring is being maintained by my Ministry in collaboration with stakeholders.

RODRIGUES – MV PEROS BANHOS – CONTAINERS' SHIPMENT

(No. B/70) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to MV Peros Banhos trip to Rodrigues on 01 March 2024, he will state the number of containers –

- (a) registered for shipment on its first inaugural trip, and

- (b) having reached the destination, indicating the reasons as to the non-shipment of some containers.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd has informed that 264 containers were registered for shipment on the first inaugural trip of MV Peros Banhos to Rodrigues.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd further informed that during loading operations, the MV Peros Banhos encountered a technical problem and consequently the handling operations got delayed. Therefore, only 136 containers could be loaded on board the vessel, which had to leave Mauritius on 02 March 2024, as per planned schedule, taking into account the sea and prevailing weather conditions, so as to avoid any shortage of essential commodities, namely MOGAS and LPG which had a reserve of up to 04 March 2024.

It is common for all new vessels to undergo a trial period whereby it may experience some snagging, which are attended under the Warranty Clause of the contract.

All the remaining containers were shipped to Rodrigues by MV Peros Banhos on 14 March 2024 with 211 containers. Another back-to-back voyage of MV Peros Banhos left Port Louis for Rodrigues on 22 March 2024 with 231 containers.

MV Mauritius Trochetia is also scheduled to leave Port Louis for an additional trip to Rodrigues on 27 March 2024 with some 75 registered fully loaded containers.

On the other hand, the fourth voyage of MV Peros Banhos for Rodrigues voyage is scheduled on 01 April 2024.

FLORÉAL SSS – RECURRENT POWER CUT – STUDENT PROTEST – ENQUIRY

(No. B/73) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the recurrent power cut in electricity supply at the Floréal State Secondary School since 2022 culminating into a student protest on Thursday 14 March 2024, she will state the actions that have been taken to address same, indicating the outcomes of the enquiry initiated into the four cases of theft of copper wires thereat.

(Vide reply to PQ B/36)

DENGUE FEVER – REPORTED CASES – 2019 TO MARCH 2024

(No. B/74) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Dengue fever, he will state the –

- (a) number of reported cases thereof on a yearly basis since 2019 to 2023 and from January 2024 to date, indicating the number of persons having –
 - (i) been hospitalised, and
 - (ii) passed away as a result thereof and;
- (b) management and prevention protocol put in place therefor.

(Withdrawn)

RÉDUIT – STATE LAND – CULTURAL CENTRES

(No. B/75) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State land earmarked for cultural centres at Réduit, he will state if any decision has been taken thereon by Government in the light of representations made by the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association thereon.

(Withdrawn)

LONG TAILED MACAQUE – BREEDING & CAPTIVITY - SURVEY

(No. B/76) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, whether, in regard to the long tailed macaque, he will state if a survey has been conducted to ascertain the population thereof in Mauritius and, if so –

- (a) when and by whom, indicating –
 - (i) the methodology used therefor, and

- (ii) if same was compliant to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and
- (b) the number thereof –
 - (i) found in the wild, and
 - (ii) kept under breeding and captivity.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, there have been two historical estimates of the Mauritian population of the long-tailed macaque namely in the year 1986 and another in 1994. A study was started since 1977 by Mr. Robert Sussman from Washington University and Mr. Yan Tattersall from the American Museum of Natural History where they followed a group of the animals over an area of 42 hectares near Montagne Rampart. Another survey was conducted in 1994 by Dr. Brian Bertram, a Scientist from the Zoological Society of London, commissioned by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA, UK). Furthermore, in the year 2007, a study was commissioned by one of the monkey breeding companies using distance sampling methodology over a wide range of habitats.

Coming to part (a)(i) of the question, all the studies used the data of the survey on groups of macaques to estimate the density of macaques in different habitat types and then extrapolated the figure to the areas of Mauritius which were being used by monkeys. This varied from a density of 1.3 animals per hectare to 0.3 animals per hectare depending of the quality of the habitat.

With regard to a (ii), all methodologies used for the survey of the long-tailed macaque over the years have been scientifically validated and thus were in line with the science-based approach as recommended by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Convention on Biological Diversity to which Mauritius is a contracting party since 1992.

However, all studies recognise the difficulty in surveying the macaque population through the use of conventional survey methods in highly invaded and dense forested areas with difficult and inaccessible terrain and being given that macaques are highly mobile.

Coming to part (b) (i) of the question, the 1986 survey estimated the number of macaques to be between 25,000 to 35,000 while the 1994 survey estimated the population at around 40,000 individuals and the 2007 survey estimated the population at around 30,000 individuals. As at date, the NPCS has estimated the population of long-tailed macaques to be in the range of 40,000

to 60,000 considering the absence of natural predators, major cyclones, limited capture from the wild since 2009 and based on its breeding potential and the available habitat.

With respect to part b(ii), as at 21 March 2023, the macaques kept under breeding and captivity are 66,958 which consist of animals used for breeding and the weaned animals that will be exported.

NATIONAL GENDER POLICY – TECHNICAL COMMITTEES – SETUP

(No. B/77) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the setting up of the 4 technical committees in the private sector, academia, media and civil society organisations, as recommended in the National Gender Policy, she will state if same have been setup and, if so, when, indicating in each case –

- (a) the number of meetings held, and
- (b) the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

AMB – SUPPLY OF RED ONIONS – TENDER CANCELLATION

(No. B/80) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the tender for the Supply of African Origin Well Cured Red Onions by the Agricultural Marketing Board in January 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to the reasons for the cancellation thereof on 23 February 2024, indicating the impact thereof on the availability of red onions on the local market.

Reply: I am informed by the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) that several consignments of onions totalling 1,920 tonnes from China, South Africa and Holland were delayed in January and February 2024 due to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security situation, re-routing of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, transshipment issues and port congestions.

The transit time of vessels from abovementioned origins increased from 15 days up to a maximum of 74 days and some consignments were unloaded in Colombo and Sri Lanka in January and February 2024; hence, resulting in further delays. Although proper planning had been carried out and orders were already placed from usual suppliers, a communiqué was issued

to invite firm proposals from individuals and companies for the supply of African origin well cured red onions for arrival to Mauritius at latest by third week of February 2024 so as to avoid sea routes of Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

This new procurement exercise was initiated as a mitigating measure as the AMB anticipated further delays due to uncertainties and unfavourable situation at international level.

Given that the monthly consumption of onions averages 1,300 tonnes, and as the country was fully supplied in onions in the third week of February 2024, the AMB did not proceed with the tendering exercise. From 05 February to 01 March 2024, 3,779 tonnes of onions reached Mauritius.

As at 18 March 2024, the stock position of onions at the Agricultural Marketing Board was 2,118 tonnes in stock/port area and a consignment of 868 tonnes of onions are expected by 22 March 2024. Hence, there is no shortage of this product on the local market.

During the month of February this year, AMB supplied 1,441 tonnes of onions which is well above the average monthly consumption.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 – FLOOD-PRONE AREAS – SURVEY

(No. B/81) Mrs K. 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 flooding in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin and Petite Rivière, he will state if a survey has been carried out to identify the flood-prone areas following the recent floods caused by cyclone Belal thereat, indicating the –

- (a) damages caused as a result thereof, and
- (b) remedial measures envisaged to address same.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 16 – CLEANING & MAINTENANCE OF DRAINS – COST INCURRED

(No. A/1) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the cleaning and maintenance of existing drains in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal, he will,

for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to the –

- (a) list of regions having benefitted therefrom;
- (b) maintenance work being undertaken thereat, and
- (c) total costs thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that –

- (a) the cleaning of covered drains is contracted out and involves the following works –
 - removal and storage of covers/metal grating;
 - removal and carting away of asphalt and debris;
 - refixing of drain covers/metal grating;
 - reinstatement of concrete borders and road, and
 - repairs of damaged tarmac.
- (b) the cleaning of open drains is undertaken by in-house labour every six to eight weeks' intervals and as and when required. It also involves the removal and carting away of debris in the open drains.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am placing the following copies in the Library of the National Assembly –

- 1) List of regions in Constituency No. 16 whereat cleaning of covered drains have been effected during years 2022 and 2023 through contracted services with the costs involved, and
- 2) List of open drains in Constituency No. 16 which have been cleaned by the in-house labour of the Council for the month of February 2024.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the maintenance works undertaken through contracted services comprise the replacement of drain covers/metal gratings if same have been found to be damaged, reinstatement of concrete borders and roads and repairs to damaged tarmac.

As far as part (c) of the question is concerned, I am informed that the total drain maintenance costs for Constituency No. 16 amounted to Rs1,692,750 for the year 2022 and Rs1,694,250 for the year 2023.

SORÈZE – CYCLONE BELAL - ROAD REPAIR WORKS

(No. A/3) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to severe damages caused to the road infrastructure at Sorèze during the passage of cyclone Belal, he will state the timeframe for the repair works being envisaged, if any.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the bid document for the resurfacing of the following roads in Sorèze is under preparation –

- (i) Avenue Dorade – 72m x 6m,
- (ii) Avenue Marlin – 588m x 6m.

I am further informed that bids are expected to be launched by start of April 2024 and the contract is expected to be awarded by mid-June 2024.