



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 30 JULY 2024

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(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
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Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Marie Christiane Dorine Chukowry	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Anjiv Ramdhany	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms
Hon. Ms Naveena Ramyad	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 23 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 30 July 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS – DRAWING OF LOTS – MODALITIES

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, at the Sitting of Tuesday 23 July 2024, I announced that I shall look into the process by which the order of Parliamentary Questions is determined.

The drawing of lots in respect of Parliamentary Questions was implemented following an Agreement dated 18 March 2022 signed by then Chief Whip for the Government and Opposition Whip.

On 30 April 2024, the modalities for the drawing of lots were changed by my predecessor, leading to some criticism by hon. Members, for lack of transparency.

Hon. Members, I agree and I have therefore decided that the name of the hon. Member in whose name the Question stands and the subject matter of the Question shall be specified in the Ballot Order.

Hence, on Wednesday 24 July 2024 at about 15:30 hours, I informed both the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Government Whip of my decision to revert back to the former practice, which had been endorsed by both sides of the House.

I invited both the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Chief Whip for the Government to respectively delegate a Member of their side to participate in the exercise of drawing of lots, which was scheduled at 17:30 hours for today's Parliamentary Questions.

The exercise was carried out in my presence and in the presence of hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy, PPS, who represented the Government side. No representative, however, for the Opposition attended that exercise.

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr Balgobin: Under protest!

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Let me make my announcement.

Having personally attended the shuffling exercise, I am now satisfied that the process to determine the order of PQs is more transparent, fair and further strengthens our Parliamentary Democracy.

COMMITTEE ROOMS - ACCESS - *POINT DE PRESSE*

Hon. Members, I also wish to inform the House that I have taken note that hon. Members are no longer granted access to Committee Rooms on Sitting days for the purpose of holding their *point de presse*. This has led to hon. Members holding their *point de presse* on the street of the city, which does not uphold the dignity of the House.

Hon. Members, henceforth, hon. Members from both sides of the House will be allowed to use the Committee Rooms of the National Assembly on Sitting days for the purpose of making their *point de presse*, subject to requests being made to that effect to the Office of the Clerk.

I thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail

- (a) The Road Traffic (Bus Fares) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 120 of 2024)
- (b) The Motorways and Main Roads (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 121 of 2024)

B. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Gambling Regulatory Authority (Technical Standards for Gaming Machine, Limited Payout Machine, Amusement Machine and Server) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 119 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

The Annual Reports and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the ex-National Computer Board for the years ended 30 June, 2020 and 2021.

D. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development for the year ended 30 June 2023.

E. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Council of Registered Librarians for the year ended 30 June 2023.

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 122 of 2024)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 17) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 123 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

PEOPLE'S TURF PLC LIMITED – HORSE RACING ORGANISATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the organisation of horse racing at the Champ de Mars by People's Turf PLC Limited (PTP), he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA), information as to –

- (a) if PTP has a Public Liability Insurance;
 - (b) the audited financial accounts of PTP for horse racing season 2023;
 - (c) its subletting agreement with Côte d'Or International Racecourse and Entertainment Complex Ltd (COIREC), and
 - (d) the letter of intent dated 06 April 2022 addressed to the PTP by the GRA,
- and table copies thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable Leader de l'opposition pour sa question. Afin d'y apporter une réponse claire, permettez-moi de retracer l'historique de l'organisation des courses hippiques depuis 2022.

Comme la Chambre le sait, pendant de nombreuses années, le *Mauritius Turf Club (MTC)* a été le seul organisateur de courses hippiques à Maurice jusqu'en 2022, date à laquelle un nouvel organisateur de courses hippiques, le *People's Turf PLC* dit *PTP*, est entré en fonction à la suite de la mise en place d'une commission d'enquête ayant rendu un rapport accablant, dit le « rapport Parry ».

Pour rappel, dans sa réponse à une question parlementaire le 22 juillet 2014, le Premier ministre d'alors avait déclaré que –

« Le gouvernement considère avec une grande inquiétude les allégations de grande envergure sur l'organisation et la gestion des courses de chevaux à Maurice. Le

gouvernement est également préoccupé par les critiques formulées à l'encontre des agences qui s'occupent des courses de chevaux et des activités de paris qui y sont liées. Il est évident que la confiance du public dans l'intégrité de l'industrie des courses de chevaux a été sérieusement entamée. J'ai décidé de mettre en place une commission d'enquête pour examiner tous les aspects des courses de chevaux à Maurice ».

Ce faisant, le gouvernement travailliste d'alors, sous la direction de Navin Ramgoolam, avait annoncé le 24 septembre 2014 la mise en place d'une Commission d'enquête sur les courses de chevaux à Maurice présidée par Monsieur Richard Parry.

M. le président, en mars 2015, la Commission d'enquête a présenté un rapport sans équivoque qui pointait du doigt les malversations généralisées dans l'industrie des courses de chevaux, allant de la collusion au truquage des courses jusqu'aux conflits d'intérêts et aux marchés de paris illégaux.

Face à ce constat sans appel, la Commission a formulé 23 recommandations.

L'une de ces recommandations était de créer la *Mauritius Horse Racing Authority* en tant que nouvel organisme statutaire indépendant pour superviser la régulation et la gouvernance des courses hippiques à Maurice.

À la suite des recommandations du rapport Parry, plusieurs amendements ont été apportés à la *GRA Act* par le biais de la loi de finances 2021 pour la création d'une division des courses hippiques au sein de la *GRA* afin de reprendre les fonctions de régulation et de gouvernance de l'organisateur des courses hippiques de l'époque.

M. le président, la division des courses hippiques tant attendue est entrée en fonction le 21 janvier 2022 avec le recrutement d'un certain nombre d'expatriés disposant de l'expertise et de l'expérience nécessaires pour remplir les fonctions de réglementation et de gouvernance de l'organisateur des courses hippiques.

Pour la saison des courses 2022, le *MTC*, par l'intermédiaire de sa filiale détenue à 100%, le *MTC SL*, avait demandé une licence d'organisateur de courses hippiques à la *GRA*.

Cependant, alors que le conseil de la *GRA* lui a bien délivré la licence d'organisateur de courses hippiques assortie des conditions requises conformément à la loi et communiquées au *MTC/MTCSL*, ce dernier a catégoriquement refusé d'organiser des courses hippiques selon ces conditions légales.

Après cela, la société privée à responsabilité limitée « *Côte d'Or International Racecourse and Entertainment Complex Ltd (COIREC)* » a été constituée.

La gestion et l'entretien de l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars ont été confiés à *COIREC* afin que l'entité puisse le sous-louer à tout organisateur potentiel de courses hippiques à Maurice pour l'organisation de courses de chevaux.

À la suite de ces développements, un deuxième organisateur de courses hippiques, *PTP*, a vu le jour et a demandé au *COIREC* un bail pour l'utilisation du Champ de Mars afin d'organiser des courses hippiques à Maurice.

En parallèle, *MTC* et *MTCSL* ont changé d'avis et décidé d'accepter toutes les conditions initialement imposées par le conseil d'administration de la *GRA* concernant leur licence d'organisateur de courses de chevaux et ont également demandé au *COIREC* un bail pour l'utilisation du Champ de Mars afin d'organiser des courses de chevaux à Maurice.

Suite aux deux demandes reçues pour un contrat de location pour l'utilisation de l'hippodrome du Champ des Mars par les deux licences potentielles d'organisateur de courses de chevaux, à savoir *PTP* et *MTCSL*, le conseil d'administration du *COIREC* a décidé d'accorder aux deux demandeurs l'utilisation non exclusive de l'hippodrome du Champ de Mars pour l'organisation de courses de chevaux lors de week-ends alternatifs.

Suite à l'obtention du contrat de location de *COIREC* pour l'utilisation du Champ de Mars, le conseil d'administration de la *GRA* a alloué et autorisé la tenue de 20 courses chacune, un week-end sur deux, aux deux organisateurs de courses hippiques, à savoir *MTCSL* et *PTP*.

M. le président, pour la saison des courses 2023, *PTP* a renouvelé avec succès son contrat de location avec *COIREC* dans les délais prescrits par les clauses de son contrat de location et a pu obtenir l'hippodrome fonctionnel Champ de Mars, ce qui lui a permis de renouveler avec

succès sa licence d'organisateur de courses hippiques auprès du conseil d'administration de la *GRA*.

En revanche, le *MTCSL* n'a pas exercé ses droits contractuels de renouveler son contrat de bail avec *COIREC* en temps voulu.

Ainsi, pour la saison des courses 2023, il n'y avait qu'une seule licence d'organisateur de courses hippiques délivrée à *PTP*.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé par la *GRA* qu'il n'est pas une condition requise de détenir une *Public Liability Insurance* pour obtenir et opérer une licence d'organisateur de courses hippiques.

Par ailleurs, j'ai été informé que cela est une condition de l'accord de sous-location entre la compagnie privée *COIREC* et *PTP* et que *COIREC* procède actuellement au suivi de cette requête.

M. le président, pour ce qui est de la partie (b) de la question, la *GRA* m'a informé que pour l'année financière terminant au 31 décembre 2023, les comptes audités doivent être soumis au 30 juin 2024.

Sur ce point, j'ai été informé par la *GRA* que *PTP* a fait une demande pour obtenir un délai supplémentaire car les comptes sont toujours en cours d'examen par les auditeurs. Ils seront soumis dans les plus brefs délais.

M. le président, au regard de la partie (c) de la question, je ne suis pas en mesure de déposer un accord entre deux entités privées.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (d) de la question, je dépose une copie de la lettre d'intention datée du 6 avril 2022.

Par ailleurs, j'ai été informé par la *GRA* que *COIREC* a servi, le 16 juillet 2024, une Mise en demeure à *PTP* étant donné que *PTP* ne respecte pas pleinement les conditions de l'accord de sous-location.

Je dépose la Mise en demeure à l'Assemblée.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Yes!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Minister. So, from the reply given by the Minister, I do understand that he is not willing to table all the copies in relation to Public Liability Insurance, the audited financial accounts, the subletting agreement and the letter of intent. Am I to understand this?

Dr. Padayachy: Non, ce n'est pas ça ! Je viens d'expliquer que les comptes ne sont pas encore déposés. Donc, quand ils seront déposés, on les déposera.

Dr. Boolell: Now, let me come specifically to the Public Liability Insurance, despite the fact that you have tried to wiggle your way out. Is he aware that from information obtained, it is clear that PTP does not have a Public Liability Insurance, in blatant violation of clause 9(6) of the subletting agreement from COIREC? Can the Minister confirm? Don't tell me that it is not a compulsory agreement.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de le dire, oui, que *COIREC* est toujours en attente de cette disposition, et c'est pour cela aussi que *COIREC* a mis une mise en demeure le 16 juillet 2024. On attend que la justice prenne forme.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, the agreement between the two parties was entered on 14 November 2020. Is he aware that it was at the request of PTP that section 9(6) was inserted? I think I will read it –

“The lessee shall, during the entire duration of the agreement, keep in full force and effect a policy of public liability insurance covering general and the lessee's liability with respect to Champ de Mars and the business operated by the lessee.”

Is he aware of this? That was a firm commitment given by PTP and it has flouted this clause 9(6) of the agreement which it entered into with COIREC!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, oui, je viens d'être mis au courant du non-respect de cette règle. Je viens de dire que c'est pour cela aussi que *COIREC* a servi une mise en demeure à *PTP* le 16 juillet 2024 pour non-respect des conditions.

Dr. Boolell: We have...

Dr. Padayachy: Et maintenant, on va laisser à la justice de suivre son cours et de fixer les dispositions.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I am glad that there is an enquiry. Now, am I to understand that there is an investigation which is going to be conducted or is it being conducted in the light of the fact that this gentleman has scared the Police off by saying that he is a Special Adviser of the Prime Minister?

Mr Speaker: No! Please!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, il y a quelques semaines, on avait eu cette même conversation. On n'est pas là pour voir qui est *Adviser* ou pas. Il a posé des questions concernant *PTP* ; je viens de lui dire que la compagnie privée *COIREC* a mis une mise en demeure contre *PTP* par rapport au non-respect des dispositions. Il faut attendre que la justice fasse son travail et après, on prendra des dispositions.

Dr. Boolell: Before I come to GRA, can I ask the hon. Minister, in the event of any serious public liability or occurrence of accident, who will bear the responsibility in the absence of a Public Liability Assurance?

Dr. Padayachy: Dans la loi, dans les réglementations, si on comprend bien, sur le contrat, il devait y avoir une clause ; il devait y avoir une assurance. Vu qu'il n'a pas pris d'assurance, ce sera à l'organisateur des courses de prendre les responsabilités.

Je tiens à ajouter dessus, M. le président, que selon les informations que j'ai reçues de la *GRA*, auparavant aussi, il n'y avait pas de dispositions concernant l'assurance quand le *MTC* était l'organisateur des courses de chevaux au Champ de Mars. C'est une nouvelle réglementation qui va dans le bon sens. Et nous sommes en train de tout faire pour que *PTP* respecte toutes ces dispositions.

Mr Speaker: Yes, Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Aided and abetted by the regime! Will the Minister agree that this is a gross violation aided and abetted by the GRA? Isn't this tantamount to illegal operation?

Dr. Padayachy: Non !

Dr. Boolell: In the lease agreement of the...

Yes, carry on, please! I apologise.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne peux pas être d'accord avec cette affirmation du Leader de l'opposition parce que ce n'est pas une condition préalable de la *GRA* ; c'est une condition de la *COIREC* qui est une société privée. C'est un accord entre deux entités privées. C'est pour cela que, je le redis, *COIREC* est en train de mettre une mise en demeure contre *PTP*. Ce n'est pas une condition de la *GRA* concernant l'assurance.

Dr. Boolell: Who is the Chairman of *COIREC*?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, address the Chair! Wait for the question to be given. Have some respect!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, through you, Mr Speaker. Can the Minister...

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may ask your question!

Dr. Boolell: Yes. Can the Minister, through you, Mr Speaker, inform the House who is the Chairman of *COIREC*?

Dr. Padayachy: Je n'ai pas cette information avec moi, mais je peux la chercher pour la déposer. Je ne crois pas que c'est une information cachée, mais je suis désolé, j'étais un peu souffrant et je n'ai pas eu le temps d'aller tout vérifier. Je pense que vous l'avez et vous allez me le donner !

Dr. Boolell: Yes! And do you know who is the Chairman of the *COIREC*? The...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, address the Chair!

Dr. Boolell: Yes. I am talking through you.

Mr Speaker: Do not argue with the Minister!

Dr. Boolell: Okay, yes! But it applies to both sides.

Mr Speaker: Yes! Ask your question!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Is he aware that the Chairman is the highest officer working at the Prime Minister's Office?

Dr. Padayachy: Je suis très heureux que ce soit le *highest officer* et il est en train de respecter. C'est pour cela que *COIREC* a mis cette mise en demeure. M. le président, je n'arrête pas de répéter une chose ; c'est que *COIREC* a fait mettre une mise en demeure contre *PTP*. Ils ne sont pas restés les bras ballants, en train de ne rien faire et d'attendre. Ils ont mis une mise en demeure ; ils ont donné du temps à *PTP* de respecter toutes les dispositions en vue de la difficulté de cette activité. Mais malheureusement, *PTP* n'a pas respecté toutes les dispositions. Donc, ils sont en violation de leur contrat et *COIREC* a fait mettre une mise en demeure pour que *PTP* respecte encore une fois toutes les règles. Donc, je tiens à saluer ce haut fonctionnaire pour son travail.

Dr. Boolell: Except that he has not delivered! Mr Speaker, do you know who he is? The Secretary to Cabinet. Now, can I ask the Minister, will the lease agreement of People's Turf PLC be suspended with immediate effect until it obtains all relevant licences? Not only Public Liability Insurance. There are so many other licences which it should obtain before operating.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, nous allons laisser travailler les deux entités. C'est une entité privée avec un conseil d'administration. Ils sont en train de travailler à bon escient, et on va les laisser travailler. Ils sont en train de faire leur travail. Je ne vais pas porter de jugement sur le travail qui a été effectué, comme est en train de présupposer le Leader de l'opposition.

Dr. Boolell: If I pay heed to what the Minister of Finance is saying, Mr Speaker, so it means that he can get away with murder because of his proximity to the regime? Is that it?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, on n'a pas...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, come on!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président...

Mr Speaker: Don't be argumentative in your question! Ask your question! He is answering!

Dr. Boolell: I am! It is argumentative!

Mr Speaker: Politely!

Dr. Boolell: Okay! You do not want me to put other argumentative questions; let me come to the audited financial accounts.

Mr Speaker: No! You can ask the question but in a polite manner. Why do you have to...

Dr. Boolell: I do!

Mr Speaker: ...attack the character?

Dr. Boolell: No! But it is my work to put across question.

Mr Speaker: Put your question nicely.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Since the audited financial account for horse racing season 2023 has not been submitted to the Gaming Regulatory Authority, will the Minister inform the House on what basis was the horse racing licence of the PTP for horse racing season 2024 renewed?

Dr. Padayachy: Ils ont renouvelé l'année dernière, en 2023. Donc, ils avaient jusqu'à juin 2024 pour déposer. Encore une fois - je le redis -, ils n'ont pas déposé, ils ont demandé un délai supplémentaire. Ce genre de demande arrive fréquemment et il n'y a aucune raison pour ne pas accepter cette demande. Les comptes sont chez les auditeurs. Il faut attendre que l'auditeur finisse son travail pour pouvoir les déposer.

M. le président, je pense qu'il ne faut pas avoir une fixation sur *PTP*. Si on veut vraiment regarder ce qui s'est passé dans le passé, il y a un rapport Parry. Je n'ai pas lu le rapport complètement, mais déjà, on voit dans le rapport Parry qui a été commandité par l'ancien régime, par l'ancien Premier ministre par rapport à toutes les défaillances qu'il y avait sur cette activité. La *GRA* est en train de mettre en place plusieurs mesures pour essayer d'apporter plus de bonne gouvernance dans cette activité. C'est pour cela que ça prend aussi du temps. On a eu un nouvel organisateur des courses, la *PTP*, et il faut lui donner la chance aussi. Ce n'est pas quelque chose de si facile que ça à mettre en place.

Auparavant, concernant l'assurance, la *MTC* n'avait pas de *Public Liability Insurance*, mais elle était en train d'organiser des courses pendant plus de 100 ans.

Donc, maintenant, on a mis une nouvelle disposition. Donnons-leur le temps, mais en même temps, *COIREC* a pris les dispositifs légaux pour pousser *PTP* à prendre ces diverses dispositions.

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Minister is in defence of the indefensible. In view of all this and in the light of what he has said, are we to understand, hon. Minister, that the Vice-Chairman of the Gambling Regulatory Authority and representative of the Prime Minister, Mr D. B., is an enabler, a facilitator of Mr J.M.L.S.?

Dr. Padayachy : Je ne vois pas en quoi j'ai les capacités pour répondre. Qu'est-ce qu'il est en train de sous-entendre ? M. le président, nous aussi, nous avons plein d'informations. Moi aussi, j'ai plein de petits papiers, encore une fois, sur ce qui se passe dans les courses. Est-ce que je suis en train de venir dire, par exemple, qu'il y avait un certain Monsieur D. ? Un certain Monsieur D. que le Leader de l'opposition va reconnaître. Ce Monsieur D. qui était son agent principal, à qui on avait donné une licence de bookmaker par le Parti travailliste et qui était en train de le financer. Est-ce que là-dessus il n'a pas des questions, par exemple ? Peut-être que c'est là-dessus qu'il devrait poser des questions ? Nous, c'est pour enlever ce genre de malodonne qu'on est en train de mettre de l'ordre dans les courses de chevaux.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, through you, Mr Speaker, I am glad that the underbelly of the reply given by the hon. Minister is that his Government is tolerating illegal operators.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Non! Non, M. le président !

Dr. Boolell: Now, can I come to the ...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Je ne suis pas d'accord avec cette affirmation.

Mr Speaker: Right. Hon. Minister, you will have the time to reply. Please, continue.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Sir. Now, let me come to the Letter of Intent. Section 10 of the Letter of Intent dated 06 April 2022, as I have asked in the question, to the PTP by the GRA, stated that Personal Management Licence should be held by all beneficial owners, shareholders and directors of a company. Is the Minister aware that this is not the case?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, est-ce une question, est-ce une affirmation ? Je n'ai pas d'information là-dessus. La question qu'il m'avait posée, j'ai répondu à toutes les questions. Moi, je ne suis pas allé chercher s'il y avait des réglementations ou pas. S'il a des informations, il peut sortir et aller faire une déposition à la police là-dessus ou aux autorités compétentes.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. Through you, I thank the Minister. It is precisely the relevance of my next question. Is the Minister aware that gross violation of Section 93B of the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act has been tolerated since the setting up of PTP with acolytes not having Personal Management Licence in violation of the law? This is a specific section of the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, encore une fois, je n'ai pas l'information qu'il est en train de me demander. S'il avait posé cette question, j'aurais cherché ces informations et je serais venu avec les informations. Je suis venu avec toutes les informations qu'il m'a demandées. On n'est pas là pour essayer de marquer un point. On est là pour essayer de répondre à des questions. J'aurais préféré que le Leader de l'opposition le mette dans ses questions. Il a posé quatre questions. Il aurait pu poser une cinquième, une sixième, une septième, et j'aurais même répondu à 20 questions. Mais donnez-moi vos questions ; j'aurais préparé les réponses. Je ne peux pas prendre toutes les informations en l'espace de deux heures pour venir et vous donner toutes les informations. Je n'ai pas toutes ces informations en tête. Je ne passe pas ma journée à regarder ce qui se passe à *COIREC* et *GRA*.

Mr Speaker: I will remind hon. Members to stay relevant and not to bring in additional matters not canvassed in the main question during supplementary questions. I have allowed you this, but, please.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is precisely because I am relevant that I am asking, through you, to the Minister, whether he has a representative on the Board of *COIREC* or Gambling Regulatory Authority Board. I take it for granted that the member would report to the Minister. This is the ABC of having a representative on respective boards.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je le répète, j'ai des représentants sur de nombreux conseils d'administration et je ne passe pas mes journées à aller poser des questions. Je fais confiance aux officiers de haut grade qui représentent le ministère des Finances sur tous ces

conseils d'administration. Et j'espère que le Leader de l'opposition n'est pas en train d'attaquer les officiers qui sont sur ce conseil d'administration, parce qu'encore une fois je pense qu'il n'a pas voulu retenir l'information principale qui est que *COIREC*, encore une fois, le conseil d'administration de *COIREC* a fait mettre une mise en demeure contre *PTP* concernant le non-respect des différentes réglementations. Donc, c'est ça l'information principale, et il y a une mise en demeure. Attendez que la justice prenne forme et qu'on puisse réglementer et prendre des actions contre *PTP*. On ne va pas prendre des actions sans aucun avis légal.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, it is precisely because we have the highest respect for those diligent officers that I have raised this question. But the problem is, Mr Speaker, when they report to Ministers, unfortunately, because of closeness with the operator, no corrective measure is taken. And this is the problem. I am not saying in relation to this specific Minister.

Mr Speaker: No! No! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, are you now attacking the conduct of the Minister?

Dr. Boolell: No!

Mr Speaker: What are you implying?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, he has been very forthwith with his replies.

Mr Speaker: I don't understand your question. Can you rephrase the question?

Dr. Boolell: Yes.

Mr Speaker: It sounds like you are attacking the conduct!

Dr. Boolell: No, far from that.

Mr Speaker: You would know this has to come through a motion.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you. Now, can I, through you, impress upon the Minister, that whenever reports are submitted by diligent officers, that these reports be taken on board and corrective measures addressed to redress a difficult situation?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je le répète. J'ai une entière satisfaction de la façon dont l'officier qui est sur le *board* de *COIREC* a travaillé et qu'encore une fois, ils ont en toute indépendance à un certain moment décidé qu'ils avaient donné assez de temps à *PTP* de respecter toutes les règles, et qu'ils ont décidé de mettre en place une mise en demeure. Et il n'y a pas eu de collusion. Si, comme il le présupposait, que j'étais en train d'intervenir, j'aurais demandé de ne pas le faire. Donc, en aucune façon, moi, en tant que ministre, je vais demander à un de mes officiers de ne pas respecter les règles. Ce n'est pas une pratique que j'ai l'habitude, ni moi ni aucun de mes collègues de ce côté de la Chambre. C'est peut-être quelque chose qui était toléré à une certaine période, mais ce n'est plus toléré actuellement.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of Opposition.

Dr. Boolell: Now, in view of the breaches of the law concerning Personal Management Licences and notwithstanding what I have highlighted earlier in relation to other breaches, can I ask the Minister, through you, of course, Mr Speaker, whether the Gambling Regulatory Authority and the Côte d'Or International Racecourse and Entertainment Complex Ltd are both accomplices of Mr J.M.L.S. and his peers? And in doing so, they have broken the law not on one occasion, not on two occasions, but on multiple occasions.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, are you prepared to substantiate what you are saying?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I have stated so! I have stated facts, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: You are now attacking an authority.

Dr. Boolell: These are not shallow statements that I have made. Based on substantial facts ...

Mr Speaker: So, please, before asking your question, substantiate what you are saying. You are attacking the conduct of the GRA, in breach of the ...

Dr. Boolell: Yes. Section 93 of the GRA Act, section 10 of the Letter of Intent, then Subletting Agreement, section 9(6) of the Subletting Agreement. If this is not flouting the law, then what is flouting the law?

Mr Speaker: Okay. Proceed with the question!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, le Leader de l'opposition est en train de faire une affirmation. Je l'ai répété, je n'ai pas les informations. Il faut attendre que j'ai ces informations. Moi, je n'ai aucune information qu'ils ne respectent pas les règles ; personne ne m'a dit qu'ils ne respectent pas les règles. S'ils ne respectent pas les règles, bien sûr que la *GRA* va prendre les actions nécessaires, mais je ne crois pas qu'ils ne respectent pas ces règles; qu'il n'y a pas de licences.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much.

Dr. Padayachy: Je ne suis pas en mesure de dire oui ou non, il l'a ou pas. Donc, dès que j'aurai les informations, je vais les déposer à la Chambre. Et si jamais il ne respecte pas ces règles, bien sûr que la *GRA* va prendre les mesures appropriées.

Mr Speaker: Yes, Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, it is clear that the main shareholder of PTP is acting contrary to the law. In order to protect the public and to safeguard public interest and punters, can I impress upon the Minister to make sure that all activities of PTP are suspended until he fully complies with all the provisions of GRA, the agreement with COIREC and in relation to the letter of intent dated 06 April 2022? We cannot allow somebody who is rogue and acting contrary to the basic provisions of the law.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, encore une fois, je le redis, le Leader de l'opposition est en train de présupposer que *PTP* ne respecte pas le contrat, l'accord, les règles de la *GRA*. Je n'ai aucune information en ma possession que *PTP* ne respecte pas ces règles. Si jamais, encore une fois je le dis, *PTP* ne respecte pas ces règles, bien sûr que la *GRA* va prendre les actions nécessaires contre *PTP*. Mais, jusqu'à présent, je n'ai pas eu ces informations. J'aimerais, si jamais il a des informations précises, qu'il les dépose ou bien qu'il fasse une déclaration, qu'il aille à la *GRA* et qu'il dépose que *PTP* ne respecte pas les règles du contrat.

Mr Speaker: Yes, last question, hon. Leader of Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: In the name of transparency, accountability and good governance, why is it that his contract is not rescinded to safeguard public interest, to safeguard punters?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, de quel contrat est-il en train de parler ?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: I said it was the last question. I will allow you one last question.

Dr. Boolell: The contract which PTP has entered with COIREC, non-compliance of provisions set by the Gambling Regulatory Authority. Mr Speaker, we are having a company which is acting contrary to the spirit and the letter of the law. Either we are a law-abiding citizen; we live in a country where there is the rule of law...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition...

Dr. Boolell: ...or we live in a country where...

Mr Speaker: ...put your question. It is your last question.

Dr. Boolell: ... there is the law of the jungle.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai dit dans ma réponse que je ne pouvais divulguer un accord entre deux entités privées. C'est un principe clé de la bonne gouvernance. On ne rentre pas dans les activités du privé et j'ai déposé toutes les autres demandes qu'il a faites, que ce soit l'accord avec la *GRA* ou même la mise en demeure, parce qu'il me semble que le Leader de l'opposition n'était pas au courant de la mise en demeure de *COIREC* contre *PTP* et je n'étais pas dans l'obligation de déposer cette mise en demeure. Je l'ai fait pour que le Leader de l'opposition se rende compte de l'intention de *COIREC* de faire respecter les règles et que *PTP* respecte les règles.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/624 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development.

Hon. Bodha!

POLICE OFFICERS – NEW UNIFORMS

(No. B/619) Mr N. Bodha (Second 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 issue of new uniforms

to the officers of the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to when the next exercise therefor is due.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Section 7 of the Police Act, stipulates that, and I quote –

“Every police officer shall –

- (a) wear the prescribed uniform; and
- (b) be provided with the staves, arms, ammunition and other equipment necessary for the effective discharge of his duties.”

Furthermore, section 6 of the Police Act provides that, and I quote –

- “(1) Subject to this Act, the Commissioner may make standing orders and give administrative directions to be observed by police officers in the performance of their duties.
- (2) Every police officer shall obey all lawful orders given verbally or in writing, and shall comply with standing orders and administrative directions issued by the Commissioner.”

Accordingly, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police, that pursuant to section 6 of the Police Act and to enforce section 7 of the same Act, the Police have issued Police Standing Order No. 110 – “Dress Regulations” which fully describes the design and pattern for each uniform with accessories. The said Police Standing Order, specifically includes that –

- (i) Police Officers will be dressed in uniform when on duty, except for those who are authorised to perform duty in civilian dress; and
- (ii) Only articles of uniform of the regulation pattern are to be worn when on duty.

I am further informed that the Police Force has a strength of around 13,000 Police Officers posted in various Branches/Units. It is noted that some Units have their specific uniform requirements. For example, the National Coast Guard, the Special Support Unit and the Special Mobile Force.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that all Police Officers, on joining the Force for the 6 months foundation training, are issued with the regular working Police uniform, that is, the Blue

Uniform, including all the necessary accessories, irrespective of their subsequent posting, which comprises –

- (a) 2 shirts short sleeves;
- (b) 1 shirt long sleeves;
- (c) 1 cardigan;
- (d) 1 raincoat;
- (e) 3 pairs shoulder badges;
- (f) 2 pairs of trousers;
- (g) 1 leather belt with buckle;
- (h) 1 pair of metal shoulder badge;
- (i) 2 embroidered name plates;
- (j) 1 cap with badge;
- (k) 1 lanyard;
- (l) 3 pairs of socks; and
- (m) 2 pairs of shoes.

As regards female Police Officers, over and above the normal entitlement mentioned earlier, they are also issued with 2 skirts, 1 pair of pantyhose and 1 pair of ballerina shoes.

On completion of their foundation training, Police Officers are posted to various Units within the Police Force. Police Divisions/Units such as the regular Police, Special Mobile Force, the National Coast Guard, the Special Support Unit and the Police Helicopter Squadron have their respective uniforms and accordingly, all Police Officers are issued their full set of those specific uniforms along with their accessories in every financial year as follows –

- (i) For the Regular Police, that is, those wearing the Blue Uniform, they are issued 4 shirts short sleeves, 2 shirts long sleeves, 4 pairs of trousers, 2 pairs of shoes and 3 pairs of socks;

- (ii) For those posted at the Special Mobile Force, they are issued 1 shirt short sleeves olive green, 1 shirt short sleeves dark green, 1 pair of trousers olive green, 1 pair of trousers dark green, 3 pairs of socks and 1 pair of shoes. They are also issued one set of combat dress comprising one shirt long sleeves, 1 pair of trousers and one pair of combat boot;
- (iii) For those posted at the Special Support Unit, they are issued 4 shirts short sleeves light blue, 4 pairs of trousers dark blue, 3 pairs of socks, 2 pairs of shoes and 1 pair of combat boot;
- (iv) Police Officers posted at the National Coast Guard are issued 4 shirts short sleeves white, 2 pairs of trousers navy blue, 2 pairs of shoes and 3 pairs of socks; and
- (v) For those Police Officers posted at the Police Helicopter Squadron, they are issued 2 shirts short sleeves white, 1 shirt long sleeves white, 2 pairs of trousers blue grey, 3 pairs of socks and 2 pairs of shoes.

It is to be noted that in every financial year, Police Officers posted in the Special Mobile Force, the National Coast Guard, the Special Support Unit and the Police Helicopter Squadron, other than the Regular Police, are also issued one set of the normal Blue Uniform comprising 1 shirt short sleeves, 1 shirt long sleeves, 1 pair of trousers, 1 pair of shoes and 1 pair of socks.

As regards Police Officers working in civilian dress in other Units of the Police such as the CCID and the ADSU, amongst others, they are also issued one set of the Blue Uniform together with the required accessories and are paid a monthly Clothing Allowance of Rs505.

Additionally, Police Officers are issued with other accessories such as caps, belt, embroidered name plate, cap badge and lanyard, as and when required or in view of wear and tear.

Moreover, Police Officers are provided with other ceremonial and specialised dresses depending on their posting and nature of duties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to ensuring timely issue of uniform to Police Officers, a constant monitoring is carried out by the Manager Procurement and Supply in the Warehousing

Section of the Police Department. As such, during every financial year, a request for purchase is made by the Officer-in-Charge of the Uniform Unit at the Warehousing Section. The procurement process for acquisition of uniforms involves –

- (i) In the first instance, the Committee of Needs undertakes an assessment of the total requirement of the Police Force.
- (ii) Subsequently, based on availability of funds, the Committee of Needs makes recommendation for approval by the Commissioner of Police for procurement.
- (iii) Preparation of the Annual Procurement Plan and its subsequent publishing on the website of the Public Procurement Office and of the Mauritius Police Force.
- (iv) Then, there is preparation and vetting of the tender documents.
- (v) The launching of tenders.
- (vi) The closing and opening of tenders.
- (vii) The setting up of a Bid Evaluation Committee to evaluate the bids and samples.
- (viii) The Departmental Bid Committee reviews the Bid Evaluation Report and subsequently, recommends for approval by the Accounting Officer.
- (ix) Notification to successful and unsuccessful bidders.
- (x) Finally, awarding of contract, upon, of course, no challenge by unsuccessful bidders.

On receipt of the uniform from the successful supplier, random samples of same are sent by the Police to a recognised body for testing of the product to verify whether the supplied items are in conformity with the required specifications of the tender.

Upon clearance from the recognised body, the Manager Procurement and Supply of the Warehousing Section of the Police Department proceeds with the issue of Police uniforms in accordance with scheduled plan.

If the sample of uniform does not obtain clearance from the recognised body, the supplier is given the opportunity to resubmit amended uniform items. In case the sample is still non-compliant, the contract is cancelled and the offer is made to the next responsive bidder. In the event there is no other responsive bidder, a fresh tender exercise is carried out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a buffer stock of Police uniform is always kept in the warehouse for issue to Police Officers whose uniform have been damaged in the performance of their duties or wear and tear, amongst others.

The different items of the uniform are distributed to the Police Officers in varied frequencies, namely –

- (i) short sleeves shirts, long sleeves shirts, shoulder badges, trousers, skirts, socks and shoes, once yearly;
- (ii) leather belt, belt buckle, metal shoulder badge, embroidered name plate, cap badge and lanyard, once at the time of recruitment but renewed in case of wear and tear; and
- (iii) caps, once every 3 years or in case of wear and tear.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that over the last few years, the uniform of the Police has known several changes from fabrics that were not comfortable or conducive to harsh weather and other conditions to lightweight. The cloth materials have also been subject to changes aimed at providing better protection and more ease of movement to the Police Officers. The older grey khaki uniforms were found not suitable for a tropical island like ours and were portrayed as unfriendly towards the community.

Subsequently, several academic and technical discussions were held regarding the fabrics, style and colour of the uniform taking into account the individual message each design conveys.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2021, the Police decided to bring certain changes to the uniform to stand out from jobs requiring the wearing of similar blue uniform, such as security companies. In this breath, a new Police outfit was designed and approved.

The style has remained almost the same, but some changes were brought to the fabric and colour coupled with some other distinctive features which include an embroidered badge, the triangular pockets on the shirt, a grey line on the seams of the pants and skirts and the silver metal badge of the Mauritius Police Force placed on the shoulder trap, amongst others.

Thus, on 09 October 2021, the new Police uniform came into force as regulated by G.N. 1497 of 2021. Accordingly, the Police Standing Orders No. 110 “Dress Regulations” was amended, to direct all Police Officers to wear the new uniform as from 11 October 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the last issue of Police uniform was carried out from September 2023 to April 2024 whereby every Police Officer of the regular police was issued with 3 pairs of trousers, 3 pairs of socks, 2 pairs of shoes, 3 shirts short sleeves and 1 shirt long sleeves. The remaining 1 shirt short sleeves, 1 shirt long sleeves and 1 pair of trousers will be issued by September 2024 to comply with the established Policy to issue 4 sets of Police uniform to those Officers. On the other hand, the Police Officers of the other Units have been issued their full set of their specific uniform along with their one set of Blue Uniform.

As regards the next issue of Police uniform for year 2024/2025, it is expected to be effected by February 2025. A stock taking exercise has been carried out by the Warehousing Section to identify those items requiring purchase. In that respect, tenders were launched for the procurement of ready-made trousers on 05 April 2024 and another one was launched on 17 April 2024 for shirts inclusive of Police badge. However, both tenders were unsuccessful as none of the tenders were responsive. The Tender Unit of the Police Department is initiating action for a fresh tender exercise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that to ensure that all the Police Officers have the best possible attire to conduct their duties, a Police Uniform Committee has been set up since June 2015 at the level of the Police Headquarters. The Committee may co-opt experts and professionals from relevant Government Institutions to advise on the effective discharge of their duties. In fact, the Committee looks into the specifications of Police uniforms, including the quality, design, material composition and also to consider any amendment thereto.

This Committee also caters for, *inter alia*, the standardisation of materials and also addressing complaints made by members of the Police Force.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The uniform being the symbol of authority, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that some companies and security services are, in fact, using the same type of fabric and the same colours, and is it not high time that the outfit and the design of the Police regular uniform be modified so that we have this symbol of authority?

The Prime Minister: I have just answered, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is a Committee that has been looking into the design, material and other specific matters concerning the uniform and precisely, because previously, there were other private companies that were using the same type of uniform, that there has been a change in the design and the material and so on.

Now, if the hon. Member is alleging that there are companies that are using the same type of uniform, the same design and so on, maybe he can communicate to this House. Let us know and then, I will definitely ask the Commissioner of Police to look into it. I mean, if the hon. Member is serious, he should communicate to us which company is using the same uniform.

Mr Speaker: Yes!

Mr Bodha: I will certainly communicate to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: No, but tell the House! Tell us!

Mr Bodha: But the CNT...

The Prime Minister: The population is watching you now!

Mr Bodha: The CNT...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Let hon. Bodha ask his question!

Mr Bodha: The CNT and some security services....

The Prime Minister: CNT?

Mr Bodha: ...are using almost the same design, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Prime Minister: Okay!

Mr Bodha: Now, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is the budget for this item and the second thing is whether he is aware that the winter gear has not yet been given to the Police Officers so far for this year?

Mr Speaker: There are two questions in one!

The Prime Minister: Yes. The budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned and that is why I gave a detailed answer so that the hon. Member would listen, because the budget varies from year to year. There is no same amount that is being spent every year. It is according to the requirements of the Police when they do their stock taking, when they also do come up with how many items they would require, then there is also, of course, a discussion with the Ministry of Finance so that we agree on the allocation of the amount that is going to be spent for this particular item. So, as I say, the budget is not the same every year.

Now, there was another question.

Mr Speaker: Yes!

Mr Bodha: The winter gear!

Mr Speaker: They have not been allocated winter gear!

The Prime Minister: I have answered. All the uniforms are provided according to what is prescribed. Now, the last tender has been unfortunate. It has been unresponsive, but that does not mean that we do not have enough of the uniforms to provide to the Officers. So, I have been informed that they are going to re-launch the tender exercise and, of course, in due course, we will see what is going to be the outcome.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what was the total cost of the procurement exercise of the last uniform that was procured, not the last tender, but the last procurement exercise, and also what is the name of the company which won the contract?

The Prime Minister: For shirts short sleeves, the date when it was procured: 24 January 2023; 49,000 units for an amount of Rs16,114,000. I don't have the name of the company. In the meantime, I will answer the other part. Shirts long sleeves, again on 24 January 2023 it was procured; 32,500 units at a cost of Rs11,012,000.

The company is New Bombay Limited. I guess for both, it is New Bombay Limited.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. David!

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS – BALLOT PAPERS – PRINTING

(No. B/620) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the ballot papers for the forthcoming National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to –

- (a) when the printing thereof is effected prior to the polling day;
- (b) if the printing thereof is effected exclusively at the Government Printing Department, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the communication to all political parties as to the total number thereof printed, including –
 - (i) tendered ones, and
 - (ii) surplus ones for each constituency.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, a ballot paper is the instrument by which a voter exercises his right to vote for the candidates of his choice in an election. Section 1(3) of the First Schedule to the Constitution of Mauritius provides that, and I quote –

“Every vote cast by an elector at any election shall be given by means of a ballot which, except in so far as may be otherwise prescribed in relation to the casting of votes by electors who are incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause or unable to read or understand any symbols on the ballot paper, shall be taken so as not to disclose how any vote is cast; and no vote cast by any elector at any general election shall be counted unless he cast valid votes for 3 candidates in the constituency in which he is registered or, in the case of an elector registered in Rodrigues, for 2 candidates in that constituency.”

Both the design and form of a ballot paper are prescribed in Regulation 21 of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014, which provide that, and I quote –

- “(1) In the case of a poll at an election, the votes shall be given by ballot.
- (2) (a) The ballot of each elector shall consist of a ballot paper showing the full name and description of each candidate, the symbol of identification allotted to each candidate and, in the case of a general election, the party or party alliance, if any, to which he belongs.
- (b) Each ballot paper shall –
 - (i) be in Form 6 or, where the Electoral Commissioner is of opinion that, in view of the number of candidates, it is impracticable to make use of Form 6, in Form 6A;
 - (ii) have a number printed on its verso; and
 - (iii) have attached to it a counterfoil with the same number printed on its recto.”

There are two types of ballots papers, namely ordinary ones and tendered ones. With regard to tendered ballot papers, Regulation 31(1)(a) of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that, and I quote –

“Where a person representing himself to be an elector whose name is on the register applies for a ballot paper after another person has already voted as that elector, the person shall, after satisfactorily answering the questions referred to in regulation 29(1), be

entitled to mark a tendered ballot paper, which is of a different colour, in the same manner as any other elector.”

I wish to highlight that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has confirmed that the preparation and printing of ballot papers, pursuant to the provisions of the National Assembly Elections Regulations, have always been strictly adhered to for all elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner that given that Regulation 14(1) of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that a candidate may, not more than three days after nomination day, withdraw his candidature, the list of candidates for each constituency is finalised after the deadline for withdrawal of candidatures. It is only then that the printing of ballot papers can begin, and this process must be completed at least three days before polling day.

For instance, in 2019, the National Assembly Elections which were held within the minimum time frame provided for in the Representation of the People Act, this exercise had to be completed within 10 days. Section 41(2) of the Representation of the People Act provides that, and I quote –

“The day of election appointed under subsection (1)(b) shall be not less than 15 days nor more than 30 days after the day on which the writ is issued, and the day on which a poll is to be taken shall be not less than 15 nor more than 60 days after the day on which the nomination of candidates for the election is received.”

Therefore, if the interval between the nomination day and the polling day is longer, the period within which the ballot papers have to be printed would be longer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has informed in categorical terms, that the printing of ballot papers is exclusively carried out at the Government Printing Department, under strict Police surveillance on a 24-hour basis. This has invariably been the case for all elections since before Independence. Furthermore, this exercise is carried out under the supervision of the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission. This ensures the integrity and security of the ballot papers throughout the printing process.

I am further informed that ballot papers are printed in booklets containing either 100, 50 or 25 ballot papers, while tendered ballot papers are made up in booklets of 5 or 10 in a different colour. For the 2019 National Assembly Elections, ordinary ballot papers were printed in booklets of 100 and booklets of 25, whilst tendered ballot papers were printed in booklets of 5.

The quantity of ordinary and tendered ballot papers printed for each constituency, polling station, and voting room is meticulously determined through a detailed process. The exact number needed is carefully calculated to ensure that there is a sufficient number of ballot papers for the electoral process. Once the number of ballot papers is determined, the required number of ballot papers is then transcribed and noted in a document called the “Distribution of Ballot Papers”. This document serves as an official record, ensuring transparency and accountability in the distribution of ballot papers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has again highlighted that as has always been the practice, ballot papers are printed at the Government Printing Department, and nowhere else and will continue to be printed thereat, under the supervision of the Government Printer, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

Ballot papers have never been printed outside the Government Printing Department. There has also never been any outsourcing of the printing of ballot papers to private printers, as was falsely alleged by some after the 2019 National Assembly Elections and in the electoral petition lodged by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam on 28 November 2019, where he alleged that ballot papers were printed at the premises of Quad Printing at Coromandel.

An hon. Member: *Menter!*

The Prime Minister: What a shame!

I am informed that as soon as the writ of election is issued, meetings are held with the Government Printer and the Police Department, with respect to security measures, the printing and transportation of the ballot papers to the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. After the ballot papers are printed, they are handed over to the Officer in Charge of the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, and conveyed to the Office of the Electoral Commissioner under armed police escort.

At the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, the ballot papers are verified and sealed in black stationery boxes and kept under lock and key and guarded on a 24-hour basis by officers of the Special Supporting Unit.

In accordance with a pre-established itinerary, two days prior to the polling day, the sealed black stationery boxes are then conveyed, under armed police escort, to Police Stations in the respective constituencies under the supervision of the Returning Officers. The sealed black stationery boxes are then placed in a strong room for safe custody and the doors are sealed by the Returning Officer.

The Returning Officer will take over the sealed black stationery boxes in the early morning of the polling day to be handed over to respective Senior Presiding Officers.

The Senior Presiding Officers will then transport the sealed black stationery boxes to their respective polling stations under armed police escort.

Regulation 28(1) of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that, and I quote –

“Every ballot paper shall bear an official mark which shall be embossed or perforated, and a printer’s design”.

Before a ballot paper is delivered to a voter, it shall bear an official mark which shall be embossed or perforated by the Presiding Officer at the bottom next to the printer’s design.

The official mark is kept secret and is different for each constituency and an interval of not less than five years shall intervene between the use of the same official mark at elections for the same constituency, in line with Regulation 28(1) and (2) of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of the question, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has informed that, as has always been the case, including for the National Assembly Elections 2019, the document detailing the “Distribution of Ballot Papers” was available for consultation in the office of the Senior Presiding Officer at each polling station.

Moreover, hon. David may recall that when he was a candidate for Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West for the 2019 National Assembly Elections, he was,

on Nomination Day, handed over a ‘letter to candidate’ by the Returning Officer, wherein he was informed of, *inter alia*, and I quote –

“The number of ballot papers allocated to each voting room may be consulted in the office of the Senior Presiding Officer at every polling station.”

This letter to candidate was handed over to all candidates for the 2019 National Assembly Elections, and this has been the case for all elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it must be highlighted that, since the last Village Council Elections in 2020, a copy of the “Distribution of Ballot Papers” is now handed over to all candidates on Nomination Day. This measure was also applied for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections in 2022. Similarly, the same principle was adopted for the National Assembly By-Election in Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, scheduled to be held on 09 October this year. This measure will be applied for all future elections, including the forthcoming National Assembly Elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has also emphasised that no “surplus” ordinary or tendered ballot papers are printed other than those indicated in the “Distribution of Ballot Papers.”

Mr Speaker: Hon. David, we have exceeded quite some time on this question. I will allow two supplementary questions from your side and one from Government side provided that no more than five minutes is spent.

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. Selon les informations dont je dispose, pour les dernières élections nationales de 2019, un total de bulletins de vote additionnels sur les 21 circonscriptions, 40,481 bulletins en surplus ont été imprimés et avec des pourcentages de surplus différents, disparates d’une circonscription à l’autre, allant de moins d’un 1 % dans certaines circonscriptions à un maximum de 8,5 % pour la Circonscription No. 8. Puis-je demander au Premier ministre le raisonnement du bureau du commissaire électoral derrière l’impression d’un nombre de bulletins additionnels différents d’une circonscription à l’autre ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, c’est cela le problème avec l’opposition. Ils sont toujours en *denial mode*. Ils pensent toujours que les élections ont été truquées, alors qu’ils ont

eu leurs pétitions devant la Cour. Je ne vais pas mentionner combien... Sept ont été retirés ! Sept ! Et parmi, il y avait des allégations telles que l'honorable membre vient de faire à l'Assemblée aujourd'hui. De ces sept qui ont été retirés, ils n'ont même pas eu le courage d'aller déposer en Cour pour venir prouver ce qu'ils sont en train de dire.

Donc, M. le président, je ne sais pas comment on va faire comprendre à cette opposition qu'ils ne doivent pas être des mauvais perdants. Vous avez perdu les élections, acceptez-le ! Acceptez le verdict de la population et n'essayez pas de trouver...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I can't hear the reply! Have some respect for the Prime Minister. Let him answer!

The Prime Minister: Et n'essayez pas de trouver des prétextes, comme vient de le faire l'honorable membre, qui vient dire « il y'a des *discrepancies* ».

Then, why did you not substantiate this in court? You are saying that you have information! Can you table the information that you have to show that there has been irregularity? Table it and we will see whether you are serious! You have not been able to prove it before a court and now you are coming before this Parliament because here, of course, you can say anything.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Following the reply from the Prime Minister, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether the subject matter of the question was mentioned in the electoral petition of the Opposition in the aftermath of the 2019 General Elections and whether there has been any ruling of our court thereon?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, 12 election petitions were lodged before our courts in the aftermath of the 2019 General Elections. Seven were withdrawn, four were heard and dismissed with cost, and in the remaining case, there has been a recount and the results were maintained.

Now, an election petition was lodged by one of the unsuccessful candidates of Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, namely your leader, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on 28 November 2019, wherein several allegations were made on the conduct of those elections. One of those allegations made by Dr. Ramgoolam was that ballot papers were printed outside Government Printing Office. He averred in his petition that he had – just like the hon. Member is saying – first-hand information. I quote what he said –

“(...) first-hand information to the effect that ballot papers were printed outside the Government Printing Office premises at the premises of Quad Printing at Coromandel. This fact casts a cloud of corruption and deviousness on the election process as there is real likelihood that stuffing would have occurred nationwide including Constituency No. 10.”

Would have occurred nationwide, including his constituency!

Now, when requested by way of a Demand of Particulars by Respondent number 4, that is, the Electoral Commissioner, on 13 January 2022, to communicate documentary evidence showing that ballot papers were allegedly printed outside Government Printing Office at the premises of QUAD Printing at Coromandel, do you know what Dr. Ramgoolam had answered before a court of law? I quote –

“No documentary evidence was available.”

No documentary evidence! The petitioner just made serious allegations and when asked to submit particulars, I must say he ran away! He ran away like a coward *la queue entre les jambes* ! He never came to the proof of those averments he made in his petition. *Tout comme vous êtes retournés la queue entre les jambes aujourd’hui dans la Chambre !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: Pinocchio!

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: So, instead of...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, show the example!

(Interruptions)

Non, non! Order! Order! You should show the example!

(Interruptions)

Right! He has the floor! Hon. Prime Minister, please continue!

The Prime Minister: Okay. I correct! As I have said before, *la vieille queue*.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Li kone kot lake la ete !*

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No. The more time you waste...

The Prime Minister: ...he never came...

Mr Speaker: Sorry, hon. Prime Minister, let me interrupt you.

I was inclined to give a last question, but you are wasting time! So, you decide if you want to.

Mr Toussaint: *Li pe envi ale la.*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Instead of coming to the proof of those averments before a court of law, he withdrew his case, purely and simply! *Comme je l'ai dit, M. le président*, vile allegations

were made by the Opposition against the Electoral Commissioner, the Electoral Commissioner's Office and the Electoral Supervisory Commission. Even civil servants who worked on the day of the elections were not spared, but, finally, all the allegations have been proved to be false and malicious. I must say 'shame on them'!

Hon. Members: Shame!

The Prime Minister: Today, they are still trying to cast doubt on the election process! The only explanation to that, as I say, is simple, because they know that the elections were conducted in such a way that it cannot – I would not say it cannot, but I would say it was not rigged. *Et comme des mauvais perdants, ils ne veulent pas accepter le verdict de la population.*

Mr Speaker: Right. Hon. David, very concisely, your last question!

Mr David: M. le président, 60 secondes ! Je n'ai fait aucune allégation et je n'ai parlé en aucune façon d'impression en dehors du *Government Printing Office*.

Mr Speaker: No, no!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Next question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, wait! You can take that later on a point of personal explanation. Just ask your question concisely!

Mr David: Le Premier ministre l'a lui-même dit dans sa réponse initiale. L'impression se fait par livret de 100 ou de 25, donc ne peut en aucune façon *tally* avec le nombre d'électeurs dans chacune des 20 circonscriptions, ce qui oblige la Commission électorale d'imprimer un surplus de bulletins de vote. Je demande au Premier ministre s'il peut nous expliquer le raisonnement derrière le nombre d'impressions différentes dans chacune des 21 circonscriptions, ce qui...

Mr Speaker: He has replied.

Mr David: ...amené à plus 40,000 bulletins de vote additionnels...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Honourable...

Mr David: ...pour les dernières élections !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! Prime Minister, wait! Hon. Member, it is a shame that you repeated a question. He has replied earlier! You insist on this question? Okay!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to repeat what I have said before because as you say, it is the same question, but let me add one thing. The hon. Member does not realise one thing ; that a voter *peut ne pas avoir voté comme il l'a voulu et gâché son bulletin. De ce fait, qu'est-ce qu'il fait ? Il peut quand même demander à ce qu'il puisse avoir un nouveau bulletin. Donc, il faut toujours avoir des bulletins additionnels. Ce ne sont pas ces bulletins... Je sais ce qui se passe dans votre tête. Dans votre tête, vous croyez que l'Electoral Commission a fait imprimer les bulletins pour ensuite – peut-être que vous êtes en train de préparer les prétextes pour les prochaines élections que vous allez certainement perdre ! – donc, ajouter ces bulletins dans les boîtes. Enfin !*

Well, I hope that you are different from the other Members; that you realise that this cannot be and will never happen! It cannot happen!

An hon. Member: *5 an la pe pe z lour pou li !*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, before I make my announcements, on two occasions, mobile phones have rang on both sides of the House. Let me remind hon. Members that this is not in line with Standing Orders. Refrain from using your mobile phone on loud or watching videos in the Chamber. Next time, I will take action!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/621, B/623, B/625, B/626, B/628 and B/629. In view of the time, I will suspend the Sitting for one and a half hours.

At 12.59 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.33 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/651 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ILLICIT SUBSTANCES ABUSE – ALLEGED CASES –
JULY 2022-JULY 2024**

(No. B/630) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to abuse of illicit substances involving students inside and outside school premises, she will state the reported number of alleged cases thereof in State and Private Secondary Schools, respectively, since July 2022 to date.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I apologise for my voice. Please bear with me.

In my reply to the Parliamentary Question B/795 in July 2022, the House was informed that in accordance with the established protocol in schools, drug-related cases are categorised as criminal offenses and are reported to the Police.

I am informed that since July 2022, the number of reported cases of alleged abuse of illicit substances inside school premises stands at 18 and outside school premises, stands at 11.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In her reply to my PQ dated 01 July 2022 – as mentioned by the hon. Minister – the hon. Minister had informed the House that there were 81 cases of drug abuse inside and 182 cases outside school premises from January 2015 to June 2022. And now in her reply, we have just heard the figures, 18 and 11. May I ask the hon. Minister as to why the Drug Use Prevention Rebound Programme has been completely phased out?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Drug Use Prevention Rebound Programme is starting as from now. We are presently training the teachers whereas the Get Connected Programme is on and has already touched more than 29,000 students and more than 1,051 teachers have been trained. The Get Connected Programme has not phased out. It is meant

for Grade 8 students whereas the Rebound Programme is meant for Grade 10 students, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Alright. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I went through the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023, where there is only a brief section dealing with the Ministry of Education. May I ask the hon. Minister why it has not been deemed necessary in view of the alarming figures regarding illicit substances, to come with a master plan exclusively to address the problem of illicit substance abuse in our educational institutions to protect our children and all stakeholders?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a National Committee chaired by the Prime Minister with a number of other Ministries involved dealing with the whole issue of drug abuse not only in the community but also in our schools. The Prime Minister himself carried out several meetings with students in different State schools and at the university level and at the Polytechnics. Only recently, about a week back or two weeks back, there was a huge campaign ‘*Unir contre la drogue*’ at the Côte d’Or with hundreds of students present, Mr Speaker, Sir. We take the issue very seriously and it is being taken at the highest level, at the level of Government.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister, as she has just mentioned the special programme in the curriculum called Get Connected is for Grade 8 and rebound for Grade 10 students, what about primary school students, hon. Minister?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, work has started, primary school students are being sensitised. We have the Educational Psychologists, the Educational Social Workers also, addressing the issue at the level of primary schools.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden, next question!

VACOAS-PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – SCAVENGING LORRIES

(No. B/631) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in

regard to the fleet of scavenging lorries of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number thereof, indicating the number thereof –

- (a) currently under repairs, and
- (b) procured since January 2023 to date.

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 it has a total of 22 scavenging lorries engaged in scavenging services and out of which, 17 lorries are in running condition.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Municipal Council has informed that five lorries are actually under repairs.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that four scavenging lorries have been procured since last year as follows –

- (i) Registration No. 5Z153 – acquired on 04 January 2024;
- (ii) Registration No. 5Z154 – acquired on 03 April 2024;
- (iii) Registration No. 5Z156 – acquired on 25 July 2024, and
- (iv) Registration No. 5Z157 – acquired on 25 July 2024.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Assirvaden: *Mr Speaker*, est-ce que le ministre est au courant que sur les 22 véhicules de la Municipalité de Vacoas-Phoenix, plus de la moitié sont dans un état déplorable ? Est-ce que le ministre est au courant que deux camions de municipalité, 5 Z 138 et 5 Z 139, roulent sans *fitness* ? Est-ce que le ministre est au courant de cela ?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned the number of lorries that are under repair. As far as the lorries that are under repair are concerned, I would like just to mention the years –

- (i) 5 Z 126, it is in December 2010 that it was registered;
- (ii) 5 Z 138, in February 2014;
- (iii) 5 Z 139, in 2014 again;
- (iv) 5 Z 143, in 2017, and
- (v) 5 Z 145, in 2018.

I think he mentioned 5 Z 139. This is still under repair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, les camions de la municipalité qui sont en pannes ou *under repair* causent d'énormes préjudices aux habitants de la ville concernant le ramassage des ordures. Est-ce que le ministre est-il au courant que les garages de la municipalité ou les camions qui se font réparer dans les garages de la ville ou de la municipalité refusent la réparation des véhicules parce qu'ils n'ont pas été payés ? Est-ce que le ministre est au courant de cela, que le budget de la municipalité n'arrive pas à payer les garages pour la réparation des camions de ramassage d'ordures ?

Dr. Husnoo: A bit surprised to hear about this, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I know the minor repairs are done in-house firstly, and major repairs are outsourced in compliance with the National Land Transport Authority Regulation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem, next question!

FREIGHT – COST REVIEW & REBATE SCHEME

(No. B/632) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether in regard to freight, she will state if –

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

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I had a consultative meeting with the three Shipping lines, namely CMA CGM Mauritius Ltd, the Mediterranean Shipping Company (Mauritius) Ltd and Maersk Mauritius Ltd, to consider the significant increase in sea freight rates, in the presence of representatives of the Mauritius Ports Authority, the Cargo Handling Corporation, the State Trading Corporation, and the Economic Development Board as well as the representatives of my Ministry, and also the External Communications Division of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

It was noted that the continuous increase in sea freight costs is a complex and global issue which is beyond the control of my Ministry and its impacts on our importers and exporters have been particularly severe.

Mauritius, being a Small Island Developing State, has not been spared due to the following main factors being attributed thereto –

- (i) According to Freightos Baltic Index, there has been an 80% increase in the Global Freight Index from \$2,519 in January 2024 to \$4,508 in June 2024. The increasing geopolitical instability in and around the Red Sea has necessitated the rerouting of shipping vessels to longer and safer alternative paths. These have not only extended transit times but also increased the fuel consumption and operational costs which significantly affect the overall shipping expenses.

- (ii) US sanctions on Chinese imports have led to disruptions in trade flows and adjustments in global supply chains; this has contributed to rise in shipping rates. The restrictions have resulted in companies seeking alternative sources and routes; hence increase in time and fuel costs.
- (iii) Following the new core Asia-Europe service lane, shipping lines have to transit through Durban which is currently facing congestion due to rising cargo volume and limited capacity thereby reducing their availability. This is causing delays in cargo handling and increased costs for shipping companies and importers/exporters.
- (iv) The extra demand for bunkering and transshipment at the already-busy port of Singapore, as ships fuel up for a longer haul and offload the cargo that they would previously have delivered to the Mideast on the way to Suez, thus, resulting in a delay of captive cargo destined for Mauritius.
- (v) Delays at the Chinese and Singaporean ports, container shortages between China and India, and a shift of capacity from regional to long-haul freight services have resulted in various surcharges and higher rates impacting lower-volume and regional trade routes. It is, therefore, more costly and difficult to secure freight services by importers in Mauritius.
- (vi) The rising fuel costs contribute...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am sorry to interrupt you.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Yes?

Mr Speaker: Is your reply going to be much longer?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is still working in collaboration with the three major shipping companies along with other concerned Ministries to come up with short, medium and long terms avenues to be explored with a view to addressing this complex situation.

Concerning part (b) of the question, presently there is no freight rebate scheme for the importation of goods as compared to the exportation sector, for which, there are two Freight

Rebate Schemes, namely, the Freight Rebate Scheme by Sea and Freight Rebate Scheme by air, also known as Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme managed by the Economic Development Board.

The Scheme has been introduced to increase competitiveness and catalyse exports in the Indian Ocean and African regions vis-à-vis exports from Asia, which will lead to the establishment of a commercial feeder shipping facility on Africa offering lower costs and reduce transit time for exporters with the increase in the volume of containers to African regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that as a welfare state, the Government prevents price increases from being passed onto consumers by subsidising these essential strategic commodities significantly, thereby maintaining their prices at a fixed rate. In this endeavour, the Government is currently providing substantial financial assistance to the tune of Rs4.6 billion as subsidies on the price of LPG, flour, rice and bread to ensure that essential commodities remain affordable for its citizens. In addition, my Ministry regulates the prices of 37 commodities. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Before you ask, I will invite the hon. Ministers, if you have long answers, to circulate. Thank you.

Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Merci. M. le président, aujourd'hui le journal est titré 'Nouvelle cascade d'augmentation des prix.' J'ai bien écouté l'honorable ministre. Dois-je comprendre qu'aujourd'hui, dans cette Assemblée, la ministre est incapable de donner une assurance à la population que les prix vont baisser à cause qu'il n'y a aucune mesure annoncée que le gouvernement va prendre pour baisser les prix suite à l'augmentation du fret ?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, *je ne me base pas sur ce que les journaux disent* because the trend for the global freight cost is in the decreasing trend and is expected to reduce in the coming month due to decrease in demand in the global market. For instance, the increase in demand in the United States market for electric vehicles coming from China had led to an increase in the freight cost. Similarly, the demand is expected to decrease in the coming days and

the freight cost is expected to decrease in line with the market prices. As we all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, the future is uncertain.

Mr Speaker: All right. Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Madame la ministre, vous avez vous-même commencé votre réponse par dire qu'il y a une augmentation du prix du fret et selon mes renseignements, c'est jusqu'à 42%. Ma question était très spécifique. On a un *Freight Rebate Scheme* pour l'exportation, pourquoi on n'introduit pas un *Freight Rebate Scheme* pour l'importation de certaines commodités de base, de certains aliments de nourriture pour baisser les prix, un système de subsides ? Pourquoi on n'a pas un *Freight Rebate Scheme* pour ces nourritures-là?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: *M. le président, on a déjà tout cela.* The Government is providing substantial financial assistance to the tune of Rs4.6 billion as I just said on LPG, flour, rice and bread. 12 products are fixed by the Government. Moreover, we also have the maximum markup on 37 products as I just said and also the regressive markup on the pharmaceutical products. So, we are doing our best, Mr Speaker, Sir. If they were here, they were not going to do that much.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Uteem: Une dernière question ! La première partie de ma question concerne la rencontre avec les *shipping lines*. Est-ce que le gouvernement leur a proposé par exemple de revoir le tarif imposé par la *Cargo Handling* et la *MPA* pour les *demurrage fees* ? À cause qu'on a des portiques défectueux, ces navires passent plus de temps à Maurice. Donc, on aurait pu négocier avec eux pour baisser les *demurrage fees*. Comme ça, le prix du fret aussi aurait baissé.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, I met with the freight shipping lines and we are still working on it. All the relevant authorities were present during the meeting and I am waiting to come out with something.

Mr Speaker: Right. Hon. Ramful, next question!

MOGAS & GASOIL – VAT, EXCISE DUTY & CONTRIBUTIONS COLLECTED

(No. B/633) **Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the price structure of

Mogas and Gasoil, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the amount of –

- (a) Value Added Tax and Excise Duty transferred to the Consolidated Fund;
- (b) funds transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account, and
- (c) other contributions charged on the consumers for financial year 2023/2024.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, the price structure for Mogas and Gasoil is defined under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011. It is the statutory responsibility of the State Trading Corporation, as the sole importer of Mogas and Gasoil, to collect the different contributions levied in the price structure of Mogas and Gasoil.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that approximately Rs4.19 billion of Value Added Tax and approximately Rs4.58 billion of Excise duty has been collected and transferred to the Consolidated Fund for Financial Year 2023-2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that from 01 July 2023 till date, Rs250 m. has been transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account with respect to Mogas on 06 October 2023 in order to reduce the deficit and allow for a decrease in the retail price of Mogas.

As regards to part (c) of the question, I am tabling the amount collected from the other contributions in the price structure of Mogas and Gasoil charged from consumers for Financial Year 2023-2024.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, the cost of living is a major concern to our fellow citizens and we know that high petrol prices have a major impact on other food items. Will the hon. Minister consider either freezing or even reducing some of the contributions and taxes that are taken when calculating the price of petrol products?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, the money that is being collected on Mogas and Gasoil are given back to the population through subsidies. So, we are already giving back what we are taking. As you all know, it also helps to maintain our welfare state.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member, talked about the money that we are charging. I want to remind him that in 2014, the price of Mogas at CIF was Rs20.50. At that time, there was no post-COVID, no war in the world and Mogas was sold at Rs45.95 which means 124% tax was imposed. Right now, we are charging less than 100% tax on Mogas!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know if the hon. Minister is aware: the price of one barrel of crude oil in April this year was 90 USD per barrel and this has gone down to 79 USD per barrel with no effect on the Mauritian price. Now, her colleague, Minister Callichurn stated in a PQ that a Technical Committee will be set up at the level of his Ministry with the representatives of the State Trading Corporation, the Attorney General's Office and the Minister of Finance to review the functioning of the Petroleum Pricing Committee presumably so that we can reduce the price of fuel products in the country. Can I know since May last year, has the Committee met? Has it provided a report to the Minister? Can we have some more details about this?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have this information. What I can say is on 24 May 2024, when the Petroleum Pricing Committee met and based on the new reference price of USD 858.08 per metric ton per Mogas, that is, the actual price for March to May 2024 and the future prices for June to August 2024 at an average rate of USD 46.84, the calculated new retail price worked out to be Rs69.66 per litre, that is, an increase of 5.22%. We were supposed to increase it by 5.22%.

However, since the PSA for Mogas had a positive balance, the retail price was maintained at its current level in accordance with the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulation 2011.

But, concerning the Gasoil, the tendency was to reduce it but the difficulty we got is because the PSA account shows a deficit of Rs4.3 billion. That is why we could not decrease the price of Gasoil.

Mr Speaker: Last question briefly, please.

Mr Ramful: Very short question. In April this year, there was an international bidding exercise which was carried out by the STC for the supply of white oil for the coming period August 2024 à julliet 2025. Can we have the name of the successful bidder and the price retained?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Successful bidder is Sahara Energy, it will start as from the 01 August, the new supplier. I do not have this information with me.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Duval! Next question!

MAHÉBOURG – MV WAKASHIO – FISHERS’ COMPENSATION

(No. B/634) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to claims for financial assistance and/or compensation following the MV Wakashio shipwreck, he will state the amount thereof disbursed to fishers in the region of Mahébourg, indicating if an interim payment would be considered by Government pending the conclusion of the Court case.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the grounding of MV Wakashio and the subsequent oil spill has had a significant impact on the fisher community of the affected area from Pointe d’Esny to Trou D’eau Douce, the more so that a fishing restriction in the affected area had been declared from August 2020 to March 2021. To provide immediate financial support to fishers and fishmonger, the Government initiated a Solidarity Grant Scheme. Registered fishers, fishmongers and applicant fishers in the affected region were each paid Rs10,200 per month from August 2020 to March 2021 totaling Rs83,228,710 disbursed as solidarity grants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of obtaining an adequate compensation for the loss of earnings of fishing community, my Ministry has submitted to the insurer, Japan P&I Club, of the vessel a claim for additional compensation to fishers and applicant fishers on 19 May 2021 for an amount of Rs134,616 per fisher and another claim to the tune of Rs140,164 per fishmonger. The calculation obviously of claims for compensation was based on official catch data which is

usually compiled at the level of my Ministry. Following lengthy negotiations, working sessions as well as an assessment of the claims, the Japan P&I Club agreed to a total compensation amount of USD 2,650,048 to be paid to 999 registered fishermen, applicant fishers and fishmongers equivalent to the sum of Rs113,000 per individual.

Consequently, in December 2021, Rs113,000 was paid to each of the concerned fishers, active fishers and fishmongers as additional compensation representing the full and final settlement of all claims for loss of earnings during that period of eight months. This represented a monthly amount of Rs24,325 per month paid to fishers, registered fishers, active fishermen and fishmongers. This additional compensation was in fact payable to a total of, as I said, 999 individuals in the affected regions comprising of 628 registered fishers, 197 applicant fishers and 174 fishmongers. So, I am tabling a breakdown of the number of individuals per region who have benefited from the compensation.

And with regard to the question for the region of Mahebourg, payment was effected to a total of 466 beneficiaries including 95 applicant fishers, 98 fishmongers, 17 fishmongers for seashells and 256 registered fishers.

Mr X. L. Duval: The hon. Minister will know the famous saying: justice delayed is justice denied. It has been four years now, the Ministry or the Japanese have compensated for loss of earnings but as the hon. Minister said, the damage to environment as it affects fishers and other economic players has not yet been compensated. Now, what is the situation concerning that part of the compensation?

Mr Maudhoo: Rightly said, Mr Speaker, Sir. With respect to payment of additional compensation, I am informed by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change that with a view to gauging the impacts caused by the grounding of the vessel and the oil spill on the environment and on the economic, social, agricultural, health, leisure, cultural and heritage sectors, a consultancy service for carrying out an environment and socioeconomic impact assessment was undertaken. In fact, following tender exercise an international firm Holland & Knight LLP was appointed consultant on 15 November 2022 and the later submitted its report on 22 June 2023 to the Attorney General's office and the Ministry of Environment. And further claims with regard to particularly loss of earning through

environment damage will depend on the outcome of course of the Court case instituted be the insurer before the Supreme Court for the setting up of a limitation fund.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the next hearing of the case on limitation fund before the Supreme Court is scheduled on the 08 October 2024 and in fact the Government also wishes that the above Court case reaches a conclusion at the earliest for consideration of payment for additional compensation to all those affected for loss of earning due to damage caused by the environmental impact. But, then as we all know the stand of Mauritius in this case is that, there cannot be any limitation fund as section 195 (d) of the Merchant Shipping Act, there is no limitation of the liability for oil spill damage. So, we are still at court level.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I ask the hon. Minister what is his best estimate of the time it will take for the Court case to be concluded?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know Court cases, long delays over there but hopefully on the 08 October at the next hearing we can obviously try to get at the earliest possible a judgment on this issue so that we can obviously try to help all those who been affected by this major oil spill.

Mr Speaker: Yes. Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In relation to compensation to other economic operators which were direly affected by the infamous Wakashio ship wreck, can I ask the hon. Minister if he can make sure in the report of the consultant that pleasure craft owners, beach hawkers and skippers are also included in the list for compensation?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I also wish to inform the House that as at date the total number of 1246 individuals, that is, other than the 999 registered fishers and fishmongers have been paid a total compensation of Rs22, 708,150. These beneficiaries are mainly like, fishmonger's helpers, apprentice fishers, boat owners, sea shell collectors, helpers on fishing boats, fish trap makers and other boat repairers. In fact, for the other claims all these have been compiled and obviously, we are waiting for the judgment to activate all this.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful! Last question on this.

Mr Ramful: I am given to understand that when the fishers were paid the interim payment they were asked to sign a clause that they shall have no further claim whatsoever in respect to this incident. Can I have an undertaking from the Government that despite the clause, Government is going to pay them further payments?

Mr Maudhoo: As I just explained in my main answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, that settlement was for the 8 months for the loss of earning because normally they were active fishermen. So, that claim was as per the catch record, that is, normally what they earn monthly and that was calculated for the 8 months. Now, with regard to environment damage, it is in the report, it all depends how much the claim will be but obviously, not only the fishers but all the communities who have sent their claims at the Ministry, all these, depending on the Judgment, will obviously be taken into account and definitely the fishermen community will be in.

Mr Speaker: Next question. Hon. Ittoo!

NLTA – PERSONALISED REGISTRATION MARK – APPLICATIONS

(No. B/635) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail Whether, in regard to the Personalised Registration Mark for motor vehicles, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, since 01 October 2021 to date, information as to the –

- (a) number of applications therefor;
 - (i) received, and
 - (ii) approved, and
- (b) total amount collected therefrom.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the new combination of personalised registration marks have been introduced since the 01 October 2021 following the promulgation of the Road Traffic Personalised Registration Mark for Motor Vehicles Regulations 2021.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that since 01 October 2021 to date, 33,135 applications for personal registration marks have been received and 32,062 applications of personalised registration mark have already been approved.

With regard to part (b) of the question, according to information obtained from the NLTA, the revenue generated for all types of personalised registration marks since 01 October 2021 to date, is Rs 627, 966,000.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister mentioned that around 33,000 applications were received and 32,000 applications were approved. Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to the reasons behind the 1,000 rejections? Thank you.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the application is not automatically granted because according to Section 14 of the regulations as I just mentioned in my reply, a personalised registration mark should not contain certain words, for example words that may be offensive, obscene, indecent, abusive, threatening, misleading or humiliating in nature. It should not contain names or acronyms of political parties. It should not contain names or acronyms of religious groups. It should not contain words with religious or political connotations or words that may create social unrest. I suppose these are the reasons why some of these applications are not acceded to.

Mr Speaker: Next question. Hon. Bodha!

FLOWERS – IMPORTATION & EXPORTATION – COST

(No. B/ 636) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to flowers, he will state the quantity thereof imported and exported since April 2023 to date, indicating the value thereof.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that since April 2023 to date, a total of around 405 tons of flowers consisting of Chrysanthemum, Carnation, Gypsophilia, among others, have been imported mainly from France, India, Iran and Malaysia for a total value of around Rs123 million.

These importations mainly occurred during the seasons of high demand for flowers which included the Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and for the celebration of destination weddings in hotels.

With regard to the exportation of fresh flowers over the same period, Mr Speaker, Sir, a total of around 22 tons were exported mainly to Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Reunion

Island and United Arab Emirates. The flowers exported consisted, *inter alia*, of Anthurium, Rose Flowers, Chrysanthemum and Tropical Flowers. The total value of fresh flowers exported amounted to about Rs52 million.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that our ornamental sector which is commercially driven and rather limited, comprises around 200 producers, nursery operators, and landscape designers, including approximately 10 anthurium growers, utilizing 70 hectares of agricultural land primarily located in the north, central plateau, and south of the island.

While our flower production predominantly occurs in open fields, there has been a notable shift towards protected cultivation in recent years. About 40 growers now produce roses and gerberas, over an area of 40 hectares. Additionally, 8 to 10 growers have ventured into chrysanthemum production, occupying 7 hectares. It is to be noted that, ornamentals are cultivated year-round in protected conditions across humid, sub-humid, and super-humid zones. As for roses and gladiolus, they are grown as from late July to October in sub-humid zones in open field conditions whereas, tropical exotics and foliage can be cultivated year-round in open fields in any zone.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to boost our local flower production, FAREI is carrying out research on ornamentals, namely Anthurium, Rose, Chrysanthemum and Orchid so as to produce high yielding materials and flowers which are attractive to buyers. With regard to Anthurium, from over 2000 crosses, four varieties have been identified as promising based on their colour, length of flower stalk and spathe size for which trials are ongoing. New varieties of Anthurium, Rose, Chrysanthemum and Orchids introduced from international nurseries are presently being assessed with regard to their adaptation to our local conditions.

After evaluation, the most promising ones will be retained for commercial cultivation by flower growers. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. He will recall that we were the second world producers of Anthurium flowers at one point behind Hawaii. May I ask the hon. Minister whether there are duties which are imposed on the import of flowers?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that VAT is applied as far as I am concerned. With regard to duties, I don't have that information. I can look for it but I don't have it right now.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: My second question. Are there specific varieties which may be cultivated? How far has the research reached as regard to specific varieties where Mauritius can in fact have a high added value production?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to bear in mind that we are in a tropical island. It has specific climatic conditions that prevail and whatever flowers that we can cultivate in Mauritius will be based on those factors. There has to be a market for it and we have to be able to produce it at a competitive price. So, all these factors have to be looked into before venturing in any type of particular flower to be produced commercially.

Having said that, as you rightly said, at one time we were leader in the Anthurium production and export, but unfortunately, we are also aware that we have to have strict phytosanitary control in Mauritius when introducing any new varieties to ensure that diseases or pests are not introduced in the country to protect our local crops. So, that is why, unfortunately in the past, having been overcautious probably, we have not been able to introduce new varieties or new types of Anthurium that has probably in a way, made us lose our lead in that segment for producing and exporting Anthurium.

But and again, at the level of the FAREI, which is the research and development arm of the Ministry, they are the ones that do carry out research to ensure that whatever flowers that are potential to be introduced are being looked at to see whether they have the potential to be grown here.

Mr Speaker: Next question. Hon. Mrs. Navarre-Marie!

PORT LOUIS-POINTE AUX SABLES – IRREGULAR BUS SCHEDULE

(No. B/637) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the irregular schedule of buses from Port Louis to Pointe aux Sables and back, he will, for the benefit of the House,

obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to the remedial measures being envisaged therefor.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that route 51 which operates from Port-Louis New Transportation Centre to Pointe aux Sables is served by 43 buses of the Triolet Bus Service Company Ltd which are licensed to operate thereat.

These buses are released at 3-5 minutes interval during peak hours and 10 minutes interval during off peak. The first release from Port Louis is at 05.02 hours and the last release is at 19.15 hours, whereas the first bus departs from Pointe aux Sables at 5.27 hours and the last one at 19.45 hours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the NLTA, surveys are carried out by the inspectorate on a fortnightly basis along route 51. The last survey which was undertaken on 18 July 2024 revealed that buses are operating in accordance with the established timetable. I am also informed that as at date, no official complaint regarding irregular schedule of buses or recurrent bus service disruptions in the region of Pointe aux Sables has been reported to the NLTA. Nonetheless, I wish to inform the House that checks are still being made by the NLTA to ensure that passengers are provided with a regular, reliable and adequate transport service.

According to surveys carried out by the NLTA, it has been observed that the number of passengers converging towards Port Louis for their economic, social, educational and health needs has considerably increased during the past years. In that context, the NLTA will have a meeting in the coming days with Triolet Bus Service Company Ltd to look into the possibility to increase its fleet so as to meet the increasing demand of the travelling public.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to differ with the information provided by the Minister. *Est-il au courant que des fois, des voyageurs doivent poirotter jusqu'à deux heures pour avoir un autobus pour rentrer chez eux à Pointe aux Sables, plus particulièrement une région appelée Kensington ?*

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately for the hon. Member, the information that I have confirms that surveys are being made regularly along this route. In fact, since January 2024, I have the dates of the surveys on the –

- 18 January;
- 9 February;
- 15 February;
- 26 February;
- 14 March;
- 16 March;
- 27 March,
- 3 April.

I can go on, Mr Speaker, Sir. For the month of July, it was on the 3rd of this month and on the 18th. The surveys are carried out by Road Transport Inspectors. I have their names with me, but I would not like to mention their names. Surveys are carried on a fortnightly basis by these inspectors. Triolet Bus Service has a fleet of 206 buses which it uses on roster basis along the routes allocated to the company. The 43 buses I mentioned in my reply serve the number of passengers along route 51 and are deployed by TBS every day along this route.

No contravention has been established against the buses of the cruise along route 51. No disciplinary cases have been reported in respect of these buses operating along route 51. So, when I have that level of information, Mr Speaker, Sir, you can understand the content of my reply to the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Yes. A last question, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie !

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, devant de telles inexactitudes, des informations erronées, je n'ai donc pas de choix que de ne plus poser de questions.

(Interruptions)

Mo députée laba !

Mr Speaker: Please, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie! Please!

Hon. Osman Mahomed!

WATER INDICATORS (2017-2023) – UNACCOUNTED WATER – VOLUME

(No. B/638) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the latest figures published by Statistics Mauritius on Water Indicators for period 2017-2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the volume of water categorised as unaccounted water, giving details thereof.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker Sir, unaccounted for water is an area of concern for water utility organisations across the globe.

The World Bank defines Unaccounted for Water as the difference between the volume of water put into a water distribution system and the volume of water that is billed to customers. This definition encompasses both physical losses and commercial losses. Physical losses represent water lost through leaks, bursts, and overflows in the distribution system while commercial losses make up for water lost due to thefts, unauthorised consumption and meter inaccuracies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the latest indicators published by Statistics Mauritius provide a crude estimate of unaccounted for water as the difference between potable water produced and water used. I am tabling figures for the years 2017 to 2023 for the information of the hon. Member.

It will be noted that estimated unaccounted for water has been constantly declining since 2022 to date as a result of several actions taken to bring more efficiency in the network to replace defective meters and to reinforce control on thefts, illegal tapping and leakages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House has been informed in the context of previous replies to PQs relating to non-revenue water, there have been sustained efforts by the Government to replace critically old pipes and to increase water production. Thus, some 540 km of pipes have been replaced between 2019 and 2024. Water production has expanded by more than 20% over the past 7 years. In the same vein, old and defective bulk meters are gradually being replaced across the island, whereby providing more accurate production figures.

To this end, I am informed by the CWA that 259 new bulk meters have been delivered in December 2023 and are currently being replaced. With the support of *Agence Française de Développement* funding, the CWA will initiate a procurement exercise in 2024 to replace another batch of old bulk meters.

I am further informed by the CWA that from October 2021 to June 2024, it has replaced 64,952 defective consumer meters, resulting in an additional annual revenue of approximately Rs65 m. Moreover, the CWA also operates an Anti-Fraud Unit which plays a critical role in reducing non-revenue water by detecting and addressing water pilferage and illegal water usage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, overall, the various actions taken in the water sector are yielding positive results contributing to an improvement in the reliability and efficiency of the water supply system. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: It is very unfortunate that the substantive Minister, hon. Lesjongard, is not in the House today. Based on the table that the hon. Minister has provided – I know that he will not be able to answer the question because he is not the substantive Minister – I would just like to make comment and a question at the same time.

In 2017, CWA sold 105 million m³ of water and 111 million m³ in 2023. Thus, an increase in sales of only 6 m³ from an additional production of 52 m³ of water that came from a difference in volume between 313,000 m³ tabled by the hon. Minister himself, produced in 2023, and 261 million m³ in 2017. Based on these figures, non-revenue water, as defined by the hon. Minister himself, is 88.5%, that is, nearly 90%.

I am sure he will not be able to answer because he is not the substantive Minister.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: But it goes on record!

(Interruptions)

If you can answer...

(Interruptions)

If you can answer, please do!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Just put your question, hon. Member!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not understand...

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can you explain to the House...

Mr Balgobin: Put your question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can you explain to the House why therefore...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can you explain to the House therefore...

(Interruptions)

Relax! Since you mentioned that non-revenue water is on the decline since 2012, these figures say the exact opposite of what you are saying.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, my colleague is not in presence in the House and I am answering the question. So, the hon. Member cannot say that it is unfortunate he is not here, first of all.

Secondly, I have submitted a table, giving details of non-revenue water from 2017 to 2023. In the table, 2020, estimated Unaccounted-for Water stands at 206 mm³ of water. 2023, it is 202 mm³. So, from 206 coming to 202, for me, it is a decline in estimated Unaccounted-for Water. The hon. Member is saying the figures are not true but, I leave it up to him to decide.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Member!

Mr Osman Mahomed: I did not say that the figures are not true, Mr Speaker, Sir. I said that the figures that he has provided himself provide a different figure for non-revenue water. Therefore, can I ask him whether the 90% that I am saying is lost through leakages, theft, commercial lost? Is there a breakdown for this that you can submit to the House?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned in the reply the various issues that are there, be it commercial loses or be it physical losses that is theft, be it leakage, be it unauthorised consumption and metres accuracy, etc., and also what are the measures that have been taken, for example, 540 km of pipes being replaced. I also mentioned that defective consumer metres were replaced, 64,000 consumer metres were replaced, that will give a proper indication of unaccounted-for water.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is good that I also mention that the replacement of pipes is not done today for tomorrow, it is a long-term process. Had the previous government started at least some replacement of pipes, today, with the huge amount of pipes we are replacing, the situation of water would have been much better.

Let me give you some information, Mr Speaker, Sir, to be able to understand. In the year 2023 to 2024, in one year only, 246 km of pipes have been laid in-house at a total cost of 900 million – in one year. For the years 2010 to 2014, four years, they have replaced only 280 km of piping over five years. That shows that if at the time there was some vision for this country, they would have started laying pipes, changing kilometres of pipes, and today, we would have added on the system so that the piping network would have been much better. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms Anquetil!

**MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY & FAMILY WELFARE – INTERDICTED
OFFICERS**

(No. B/639) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the officers of her Ministry currently under interdiction, she will state the number thereof, indicating in each case the duration thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that only one officer, Mr H.S., Family Welfare and Protection Officer of my Ministry, was interdicted on 05 May 2023 as a police case had been lodged against him for breach of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act. The officer was interdicted under Regulation 31 of the Public Service Commission Regulations 1967, now subsequently amended, on 16 May 2024.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has advised that there are no further actions against Mr H.S. My Ministry has, consequently, already made a recommendation to the Public Service Commission to reinstate the incumbent in his post of Family Welfare and Protection Officer with effect from 05 May of last year.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre si un certain Monsieur R. a été suspendu de ses fonctions pour corruption en raison d'accusations selon lesquelles il aurait pris de l'argent en échange de promesses d'emplois, principalement envers les femmes ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to reiterate my answer to the PQ that has been put to me, that only one officer, Mr H.S. – I repeat – a Family Welfare and Protection Officer of my Ministry, was interdicted on 05 May 2023 because there was a police case lodged against him – only one. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Ms Anquetil: La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre le nombre de *caregivers* suspendus dans leur *shelter* qui font partie de son ministère et ainsi que le nombre d'années de service ? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would, first of all, need notice of the question because it is completely different and I would, very kindly, through you, ask the hon. Member to learn the difference between suspension and interdiction.

Ms Anquetil: A last one, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Okay, a last one! On the subject, please!

Ms Anquetil: Yes, on the subject.

Will the Minister inform the House how many of the interdicted officers are *agents politiques* in her constituency? Thank you.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, once again, there is only one officer who was interdicted and is being reinstated.

Mr Speaker: There is no need to...

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: How many? *Enn papao! Enn!*

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ameer Meea!

FRESH EGGS – MARKET AVAILABILITY & RETAIL PRICE

(No. B/640) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to fresh eggs, she will state if there is any shortage thereof on the local market, indicating –

(a) the reasons therefor, and

(b) if any increase in the retail price thereof has been reported to her Ministry.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, Officers of my Ministry have reported that following their normal visits at the different retails around the island a lack of eggs was noted on the shelves.

I wish to inform the House that Officers of my Ministry have been following the situation closely over the past few weeks and conducting inspections at various retail outlets across the island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact early this month as soon as it was reported that in many cases shelves were empty, I chaired a meeting with the three major producers and distributors of eggs who supply 80% of the local market to get a better understanding of the issue.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the producers that there has not been a decrease in the production and distribution of eggs around the island. They have pointed out that there had been a noticeable surge in the demand of eggs for this period of the year, which relates to the new consumer behaviour, more precisely, to panic buying, resulting in a temporary scarcity, which has been compounded by the media articles.

Moreover, during the meeting, they have showed videos and images of people buying huge amount of eggs, which according to them, was for the purpose of reselling at higher prices. These people were profiteering from a supposedly non-availability of eggs as reported in the media articles for selling same at higher prices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry issued a Communiqué in mid-July informing the public that there was no shortage of eggs in the market and that we have received the reassurance from producers and distributors that the production of eggs will be increased further for that period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that in the past 4 to 5 months, the producers and distributors have not increased their wholesale prices of eggs and we have also noted that the retail prices in outlets directly supplied by these producers have not increased.

Eggs are available at most retail points at a price ranging from Rs8.50 to Rs10.00 depending on the size of the eggs. It is to be noted that the price is not controlled and is left to be regulated by market forces.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: M. le président, est-ce que la ministre est-elle au courant que l'ACIM, l'Association des consommateurs, a mené une enquête dans 24 supermarchés à travers l'île et résultat de cette enquête, c'est que les prix ont grimpé considérablement, passant jusqu'à R 13 l'unité de l'œuf ? Et dans certains cas, il y a même jusqu'à R 15 l'unité de l'œuf, ce qui fait une augmentation de 30 à 40 %. Donc, M. le président, *can I ask the hon. Minister if she will agree with me that people are finding this price very hard to pay; fellow Mauritians are finding it very difficult, especially those who do not visit malls?*

Ms Anquetil: Elle est trop bonne celle-là.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, ACIM has visited 24 supermarkets – very good. My officers have visited 405 trade premises including shops, supermarkets, malls, whatever it is, where they sell eggs. We have visited 405 trade premises from 15 to 27 July 2024 and we also did a market survey...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I can't hear the reply!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: ... on prices of eggs and like it is, we did a market survey from April till July. We have for Oeudor selection *gros* and for 6 pieces, the price in July is Rs56.25. For Matines – *très gros*, for 6 pieces, Rs59.35. For Oeudor Jumbo, for 6 pieces, Rs58.65 and for Oeudor Primeur, 12 pieces for Rs104.90. As I said in my answer, we have issued a communiqué on 17 July and I have told consumers not to buy eggs higher than Rs10. I told them not to buy them.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My question was related to market survey and same has already been canvassed. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Alright, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, est-ce que j'ai bien compris la ministre dans sa réponse initiale, c'est que les producteurs d'œufs ont fait comprendre à la ministre que les Mauriciens, en général, ont changé leurs habitudes et pour le mois de juin et juillet, ils ont commencé à manger des œufs tous les jours ? C'est ça que j'ai bien compris ? Deuxième chose, M. le président,...

(Interruptions)

M. le président, je vais dire que...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! I appreciate the help and...

(Interruptions)

Wait! Wait! Wait! Hon. Assirvaden, wait!

Dr. Ramdhany: *Lampoule koz menti!*

Mr Assirvaden: *Dire labas!*

Mr Speaker: I am maintaining order.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden, I am talking! Can you wait?

Mr Ameer Meea: *Be banla aussi pe fer tapaz.*

Mr Speaker: I can do my job in the Chair without your assistance. Thank you.

One question, one subject matter, and I will get back to your second question.

One question! Ask your question! It was intelligible.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: M. le président, ce que les distributeurs m'ont dit, en général, pendant le mois de juillet, les personnes consomment plus d'œufs. Qu'est-ce que je peux faire si

les personnes veulent manger plus pendant le mois de juillet ? Après, ce que j'ai compris aussi, puisque...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden, I am not going back to you. You are not listening to the answer! Listen to the answer! Do not engage in a conversation!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, j'aurais souhaité...

Dr. Ramdhany: *Ki président!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Ramdhany, please!

You asked a question!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, *on a point of order*. L'honorable Ramdhany est en train de me provoquer. Je ne peux pas rester tranquille. Je dois lui répondre, M. le président. Il faudrait voir aussi !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Assirvaden: Vous entendez un peu ?

Mr Speaker: Listen to me! You take the point of order, you do not engage in discussions, okay? You have asked a question, you listen to the answer; otherwise, I will not get back to you.

Continue, please!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Je vais répondre encore une fois. J'ai dit que les distributeurs m'ont dit que d'habitude, pendant le mois de juillet, les consommateurs achètent plus d'œufs et après en même temps, il y a la fête de La Vierge qui arrive, ils ont commencé à faire leur stocks pour pouvoir vendre les gâteaux. C'est-ce qu'ils m'ont dit.

Mr Speaker: Right! Hon. Ameer Meea, last question!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, it's good and the population is listening that the hon. Minister stated to the House that the prices of eggs have not increased. Also, can I ask the hon. Minister, she said that her officers went to 425 supermarkets, shops etc.; can the hon. Minister table the result of such survey in the House?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the list of...

(Interruptions)

Of course, I don't have it with me, but I trust...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Table avan!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: I trust my....

Mr Ameer Meea: *Table avan!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Ameer Meea! Let her reply!

Mr Ameer Meea: She must substantiate...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: But let her reply!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ameer Meea! Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Donn Raport la!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea! Hon. Ameer Meea!

You listen to my ruling!

Mr Ameer Meea: She has to substantiate....

Mr Speaker: No, don't talk over me. I have the microphone. I have told you when you solicit an answer, you wait for the reply! Otherwise, I will not give you supplementaries. I am warning you.

Mr Ameer Meea: She has to substantiate...

Mr Speaker: No, no, do not get in an argument with me.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Li kapav dir linn ale dan mil magazin...*

Mr Speaker: Please!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, ils sont en train de mettre en doute l'intégrité de mes officiers...

(Interruptions)

A part cela ...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Donn raport la!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: M. le président, je voudrais...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Enn stratezi sa!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: M. le président, je voudrais ajouter quelque chose. Cette même opposition qui fait semblant de défendre les consommateurs, je dois vous dire quelque chose, je dois vous avouer quelque chose. Il y a un membre de l'opposition, l'honorable Ehsan Juman qui a téléphoné, deux semaines de cela, à mon *Head de Consumer Affairs Unit* pour lui dire pourquoi elle est allée servir des contraventions dans sa circonscription. C'est cela...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Shame!

(Interruptions)

Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ale lapolis!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ale lapolis!*

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, après les allégations de la ministre à l'encontre de l'honorable Ehsan Juman, est-ce que la ministre peut confirmer à la Chambre et la population, que depuis ce qui s'est passé, est-ce qu'elle est...

Mr Speaker: No, wait! Are you....

(Interruptions)

Wait! Wait! Hon. Assirvaden, wait! Are you taking a point of order? Are you asking a question? What is it? Is it a point of order?

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, vous permettez que la ministre fasse des allégations gratuites contre un député ! Mais c'est gratuit !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is the point of order? No, listen! We will listen to the point of order. Hon. Assirvaden, I am giving you the opportunity! What is your point of order?

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, après les allégations, on demande à la ministre de retirer ce qu'elle a dit à l'encontre du député ou elle va à la police.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: *Pa enn allégation sa !*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, it is not proper, in fact, to comment on the conduct or character of any Member of the Assembly, the more so that he is not present. Kindly withdraw that part.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just reporting what the Head of my Ministry told me...

Hon. Members: Withdraw! Withdraw!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: I am just reporting! But if it's not proper, I am going to remove it.

Mr Speaker: Yes, thank you!

Look, let me warn hon. Members, it might be my first or second day of question time, but I will not allow the House to get unruly. I will take sanctions if you do not obey the authority of the Chair. So, please, let us proceed in an orderly manner.

Hon. Doolub!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 12 - DRAINS - MAINTENANCE

(No. B/641) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to drains in Constituency No. 12, Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the maintenance thereof in view of the upcoming rainy season.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know how vulnerable our country is when it comes to flooding. With climate change, the situation has become even more challenging, especially with the onset of recurrent flash floods.

With a view to alleviating flooding, Government is investing massively in drain projects as well as other flood mitigating measures. In 2021, an unprecedented sum of Rs11.7 billion has been earmarked by the Government under the National Flood Management Programme for the construction and upgrading of some 1,700 drain projects over a period of three years, starting with high risk flood prone areas. As at date, some 596 projects for a total amount of 4.9 billion have been completed.

The status of the remaining projects is as follows –

- 161 projects for a total amount of Rs4.3 billion are under construction;
- 7 projects estimated at Rs5.3 billion are at bidding stage,
- 911 projects estimated at Rs39.4 billion are at design stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the cleaning of drains, the Land Drainage Authority has earmarked some 1,500 km for the Financial Year 2023-24 and around 400 km of drain has been cleaned by the local authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that in Constituency No.12, there are some 55.7 km of drain networks which take into consideration the 47 drain projects that have already been completed and which amount to some Rs482 m.. It is also to be pointed out that 11 projects for a total amount of Rs216.7 m. are under construction, 4 projects estimated at bidding stage, 16 projects estimated at Rs403.9 m. are at design stage.

Out of the 55.7 km of drain network, 50.8 km falls under the purview of the District Council of Grand Port for regular maintenance. The remaining 4.9 km of drains are along classified roads which fall under the purview of the Road Development Authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for the Financial Year 2023-24 funding allocated to the District Council of Grand Port for cleaning of drains and desilting of rivers was as follows –

- Rs2.5 m. allocated for cleaning of drains;
- Rs18 m. for the desilting of rivers, and
- Rs8 m. for cleaning of drains post Belal cyclone.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the LDA that a maintenance plan was submitted to the District Council of Grand Port in September 2023. As at date, only 8.1 km of drain out of 50.8 km have been cleaned through contractors. Desilting works around nine rivers water course have been carried out. The desilting of three water courses, namely river Eau Bleu, river Délices at Grand Bel Air and Petit Bel Air and water course at Camp Carol are still pending.

I wish to highlight that the onus is on the District Council of Grand Port to carry out regular inspection and regular maintenance such that the stormwater drainage infrastructure within the jurisdiction is cleaned to allow free flow of water at all times.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. If I got it well from the reply of the Minister, despite funding has been provided, only 8 km of drains on a total of 50.8 that you mentioned

have been maintained by the District Council. What are the actions that are being envisaged by your Ministry?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, as you know the LDA also has the power to enforce. So, warning letters have been issued to the District Council of Grand Port because indeed some of the rivers and drains in Constituency No.11 and in No. 12 are in a very bad state. In fact, there has been a case that came up on the radio at Gros Billot which falls under the purview of the District Council. Unfortunately, nothing has been done. There were complaints from the inhabitants in the region. I should thank my hon. colleague, hon. Seeruttun, who helped a lot and we have had Mauri-Facilities to intervene immediately to solve and bring some peace to those inhabitants.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Doolub, last question!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to projects that are being undertaken actually in Constituency No.12, can we have from the Minister a status on the retention pond where works started in Mare Tabac?

Mr Hurreeram: Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, this project was given to the District Council of Grand Port as an emergency. After two weeks of work, given it was an emergency and we needed instant and immediate action on the field, nothing was done. I had no choice but to step in and to request the PS of the Ministry to recall the file and to re-award that project to the NDU. Now, it is almost completed and there are some snags that we need to do around.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. David!

DÉBARCADÈRE, POINTE AUX SABLES – ILLEGAL DUMPING

(No. B/642) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the street connecting the Royal Highness Street and Apricot Silk Street in the region of Débarcadère, Pointe aux Sables, he will state if he has been made aware that the region has become a dumping ground, rendering it impracticable for pedestrians and unsafe due to fires being frequently set therein and, if so, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to the remedial measures being envisaged to address 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 City Council of Port Louis of the illegal dumping on the street connecting the Royal Highness Street and the Apricot Silk Street in the region of Débarcadère, Pointe aux Sables by residents of the vicinity.

I am further informed by the City Council that the scavenging service in the region is providing twice weekly service through a private contractor and the latter has a responsibility to cart away any refuse found there as and when required. The last site visit was effected on the 12 July 2024 by the Councilor and an officer of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Council will remove the heap of soil found there to allow free access on Apricot Street. Moreover, the Council will clean and cart away soil and construction debris by the end of this week and will ensure that a no dumping sign is fixed at that particular place.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. David!

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Vice-Prime Minister mentioned very clearly and rightly that there is illegal dumping in that public street. May I know from the Vice-Prime Minister whether there have been any preventive or punitive measures taken to address this specific issue of illegal dumping in that street?

Dr. Husnoo: As far as construction debris is concerned, that depends on the residents as well. They should realise that it is a road which is used by the public and they can't just dump anything on the road. I think this is common sense: they should not just dump things just on the road. We cannot blame the local authorities, that is, if you dump your stuffs on the road, tomorrow morning, they have to be there to cart it away. That is why we are having this problem. I think it is a matter of sensitisation to the public and that is more important.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes, thank you. May I ask the Minister whether he will impress upon the Municipal Council of Port Louis to deal with the same issue at corner Jacquier and Cerisier Streets in Pointe aux Sables?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a different question!

Mr Speaker: Hon. David! Last question!

Mr David: May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister what budget or resources have been allocated for the cleaning and rehabilitation of this public street?

Dr. Husnoo: The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has a budget. I can't remember off hand how much money is allocated to each street. The Council has the budget to clean, not just in Pointe aux Sables, but across the city of Port Louis.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold! Next question!

MAURITIUS & RODRIGUES – PUBLIC & PRIVATE HOSPITALS – CAESARIAN SECTION

(No. B/643) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the caesarian section delivery in the public hospitals in mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues and in private hospitals, he will state the –

- (a) reasons accounting for the difference in the rate thereof between the different public and private hospitals, indicating the reasonable and acceptable rate thereof, and
- (b) implications of the rising rate thereof, if any, for women and babies, indicating the measures being proposed in relation thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, worldwide, there is an increase in the rate of caesarian section in all the countries for the last decade. In Mauritius, some 4,321 caesarian sections were done, that is, representing 57% of deliveries in public hospitals, while in private hospitals, 3,023 caesarean deliveries were done, representing 68.4% deliveries.

In Rodrigues, a total of 306 caesareans, representing 40.5% births through caesareans were undertaken in the year 2023. The reasons accounting for the increase in caesarean section are the maternal demographic, that is, late late pregnancies, obesity, diabetes, foetal distress, failed induction of labour, malpresentation, teenage pregnancies, patient not attending antenatal care, HIV positive mothers. These are all the causes of caesarean sections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to (b) of the question, it is worth pointing out that by undergoing a caesarean, the incidence and rate of surgical complications for a mother may also increase and the risk of having repeated caesareans sections in the future also increases in parallel.

My Ministry has embarked on a series of measures –

- (i) introduction of the Maternal and Child Health care for all women in their reproductive age groups;
- (ii) Preconception, Antenatal care, Obstetric care, Postnatal care, Breastfeeding and Care of new-born, that we have also introduced and is being done by trained midwives in Mediclinics, Area Health Centres and Community Health Centres;
- (iii) Gynaecologists are on 24 hours basis being in the hospitals now; at all time you have a gynaecologist posted in the hospitals;
- (iv) Awareness campaigns, including Radio/TV programmes on Maternal and Child Health that is also being done. Sexual and reproductive health clinic and Family Planning Clinics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2023, the Maternal and Child Health Handbook has been reviewed to include so many issues including a growth monitoring and that helps a lot for attending the issues of caesarean section.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Léopold!

Mr Léopold: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is professionally ethical for gynaecologists to undergo caesarean section without clinical indications?

Dr. Jagutpal: See, the indications are clear. It is a question of the gynaecologist because this is a very critical period between the time of labour and I don't think that is an issue of ethics; it is a question of whether the criteria are met to do caesarean sections. It is very difficult to say whether that has an ethical issue, it is more like saving the lives of the mother and the baby because two young aged persons are involved here. I am not so comfortable in ...

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Léopold: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether patients, women are allowed to ask for caesarean section even if it is not clinically indicated?

Dr. Jagutpal: It all depends upon the gynaecologist's clinical findings because the gynaecologist has been following the whole antenatal and knows that probably if ever there are obesity, diabetes, these are the potential areas where a caesarean section will be indicated and at the same time it is more of a clinical decision. It is very difficult to reply to this question.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Notwithstanding the causative factors mentioned by the Minister, in relation to the high incidence, will the Minister state whether had there been proper follow up, incidence could have been mitigated?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I have pointed out because now women of advanced ages are going through pregnancies and other issues coming up and already having previous pregnancies mean that automatically the rate of caesarean section will keep on increasing. So, it is a matter of how we are addressing all these issues. It is going to come up but we have to address our NCD problem as well. The NCDs being the major issues and obesity that we have got to tackle including cigarette and alcohol. Already, in the population there is a percentage of women consuming alcohol and cigarettes. With some more time we may come up to a plateau of the increasing need for caesarean section.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful. Next question!

CREMATION INCINERATORS – NUMBER

(No. B/644) 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 cremation incinerators, he will state the number thereof that –

- (a) has been set up in the country, and
- (b) that are not operational at present, giving the reasons thereto.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, the information request regarding part (a) and (b) of the question are being tabled.

However, I wish to inform the House that as at date, there 197 cremation facilities in Mauritius. Out of which, 165 are traditional pyres and 32 are cremation incinerators. I am informed that 16 cremation incinerators are in operation whilst the remaining 16 are LPG-fired human incinerators which were supplied by Kanta Electrical Indian Ltd under the Indian line of credit. The second 16 ones are not in operation. The contract for the latter – 16 LPG-fired human incinerators – was awarded on 26 July 2019, but no provision for the maintenance was made in the bidding document. The respective local authorities had launched several bids for provision of maintenance services to these incinerators, but they were unsuccessful.

In this context, my Ministry had on 27 March 2024, invited bids centrally for the repairs and maintenance of the 16 incinerators on a customised basis to allow local service providers to bid and the closing date for submission of bids was 25 April 2024. One offer was received and after evaluation it was found to be non-responsive. A second bidding exercise was carried out on 19 June 2024 and the closing date for the submission of bids was fixed for 18 July 2024, following which, one bid has been received and same is under evaluation. In the meantime, all requests for incineration received at the level of the different councils are being redirected to the nearest cremation incinerators which are in operation in the respective councils' jurisdictions.

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, this issue is causing a lot of anxiety to the grieving families. It has been five years now since those 16 incinerators are not in operation. May I call upon the hon. Minister to kindly look the matter and treat this issue with urgency, given the fact that in my Constituency itself, there are, I think, two incinerators that are not in operation? May I call upon the hon. Minister to kindly look into the matter?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I appreciate that this is a very sensitive issue. I would like firstly to mention that, in Grand-Port, 2 are operational; two incinerators at Rose-Belle and Plaine-Magnien; that is what I have been told. As I have mentioned in my reply, the local authorities have done their bidding at their level and they did not manage to get anybody. Centrally, we have done a first bid but we did not get any responsive bid. And, we have just

launched it and now we have got one responsive bid and we are trying to work on it, and hopefully we can get the solution. I appreciate that there are 16 out of 32, it is not fair – 50% of them are not functioning, I appreciate that and believe me, we are working on it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

GRADE 9 & 9+ – NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

(No. B/645) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to Grade 9 and 9+, she will state if the Ministry is considering deloading the syllabus for the forthcoming National Certificate Examinations 2024 and, if so, when the educators and students thereof will be communicated therewith.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to Grade 9 and 9+, I wish to inform the House that no deloading of the syllabus has been envisaged for the forthcoming National Certificate of Education examinations 2024.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Dr. Gungapersad: No further questions.

Mr Speaker: Alright. Hon. Assirvaden!

Ms Anquetil: Bravo Mahend! Bravo!

CAMP FOUQUEREAUX, HIGHLANDS & BELLE RIVE – 24/7 WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/646) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the supply of water on a 24/7 basis in the regions of Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands and Belle Rive, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to where matters stand.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Central Water Authority supplies water across six water supply zones on the island irrespective of constituencies. The regions of Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands

and Belle Rive are part of the Mare aux Vacoas (Upper) water supply zone, receiving water from the La Marie Water Treatment Plant which has treatment capacity of 130,000 cubic meters per day.

According to information from the CWA, the Mare aux Vacoas (Upper) water supply zone had 79,448 subscribers as of 30 June 2024, reflecting an increasing view of new *morcellements* and commercial projects. These have contributed to added pressure on the existing water supply network.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in May 2023, in response to PQ B/522, from the hon. Member, the House was informed about the water improvement projects undertaken by the CWA since 2019 to increase the water supply in this zone. This included the commissioning of two boreholes: one at La Marie in 2019, supplying 6900 cubic meters per day and another one at Valentina in 2022, providing 5500 cubic meters per day.

Furthermore, the CWA has replaced 3.1 km of old and defective pipes out of a total of 3.3 km in the region of Phoenix, Camp Fouquereaux, Valentina and Highlands, and the remaining 200 meters is expected to be completed by mid-August 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding water supply, I am informed by the CWA that the lower parts of Camp Fouquereaux and Highlands receive a 24/7 water supply, while the upper part of Camp Fouquereaux receives 12 hours of water supply daily.

I am further informed by the CWA that some 25 inhabitants of Camp Chapeau, Belle Rive who used to be supplied by dug wells in the in the past, have made a request to be connected to the CWA network. The request is currently under consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it must be outlined that the major constraints faced in this water supply zone are inadequate water treatment capacity, old pipe networks and increasing demands. Actions are being taken on several fronts to address the water intermittency in some parts of the zone.

It is expected that water supply in the aforementioned regions will considerably improve after the upgrading of La Marie Water Treatment Plant. I am informed by the CWA about a consultancy exercise to increase the treatment capacity of La Marie Water Treatment Plant to

160,000 m³ per day through the upgrading of its rapid gravity filtration. The evaluation exercise has been completed and the contract is expected to be awarded shortly and works are expected to start in September 2024 for a duration of a year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, furthermore, I am informed by the CWA that several pipe replacement projects in the Mare aux Vacoas (Upper) water supply zone and approximately 66 km of old and defective pipes have been identified for replacement as from the year 2024 and this includes some 13.6 km in the region of Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands and Solferino. These works will concern, among others –

- Disha Lane (Allee Brilliant);
- Robinson Road;
- Osman Road (St Paul);
- Rémy Ollier Street (Closel);
- Balgobeen Road (St Paul);
- Gopee Lane (Closel);
- Roopchand Lane (Parisot), and
- Jhugroo Road, and Nehru Lane in Phoenix;
- Petit Camp, including laterals;
- Belle Terre;
- Belle Terre Road, amongst others.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Balgobin: I have a small conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you allow me. Just to give all the information to the hon. Member. In addition to the above planned pipe replacement works for a better efficiency of the network, the CWA intends to drill a duplicate borehole at Valentina to supply water production and further improve the water supply in the Highlands region.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. C'est bien, M. le président, que le ministre reconnaît que la distribution d'eau à Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands et Belle Rive ne se fait pas *on a 24-hour basis*. Là, actuellement, quand je pose la question, trois camions de la...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Assirvaden: ...CWA...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea! I have warned you earlier about this. You should apologise!

Mr Ameer Meea: I am sorry.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Assirvaden: Puis-je ? Là, actuellement, à l'heure où je vous parle, M. le président, trois camions citernes de la CWA alimentent la région de Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands et Belle Rive.

M. le président, cela fait déjà 10 ans. J'ai posé la question l'année dernière concernant ces régions spécifiques que le ministre a fait référence effectivement, à Camp Fouquereaux, Highlands et Belle Rive. Cela fait déjà, M. le président, 10 ans depuis la promesse électorale de l'*Allians Lepep* pour une distribution d'eau 24/7 dans le pays.

Ma question est simple pour ces habitants de Camp Fouquereaux, de Highlands et de Belle Rive, M. le président. Quand est-ce que cette promesse de distribution d'eau 24/7 sera une réalité, du moins, pour la région de Camp Fouquereaux, de Highlands et de Belle Rive ?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply, I mentioned that I am informed by the CWA that the lower parts of Camp Fouquereaux and Highlands already receive water 24/7 supply and only the upper parts of Camp Fouquereaux receives 12 hours of water supply and I have mentioned also for Belle Rive, 25 inhabitants of that region; houses and households have recently made a request to the CWA to be connected in the water supply because for many years, they have been using dug wells for water consumption and this request is currently under consideration by the CWA to do the needful.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, la promesse électorale de 2014 concernait le *upper parts* et le *lower parts*. Les gens de Camp Fouqueraux, de Highlands, que ce soit *lower* ou *upper*, forment partie de l'île Maurice, M. le président. Ma question est simple ! Le ministre suppléant, je peux comprendre, peut prendre l'engagement ici dans cette Chambre quand ; du moins un mois, une année, une date la promesse de 24/7 de distribution d'eau sera une réalité dans ce pays ?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also mentioned in the reply what actions are being taken, for example, upgrading of La Marie Water Treatment Plant to have a water supply of 160,000 metre cube. I have informed about various pipe replacement projects in that particular region and all these measures that have been taken by the CWA will definitely bring more smoothness in the water supply in the region for the inhabitants of all those areas mentioned.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, next question!

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU HOSPITAL - MRS M. E. R. A. - DEMISE - ENQUIRY

(No. B/647) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the demise of one Mrs M. E. R. A. on 03 July 2024 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, Rose Belle, he will state if an enquiry has been carried out to determine the causes thereof and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we extend our sincere condolences to the family. The patient M.E.R.A was admitted at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital on 26 June 2024 and relatives signed Discharge against Medical Advice on Sunday 30 June 2024 to continue treatment in the private clinics.

Given that there has been a press article dated 14 July 2024 in a weekly newspaper, stating that there has been an alleged case of medical negligence, the matter has been referred to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee and the Medical Council.

Thank you.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. Est-ce que le ministre se propose de remettre une copie des conclusions du rapport de ce comité à la famille de la dame décédée s'il-vous plaît ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated in the Medical Negligence Standing Committee, the family will be called whenever the inquiry is completed and will be given a report to the families.

**FOOD & HOUSEHOLD ITEMS – PRICE INCREASE – PRICE CONTROL
MECHANISMS**

(No. B/648) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to essential food and household items, she will state if consideration will be given for the concept of *blocage des prix* to be introduced for a specific time frame to alleviate the burden of the consumers.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that since 1998, price controls on essential commodities have been implemented in response to varying economic conditions with the aim to shield consumers from unjustified price increase and maintain their purchasing power.

Currently, my Ministry has put in place price mechanisms and control –

- (a) the Maximum Price and Maximum Mark-up on 37 categories of commodities for Mauritius, and
- (b) the maximum price of 23 essential commodities in Rodrigues.

Out of the 37 categories of commodities, 25 essential commodities are regulated under a Maximum Mark-Up Regime. These include products such as milk powder, breakfast cereals, canned fish, edible oil, basmati rice, imported fresh fruits, infant milk powder, and baby diapers amongst others. The mark-up is capped within a range of 15% to 45%. The remaining 12 commodities such as Gasoil, Mogas, LPG, cement, bread, flour, ration rice, onions, and potatoes are regulated under a fixed maximum price regime to ensure affordability and accessibility for every Mauritian citizen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government is currently providing substantial financial assistance to ensure that essential commodities remain affordable for the public by subsidising LPG, like I said, flour and rice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has consistently been prioritising the well-being of its people by implementing these measures and remains committed to controlling the prices of goods whenever necessary. For that reason, a dedicated team at the level of my Ministry conducts ongoing market analysis and monitor the price evolution of essential commodities. Based on these findings, recommendations are made for policy interventions and decisions whenever it is necessary.

It is important to note that while controlling prices of goods can provide immediate benefits for consumers and social welfare, achieving a balance whilst considering the economic impact is crucial to ensure long-term stability and sustainable growth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the rise in cost in commodity, as I had mentioned earlier, are beyond governmental control. This challenge is a global phenomenon, affecting countries worldwide, and my Ministry will leave no stone unturned to ease the burden on consumers while ensuring the country's economic stability is maintained.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister for her reply, but she has not answered the question at all. My question was: whether her Ministry will consider the policy of a *blocage des prix pour un certain temps sur un certain nombre d'articles? Est-ce qu'il y a une étude qui a été faite dans ce sens, Madame la ministre, concernant cette possibilité qui a été appliquée à la Réunion avec succès et qui va devenir, probablement, une politique adoptée par le nouveau gouvernement en France ?*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, no study has been made right now. In order to ease the burden on consumers and mitigate the effect of rising prices, the Government has introduced several measures to safeguard the purchasing power of consumers such as the CSG Allowance, Child Allowance of Rs2,000 for children, the *revenu minimum garanti, salaire minimum garanti*, School Allowance, the increase in pensions. So, we are helping the population through other measures.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether her Ministry has considered the possibility of subsidising locally produced items?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Right now, we have not discussed about that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ittoo!

NATIONAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – DRAIN PROJECTS

(No. B/649) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the National Flood Management Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the drain projects identified to be implemented thereunder.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2021, Government rolled out an unprecedented National Flood Management Programme to the tune of 11.7 billion for the construction and upgrading of drain projects over three years, starting with the high-risk flood prone areas.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that as at date – as I have mentioned earlier, but it comes back again in this question – the National Flood Management Programme, which is spearheaded by the Land Drainage Authority, comprises 1,700 drain projects which are being implemented in several institutions as follows –

- 952 projects by the NDU;
- 56 projects by the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd;
- 39 projects by the Road Development Authority,
- 716 projects by the local authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the coming up of the National Flood Management Programme in the Financial Year 2021-2022 till date –

- 596 projects for a total amount of 4.9 billion have been completed;
- 161 projects for a total amount of 4.3 billion are under construction;
- 71 projects estimated at 5.3 billion are at the bidding stage,

- 911 projects estimated at 39.4 billion are under design stage.

These drain works, which aim at reducing risk of flooding in flood prone areas, comprise the construction of new drains as well as the upgrading and maintenance of existing drains across the island. Some example of flood prone areas which have been rendered resilient to flooding and where the risk of inundation has been greatly mitigated are –

- Canal Anglais;
- Cité Roma, Riche Terre;
- Belle Source, Pamplémousses;
- Camp La Cloche, Pointe aux Piments;
- Fond du Sac, Cottage;
- L’Amitié;
- La Paix, Piton;
- Petite Julie;
- Tatamaka River, La Caverne;
- Canal Aliman, Vacoas;
- La Flora;
- Chemin Grenier, and
- Pink Pigeon in Queen Victoria.

Mr Speaker, Sir, road networks which were previously subjected to flooding have also been rendered safe through the construction of new bridges and culverts of higher hydraulic capacity. Some examples are –

- Anse Jonchée;
- Vieux Grand Port;
- St Denis Bridge;
- Tatamaka River, La Caverne;
- Constance;
- La Brasserie;
- Cité Atlee;
- Mapou;
- Nouvelle France;
- M1 at Riche Terre, and
- L'Esperance, Quartier Militaire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our efforts to build up resilience on several other regions throughout Mauritius are ongoing. For example, drain projects are currently being undertaken at Souillac, Nouvelle France, Mare Tabac, Dynamo Street, Tyack, Dakri, Bambous, Balisson, Union Park, Nouvelle France, Sans Souci, Montagne Blanche, Providence, St Pierre, St Julien, Valetta, Trois Boutiques, Petit Verger, Camp de Masque Pavé, La Laura, Vallée des Prêtes, Canton Nancy, Pamplemousses, Rivière des Anguilles, Anderson Road, Curepipe, Kestrel Lane, Terre Rouge, and St Jean, Quatre Bornes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have repeatedly mentioned in this House that there is no dry feet policy to eliminate flooding. This is evidenced by flooding events which have been occurring worldwide throughout the year, that is, there is no specific time for such an event to occur. Recent examples of flooding which occurred in the US, China, Dubai and even Europe lead to hundreds of casualties and abilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the priority of this Government is and will be to safeguard the lives of the citizens at all costs. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, the House will agree that the Government has accomplished a herculean task by the setting up of the National Flood Management Programme, the Land Drainage Master Plan is accessible and funding to the tune of Rs11.7 billion is now available for the implementation of drain projects. Can the hon. Minister please inform the House as to what is delaying the implementation of these projects which are still being awaited? What are the challenges that he is facing? Thank you.

Mr Hurreeram: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, this is a very pertinent and interesting question to deal with. I should thank the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister to have given us the required budget.

Unfortunately, very often, we do not have the right of entry on lands, especially when we have to acquire private properties or we have to work within privately owned areas. Very often, the negotiations are long and tedious and there are also many challenges. You can say why not go for compulsory acquisition. But then, how do you prevent that person from going to court and resist in giving that plot of land?

So, this is a long procedure that we have to go through. If you are building 1 km of drain and you have one person in the middle who opposes, the whole project gets blocked! We are here talking about drains and we have to take the water to a safe discharge point.

Secondly, *l'île Maurice, aujourd'hui, est un chantier à ciel ouvert. Alors*, we also have a problem of finding contractors. Many of our local contractors have their diary full. I think Solange is no longer writing in diary; there is no space in the diary. So, this is why we are also trying to see other avenues to get experts from elsewhere. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Doolub!

NEW EYE CARE HOSPITAL, RÉDUIT

(No. B/650) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the construction of the New Eye Care Hospital in Réduit, he will state when same will be operational.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker Sir, during the Budget Vote for Financial Year 2019-2020, funds were allocated to my Ministry for the implementation of the project through a grant with Abu Dhabi Fund for Development. The grant agreement was signed in February 2019. HSCC (I) Ltd, a Government of India Company, was appointed as Project Consultant.

Despite facing a two years' delay in project preparation and design due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Ministry stayed committed in delivering this healthcare infrastructure projects. Following an international bidding exercise, the contract for the construction of the New Eye Hospital at Réduit was awarded to Varindera Construction Ltd on 18 July 2022 for a contract value of Rs714,676,558.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the commencement date of works was 29 July 2022 and the extended completion date is 30 September 2024. The 108 bedded and 7-storey facility having 4 Operation Theatres and 6 ICU beds is intended to be operational by the beginning of next year.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister just mentioned that the hospital is intended to be operational early next year, can the hon. Minister confirm whether ophthalmology services will be maintained at the New Souillac Hospital, currently being offered there?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Likely this will be maintained due to the growing number of cataract surgeries that has to be performed with the increasing proportion of aging population likely the facility in the south will be maintained because for at present the cataract surgeries, some are to be conducted by the private clinics and likely in the future, we have to, at the same time, run Souillac Hospital to deliver the service on time.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether with the opening of the New Eye Hospital, he intends to repurpose the actual currently operational Subramania Bharati Eye Hospital in Moka?

Dr. Jagutpal: Sorry, please?

Mr Doolub: Does your Ministry intend to repurpose the Subramania Bharati Eye Hospital, the current eye Hospital of Moka, does your Ministry intends to repurpose to the opening of the New Hospital in Réduit?

Dr. Jagutpal: Once all the services at Subramania Bharati Eye Hospital will be shifted to the New Eye Hospital and the facility over there will be taken. For the time being, the Ministry has decided to keep it as a centre for contaminated diseases such like, you know, at least we have one centre where all these infectious diseases can be admitted.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem, next question!

MAURITIUS STANDARDS BUREAU – ELECTRIC CABLES – CONFORMITY CERTIFICATES

(No. B/651) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the proposed recognition of conformity certificates for electric cables as announced in the Annex to the Budget Speech 2024-2025, she will state if consultation has been held with the Mauritius Standards Bureau and other stakeholders in relation thereto, indicating the outcome thereof.

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): Mr Speaker, Sir, the recognition of conformity certificates, as announced in the Annex to the Budget 2024/2025 is in line with the ease of doing business mandate to make it easier for businesses to trade, import and manufacture in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the control for electric cables exists since more than three decades. In the past, most importers could not produce conformity certificates for electric cables. The prevailing Consumer Protection (Safety Requirements) Regulations 2019, provides for mandatory testing of

the electric cables by the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB) to ensure that they meet the required standards.

In fact, these Regulations already recognise conformity certificates for a number of items including electric water heaters, automatic circuit breakers, residual current switches, leakage modules, flexible tubes, pipes and hoses, hair dryers, table fans, wall fans, dish washing machines, clothes washing machines, whirlpool baths, etc. For these items, there is no need for a further testing by the MSB.

In line with ease of doing business, the conformity certificates as per European Standards, or British Standards for electric cables insulated with plastic materials, other than armoured underground electric cables are being recognised similar to other electric items. This measure is in line with the rationalisation of norms and standards to meet international norms.

Government is, as it is the case for a number of electric items, recognising the certificates of conformity for instance which are meeting EU Standards, will no longer have to go through an additional layer of mandatory local testing by the MSB, which has an impact on the time taken and the cost of sales of operators, and ultimately on the retail price of products. My Ministry has received representations from operators and I am also informed that the Economic Development Board has also received similar representations to facilitate trade and to improve the ease of doing business in Mauritius.

As per established procedures for amendments to be made in any legislation there is need for in-depth consultations with relevant stakeholders and authorities concerned. As at date no amendment to the Consumer Protection (Safety Requirements) Regulations 2019 to allow full recognition of conformity certificates for electric cables has been made.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view thereof, my Ministry has initiated the consultation process with a view to consider all implications involved given that quality standards should be ensured.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Yes, only one supplementary in view of the time, yes, only one.

Mr Uteem: Yes, okay. Only one supplementary, my question was very specific regarding Mauritius Standards Bureau, so may I know from the hon. Minister whether the Mauritius Standards Bureau has been consulted and what was the advice given by the Mauritius Standards Bureau with regard to them ceasing to carry out test on electric cables?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the MSB has submitted their views regarding the implementation of the measure and same are being considered and further discussions are ongoing with the view of addressing any concern and to ensure the smooth implementation of the measure while ensuring product safety.

Mr Speaker: Alright, time is over! Hon. Members, for questions addressed to ministers, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/654, B/655, and B/658.

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.

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

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

(4.35 p.m.)

ONLINE MOTOR VEHICLE LICENCE – RENEWAL

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I shall make two statements to the House. I shall firstly make a Statement regarding the renewal of the Motor Vehicle Licence (MVL) known as “*Déclaration*” which is coming into full operation as from 01 August 2024 and the first phase will concern owners of private vehicles, involving some 350,000 vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to be informed of the numerous operations being carried out at the level of the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) with regard to the current fleet of 650,000 vehicles which is increasing at a rate of 4% annually. In fact, there are at least 800 customers calling at the NLTA counters daily and some 27,000 transactions are carried out on a monthly basis with the highest frequency for the payment of Motor Vehicle Licence, out of which some 6,592 persons call at the Head Office, Cassis, Forest Side and Flacq.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, despite the introduction of the First Phase Online MVL in November 2018 for the renewal of MVL by owners of private motor vehicles, there has not been a proper uptake of this platform, being given that they have the choice between the traditional paper-based MVL wherein vehicle owners physically call at the NLTA Counters or at the Post Offices around the island and the online MVL alternative. Many people are therefore not opting for the online system and hence NLTA faces a high number of people converging at its counters at Cassis, Flacq and Forest Side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry held several consultations with relevant stakeholders such as the NLTA, State Informatics Limited (SIL) and the Central Informatics Bureau (CIB) in order to enhance the online platform and make it more convenient to users.

Following various tests carried out on the online platform for its effectiveness, same have been successfully attended to. As a result thereof, a cut-off date of 31 July 2024 for the MVL Online phase 1 has been agreed by all stakeholders.

However, there will be a transition period up to 01 December of this year for such transactions to be effected manually at the Post Offices only. As from 02 December 2024, owners of private vehicles would have to renew their MVL solely through the online platform.

This E-Service will serve as a one-stop shop to enable the public to renew their MVL and effect the appropriate payment online by virtually accessing the NLTA system which is also connected to the Insurance system. It is to be also highlighted that the online system has been enhanced to cater, amongst others, for the integration of the IPS Gateway whereby several options for payment namely, Juice, Blink, my-T Money and others are provided.

A 24/7 Help Desk online facility has been set up by the National Land Transport Authority to assist users encountering difficulties while using the online system. A sensitisation

campaign in that respect has been launched on Friday 19 July 2024 to ensure a seamless uptake of the Online MVL system by owners of private vehicles highlighting the above mentioned aspects including a request to all vehicle owners not to wait for the last day to effect transactions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the completion of the development of the second phase of the Online MVL Platform involving all other types of vehicles, including those holding a Public Service Vehicle Licence (PSVL), is expected by end of this year and I shall inform the House on the exact timing and for which another sensitisation campaign would be undertaken.

The implementation of the first phase of the renewal of Online MVL will help in reducing queuing at the level of the NLTA, and Vehicle Owners will be able to effect payment for the renewal of their Online MVL without any hassle and at the comfort of their home. I thank you.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a second statement to make.

(4.39 p.m.)

ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION PROJECT

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall make a Statement on the status of the continuum of road safety education project in Mauritius which is being implemented in line with the National Road Safety Strategy 2016-2025. The aim of Road Safety Education is to reduce the risk of trauma from injury and death due to road accidents and to lay the foundations for safe road use.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) of my Ministry in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius Film Development Corporation and the Mauritius Police Force, have been working together to impart Road Safety Education to Primary School students. As at date, the curriculum on road safety for grade 1 to 6 has been developed and the Road Safety Education pupil's books and teacher's guide for grade 1 to 6 have already been distributed in schools.

In fact, 86,000 school books have been distributed to the pupils of the different schools. The Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has allocated 25 minutes per grade on a weekly basis for the teaching of Road Safety Education as a compulsory

subject in primary school curriculum. To make Road Safety Education more appealing to students, the curriculum materials for road safety education for grade 1 & 2 have been digitalised. 28 animated videos in 3 languages, English, French and Creole for 28 lessons and 31 interactive activities for grade 1 and 20 animated videos and 23 interactive activities for grade 2 have been produced.

I am very pleased to inform the House that I launched the publications and digitalised materials at the New Bambous Geoffroy Government School at Bambous on 18 July 2024 in the presence of representatives of my Ministry, TMRSU, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius Film Development Corporation and the Mauritius Police Force.

All the Road Safety Education materials are available on the website of the Mauritius Institute of Education which can be downloaded and used offline and which are accessible on tablets of primary school students. They are also available on the TMRSU YouTube Channel.

As the way forward, all the published and digitalised materials would be edited and adapted for Special Education Needs pupils by my Ministry in collaboration with Special Education Needs Authority (SENA) and the curriculum materials for grades 3 to 6 will also be digitalised in a phased manner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the Road Safety Education, we look forward to a reduction in road accidents in the years to come, as Road Safety Education would create a new generation of citizens who, we hope, would be more diligent and courteous on our roads.

Before thanking you for your attention, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank my colleague the Minister of Education for her assistance and collaboration.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Ramano!

(4.42 p.m.)

ROCHE BOIS TRANSFER STATION – FIRE OUTBREAK

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a Statement on the fire outbreak at the Roche Bois Transfer Station. As this House may be aware, there was a fire outbreak on Saturday 27 July 2024 at Roche Bois Transfer Station, which is operated by a

private operator, the Joint Venture Serveng Ltd/Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd.

On Saturday 27 July 2024 at around 16.05hrs, a fire outbreak was reported by the contractor who operates and maintain the Transfer Station at Roche Bois. The Fire and Rescue Services were on site since 16.15hrs. The Fire and Rescue Services deployed water tankers from various Fire stations and the contractor deployed two water tankers and a tracked loader to break down the waste stockpile to enable the fire fighters to adequately sprinkle water to extinguish the fire.

It has been reported that one tracked loader and one lorry found on the lower platform were completely damaged by fire. One personnel of the operator was severely injured and was promptly transported to Jeetoo Hospital for first hand medical care. I am informed that the person has been transferred to the burns unit of Victoria Hospital for treatment. I am further informed that there were two other persons on site who were injured and were provided with proper treatment. I wish to convey my special thoughts and prayers to them and their families and wish them rapid recovery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fire which propagated rapidly in the waste mass stacked on the lower and upper platforms of the station platform was significantly extinguished by the night of Saturday 27 July 2024 whereas the fire in the waste mass on the lower platform took more time and resources to extinguish. Officers of the National Environmental Laboratory came on site to monitor ambient air quality around the station and nearby residential areas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I effected a site visit on Sunday 28 July 2024 together with the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister Local Government and Disaster Risk Management, hon. Dr. Anwar Husnoo, and the officers of my Ministry to assess the situation and to ensure that adequate resources are being deployed and site security is being reinforced. As at this morning significant progress has been made with only mild smokes emanating from the Transfer Station.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Environmental Laboratory conducted a first ambient air measurements using the Portable Gas analyser (PGA) on 27 July 2024, two ambient air measurements on 28 July 2024 and one ambient air measurement on 29 July 2024. The exercise was carried out at five monitoring sites namely at Baie du Tombeau near community centre, Baie du Tombeau Public Beach, Roche Bois at Recreational Park, entrance of Terre Rouge Bird

Sanctuary and at Route Abattoir. Tests were carried out to detect the presence of toxic gases namely Nitrogen Monoxide, Nitrogen Dioxide, Ammonia, Sulphur Dioxide, Benzene, Toluene, Xylene, Naphtalene And Formaldehyde.

All the toxic gases screened at all the sites were below the detectable limits of the Portable Gas Analyzer (PGA) at the time of measurement and were thus compliant to the Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level known as LOAEL. The LOAEL according to the United States Environment Protection Agency, is the lowest tested dose of a substance that has been reported to cause adverse health effects on people and animals.

As regards observations made on site for all the monitoring exercises, the smoke was moving in a general south easterly direction towards the sea. As at date, the smoke is mild and of lesser intensity than observed on previous days. Ambient Air Monitoring will be maintained.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the cause of the fire outbreak, investigations is being carried out by the Police and the Fire and Rescue Services and preliminary reports are awaited. I wish to inform the House that the presence of inflammable aerosol containers and sprays has been found on site and these are unpermitted wastes at Transfer Stations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Monday 29 July 2024, I chaired a meeting with the operators of all the five transfer stations as well as the landfill to emphasise the importance of security and access to the site, to draw their attention on better control on permitted and unpermitted types of wastes and to prevent the accumulation of wastes. The operators were also reminded of their contractual obligations and responsibilities as custodian of their respective Waste Management Facility.

Furthermore, the contract provides for the types of waste that are permitted at the transfer stations in accordance with Part 1 of the First Schedule of the Local Government (Dumping and Waste Carriers) Regulations which also specify the exclusion of chemical waste and hazardous wastes.

Following requests from the operators of the transfer stations with regard to security of their staff, it was decided that the assistance of the Police will be sought for regular patrols.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as several Members of the House are aware, there is a high presence of informal waste-pickers operating around Roche Bois Transfer Station to recover materials. The

site where the current station stands was previously a dumping ground which existed for more than five decades or so. Informal scavengers were always found on that dumping ground. In 1992, dumping was stopped and the site was converted into a transfer station having a designated receiving area where wastes collected using small Lorries are transited before they are disposed at the landfill using long trunks. It helps to reduce both transportation cost and time as the wastes collected are disposed at the landfill in larger volumes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer to two reports on waste management, which refer to the Roche Bois site, namely *l'Élimination des Ordures Menagères* (MATIM) of 1976 and the Performance Audit Report No. 5 of the Director of Audit, June 2011. The MATIM report made observations that there were at that point in time no inhabitants close to the site and recommended that alternative disposal sites be identified. As regards the Performance Audit Report, it mentioned the construction of a new transfer station at Riche Terre in replacement of the one at Roche Bois. The construction of a new transfer station initially planned at Riche-Terre had to be cancelled because of objection from the public living in the vicinity. Gaining public approval for constructing new waste management infrastructure is always a challenge.

In 2012, the Roche Bois Transfer Station was upgraded to improve security on site, improved controlled access and operational efficiency. It is noted with time that inhabitants constructed their houses closer to the transfer station and more and more informal waste pickers operated around the station. In view of the prevailing situation, this Government is firmly committed to relocating the transfer station from Roche Bois to another appropriate location.

Mr Speaker, Sir, being conscious of the socio-economic reality of the waste-pickers community, my Ministry is proposing to have a meeting with relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Local Government and Risk Management, the Ministry of Health and wellness, Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection, the Police, NGOs in the region amongst others to find possible remedial actions to address the issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that besides addressing the issues at Roche Bois Transfer Station, my Ministry has already embarked on a new waste management strategy and action plan to improve the whole chain of waste management with focus on resource recovery, recycling and environmentally sound disposal of residual wastes.

As far back as 2015/2016, it was recognised that based on the landfilling rate and the existing designed capacity, the Mare Chicose Landfill would reach saturation in 2018. The first option was to look for land to set up new landfills. On 16 January 2017 and 08 March 2017, the Ministry conducted two Expression of Interest (EOI) exercises to identify landowners who could provide land for setting up of a landfill but this exercise has proved to be non-conclusive.

The possibility for securing private plots of land adjacent to the existing landfill and belonging to small planters was also explored. However, this would have entailed lengthy acquisition/legal procedures and it was concluded that it would be unrealistic to rely on this option. The only option was to extend the landfill vertically as far as possible on the same footprint of the existing landfill with an additional stretch of land along the western and southern perimeter of the landfill. In December 2017, Government gave its approval to proceed with the project of vertical expansion of the Mare Chicose Landfill.

In December 2018, following a procurement exercise, a consultancy firm was recruited to conduct a feasibility study and come up with an optimal design of the vertical expansion of the landfill and accordingly prepare the detailed design, tender documents for the works/operations contract and provide supervision services throughout. However, delays were encountered in various phases of the consultancy with regard to geotechnical investigations. Tender for the vertical expansion was finally launched in December 2020 and following evaluation at the level of the Central Procurement Board, the latter recommended in April 2022 the annulment of the exercise.

A fresh tender exercise was thus undertaken with launching in April 2023 and after evaluation of bids at the Central Procurement Board the contract for vertical expansion was awarded in June 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a key project in line with our Circular Economy Roadmap, which my Ministry is undertaking is the implementation of two regional integrated waste processing facilities comprising sorting units and composting plants under a public private partnership. Following a procurement exercise under BOT Projects Act, the contract will soon be awarded. This project will enable the diversion of around 45% of waste landfilled. This project is underpinned by segregation of waste at household, commercial, and industrial level.

Other projects which my Ministry has undertaken pertain to the construction of three *déchetteries* (Civic Amenity Centres) at La Laura, Poudre d'Or and La Chaumière to enable waste generators to bring sorted wastes for eventual recycling.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

(Second Reading)

THE MAURICE STRATÉGIE BOARD BILL

(No. XI of 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

(4.55 p.m.)

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that The *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill (No. XI of 2024) be read a second time. It is with great honour that I present today this Bill to this House.

The purpose of the Bill is to perpetuate *Maurice Stratégie* at the Economic Research and Planning Bureau of the country. Economic research and planning are the foundation of effective public policy. It enables us as Government to understand the economic, social and environmental dynamics that shape our country.

Through in-depth research, *Maurice Stratégie* will identify the challenges and opportunities we face and develop strategies that maximise the benefits for our nation. The setting up of such entity will also provide Mauritius with the opportunity to learn from international best practice and adapt this knowledge and experiences to our specific context.

Mr Speaker, Sir, strategic planning is the key to anticipate future trends, define clear objective and mobilise the resources needed to achieve them. It allows to align public efforts with a common vision for our future and to measure our progress in a transparent and accountable way.

In this context, the work conducted by *Maurice Stratégie* as a statutory body will focus on 3 fundamental pillars which are –

1. Economic growth;
2. Environmental Sustainability, and
3. Social Cohesion.

To achieve these ambitious goals, we will need to rely on reliable data and rigorous analysis. This means strengthening our data collection capabilities, promoting interdisciplinary research and fostering collaboration between the public, private and academic sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to the economic sphere, *Maurice Stratégie*'s research will enable us to better understand the sectors driving growth and innovation. It will help the authorities to identify the most effective fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate investment, employment and productivity. Strategic planning meanwhile, will guide us in the allocation of budgetary resources, ensuring that every rupee spent generates maximum value for our economy and our people.

On the environmental front, research conducted by *Maurice Stratégie* will be essential to assess the impact of our actions on our ecosystem and to develop sustainable solutions. Planning will enable us to set targets for reducing carbon emissions, managing natural resources and preserving biodiversity in line with our 2030 objectives. Finally, in terms of social cohesion, *Maurice Stratégie* will be tasked to provide us with valuable insights into the needs and aspirations of our citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, against this background, this Bill provides and sets clear objectives and function of *Maurice Stratégie*. As such, *Maurice Stratégie* will provide support to the Government through –

- the development of short term to long term plans, visions and strategies;
- undertake in-depth economic research and analysis to support policy choices;
- drive public debate, and provide recommendations to support collective choices on social, economic and environmental issues, and

- evaluate Government policies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this critical legislation will establish a robust framework and empower *Maurice Stratégie* with the necessary tools to operate efficiently and deliver exceptional results. This includes the authority to request relevant information, documents, research findings and data from any public sector agency. *Maurice Stratégie* will therefore have comprehensive access to resources required to fulfil its mandate.

Furthermore, to guarantee a unified approach across Government agencies, the *Maurice Stratégie* Board is comprised primarily of specific positions within relevant agencies and not individuals. These appointments are based on expertise and not political affiliation as our opponents have mistakenly suggested. This guarantees that *Maurice Stratégie* leverages the best minds available and safeguards the institution's longevity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in a significant move towards greatest inclusivity, we are expanding the composition of the Board of *Maurice Stratégie* in line with suggestions received during consultations with various stakeholders, including private sector associations and international development partners. This will ensure that the critical perspectives of the private sector and academia are directly represented at the decision making table. It must be highlighted that a cornerstone of our Government programme for this mandate, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, is the establishment of an Economic Research and Planning Bureau. While the Opposition talks about economic planning, they never mentioned it in their past electoral manifestos. This vital initiative will serve as a collaborative platform, fostering a spirit of partnership between public and private sector entities. Through this combined effort, we aim to propel our nation's economic growth trajectory on a sustainable and inclusive path.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the current global climate characterised by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties, it is essential for Mauritius to foster long term economic resilience. By implementing a comprehensive medium to long term economic plan, we will strategically navigate these challenges and unlock transformative opportunities for our nation's prosperity.

Last but not least, allow me to say a few words on the collaboration with international stakeholders. Here, allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the *Agence Française de Développement* which is currently financing the services of a consultant from Expertise France

to assist in the structuring of *Maurice Stratégie*, the construction and integration of the tools and methods required to carry out the missions of *Maurice Stratégie* and the development of the annual work programmes. I would also like to highlight that since its inception, *Maurice Stratégie* has been collaborating with other international development partners such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank.

Once again and to conclude, the support and commitment of these international stakeholders clearly highlight how important *Maurice Stratégie* is already and will be even more in the coming years.

To conclude, allow me to say that *Maurice Stratégie* is not a ‘nice to have’ but definitely a ‘must have’ for the future of our nation, our country and of our people. On these words, I thank you for your attention.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the Sitting for half an hour!

At 5.03 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, the *Maurice Stratégie* Board was an annoyance under the aegis of the Economic Development Board. The Chief Executive Officer of the EDB was fed up and had told the Minister of Finance that his hand-picked team had no *raison d’être*.

Now, a new public body will be created by converting *Maurice Stratégie*, a private company incorporated under the Economic Development Board, into a public body, and it will be placed directly under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. As the Minister has stated, the *Maurice Stratégie* will continue to be engaged in in-depth research and analysis of economic policy issues. It is also entrusted with the

responsibility for economic planning by supporting Government in its long-term plans, vision and strategies.

Unfortunately, the proposed *Maurice Stratégie* as a public body will likely mean more waste of public resources. Why? By reinforcing and extending the Finance Minister's authority over *Maurice Stratégie*, the Bill confers excessive and undemocratic power upon the Minister, specifically section 16 (1) of Part VI informally empowers the Minister to act as a partisan appointee in the name of public interest. The *Maurice Stratégie* Board will comply with such directions, and sections 8 and 10 of the Bill remind us of the unfettered powers of the Minister to appoint the Executive Director and its staff.

A Strategic Advisory Council is also proposed to provide expert guidance and advice to the Board and to make recommendation in respect of short and long terms strategic plans. Its nine-member Board will also allow for broader participation, but the six non-official members will be appointed by the Minister of Finance, which hardly guarantees the independence of the Board. What can we expect from a regime which has no reliable plan, no way forward and no way out? Simply, it is on its way out. Some may argue it has haphazard plans and policies. Mixing planning and budgeting together is a bad cocktail. There are lessons to be learned from Botswana and South Africa experience.

As regards its research and analysis, *Maurice Stratégie* will no doubt publish even more glowing economic reports and economic propaganda in the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation style. Its economic reports are sharply at odds with views of most of our independent economists. It contrasts strongly with the country assessment published by international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. And it has so far failed to impress Moody's credit ratings agency to upgrade Mauritius from its demotion close to junk grade status for which this government's reckless fiscal policies are responsible. In fact, Moody's did not even upgrade Mauritius to a positive outlook rating.

Let me look at the rationalisation of research, development and innovation. There is an urgent call for rationalisation of research and development institutions like the MSIRI, MRIC, the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council, the MOI, FAREI, and Higher Education Commission. These have to reinvent themselves. The country is lagging behind in innovation.

Rather than creating institutions, there should have been more efficient use of resources by creating linkages and capitalising on strengthening of institutions. There are cases where researchers applying for funds for same programmes from different funding agencies. Where is ethics? The Mauritius Research and Innovation Council has failed to submit its last four annual financial year reports. There has not been any consultation with senior staff. This is adding insult to injury, and we dare to talk of productivity, innovation and levelling up.

Mr Speaker, on the added economic planning objective, *Maurice Stratégie* is also bound to fail mainly for two reasons. First, because the evidence has shown that putting planning together with finance does not work. Planning requires long-term perspective, which is often eclipsed by short-term budgetary and other fiscal consideration. It requires the coordination and implementation of appropriate policies to guide the allocation of resources towards long-term development goals. Separating planning from budgeting gives more needed weight to longer term considerations. Secondly, *Maurice Stratégie* as a research and planning bureau, is inadequately structured and too weak to support proper and effective planning. Even the most well-conceived national development plan will deliver little development impact if insufficient attention is paid to implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

Implementing a national plan requires a focus on the alignment of sectoral policies, programmes and projects with the overall strategic objectives of the plan. This requires the planning body to be adequately structured to ensure overall coordination, monitoring and evaluation. It also conferred with the authority to ensure policy consistency across various Ministries and government bodies. This is why in South Africa, strategic planning was transferred from the Treasury to the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation under the President's Office. Botswana had similar national strategy office at the level of the President. There have been several attempts in Mauritius to review the planning and strategy process for improved development impact.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us go back to the days when Mauritius shortly became independent. Government embarked on national planning soon after independence with proven results. The Labour-led Government set up the Economic Planning Unit, headed by Mr Nijhawan. It had a dream team comprising of Bheenick, Wong So, Hanoomanjee, Ignace, Tribowan, Rattan Khushiram, Luchmun, just to mention a few. The Ministry of Economic Planning defined

policies with clarity and certainty, Key Performance Indicators with measured output, outcome and outlook. The Labour-MMM Government set up the National Policy Unit in 1995 under the PM's Office, headed by Dr. Meetarbhan.

But then, what happened to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance? Following the global spread of ideas in favour of economic liberalisation and the emergence Washington Consensus, the role of economic planning became less important and a greater emphasis was placed on strengthening the functioning of markets. As a result, the Ministry of Economic Planning in many developing countries were either dissolved or merged with Finance Ministries. Mauritius also merged the Economic Planning and Finance Ministry in 2003.

However, the need for long term strategic planning continued to be strongly felt. In 2024, a Strategic Policy Unit was set up under the Prime Minister's Office to support National Planning Objectives. In 2015, the new government formulated the Vision 2030 blueprint and set up Vision 2030 High-Powered Committee to give strategic direction and oversight and facilitate collaboration for the elaboration and implementation of the blueprint.

More recently, there has been a global shift in the assessment of the Washington Consensus in a resurging importance of national economic planning under the name of industrial policy. Among the reasons for renewed focus on planning is the obvious need to address market failure on climate issues. The environment must remain at the heart of our policy. Government needs to stir structural transformation towards sustainable energy production. Environment must be linked to three of the issues that mattered most to a nation –

1. Security;
2. Prosperity, and
3. Society.

The global trading system is being undermined by new geopolitical and national security issues. Mauritius like many other countries needs to review their import dependence, especially for critical goods and services, including food and vaccines. While fully supporting markets to thrive as a facilitating role, Government must also act as a shaper, mover, facilitator and an enabler.

A proposal for strategic policy and planning development in the Prime Minister's Office was also put forward. The Strategic Policy and Planning Department would have been well structured to lead and implement a national strategic plan, but the proposal was abandoned in favour of entrusting strategic economic planning to the newly formed Economic Development Board in 2017. The EDB's planning remains almost totally unfulfilled except for the setting up *Maurice Stratégie* as an armed for Government's economic propaganda. This Bill is seemingly trying to revive the planning function by converting *Maurice Stratégie* into a public body under the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker, there does not seem to be any value added in the changes brought by the Bill to Mauritius Strategy Private Company. Its research output has not continued to boost the credibility of Government's economic projection. Maybe Government hopes by these changes to raise its profile and enhance its influence on the public and international view of economic performance. Putting *Maurice Stratégie* under the Prime Minister's Office rather than a glorified public body under the thumb print of the Ministry of Finance would have better achieved this objective. In any case, the revive future for planning in Mauritius, will remain non-existent despite separating planning from budgeting gives more needed way to longer term consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed irony that the Ministry of Finance is seeking to enhance its planning role while it has failed miserably in ensuring a more efficient allocation of budgetary resources. Programme-Based Budgeting was introduced by the Labour government precisely for this purpose in 2007-2008. Mauritius was regarded as a model of efficient public financial management for other African countries. In 2015, the new MSM regime abolished the Programme-Based Budgeting without reason and justification. No wonder that the country has seen and witnessed such wide misuse and inefficient allocation of public funds. Good planning goes hand in hand with good use of public money.

Mr Speaker, another reprehensible and equally retrograde measure was the abolition of the National Economic and Social Council which only reflects the lack of Government's consideration for participation of private sector, trade union, civil society in national decision making and strategic thinking. Has anybody given thought as to why affordability of residential house is prohibitive for middle class? Where is the analysis to apprise us that Residential

Property Price Index shows a substantial increase of 106.4% from December 2019 to December 2023? It has a cascading effect on the cost of living and the cost of borrowing is higher.

The National Economic Social Council, producer of excellent papers, didn't pay service to the government of the day. I appeared before the National Economic Social Council several times to put cross reforms on sugar and non-sugar sector and on regional and international issues as Minister of respective portfolio.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure had it been still in operation or functioning, the National Economic Social Council would have produced a paper on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement which today, is a lucrative market of 1.1 billion consumers. There should have been discussions at the bar of public opinion. It is to achieve several goals such as creating a competitive environment and achieving sustainable economic growth and development with emphasis being placed on boosting intra-regional trade.

Increasing intra-regional trade remains one of the main goals and this will entail competition among Member States for markets within the African Continental Free Trade Area and from third party countries vying for this lucrative market. These are issues that should be discussed forcefully by our people. Ministers, Trade Unionists and NGOs would have been invited by the National Economic Social Council to put across their policies and be crossed examined. Of course, there was no obligation, but it would have been good to appear before the Council.

Mr Speaker, unfortunately, this Bill does little to enhance the role of strategic planning in furthering our development. As stated earlier, merely creating few jobs for the buzz will not take us long. Yet, we have the potential to be an Ocean State.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: I will now ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Hon. Dhunoo!

(5.55 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to voice out my opinion on the *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill.

Today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we stand at a pivotal moment in our nation's journey towards a more robust and forward thinking economic future whereby the establishment of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board is crucial for several reasons. The introduction of this Bill is not merely a legislative formality. It is a beacon of our Government's commitment to strategic economic planning and development. A commitment that is essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

The *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill represents a significant milestone for Mauritius in an era characterised by rapid global changes. The ability to anticipate shifts, adapt to emerging trends and make informed decision is vital. This Bill serves as a keystone of a thriving nation, enabling us to identify growth, opportunities, enhance our competitiveness, ensure sustainable growth and sustainable development and mitigate risks.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the establishment of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board is a visionary step that will serve as the nerve point for economic planning and research in Mauritius. It will foster strategic vision, facilitate policy formulation and promote active engagement amongst stakeholders. This institution will not only enhance our capacity to formulate sound economic policies but will also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ensure that these policies are reflective of the needs and aspirations of our citizens.

In today's rapidly changing global economic landscape, it is crucial for Mauritius to position itself strategically. The introduction of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board will, hence, equip our Government with the necessary tools to navigate these challenges effectively. By fostering a data driven approach to policy making, we will enhance our resilience against external shocks and ensure that our economic strategies are adaptable to the changing global condition. The *Maurice Stratégie* Board's ability to evaluate Government policies is particularly noteworthy. Through mechanisms such as conducting strategic studies, participating in policy evaluation and driving public debates, the *Maurice Stratégie* Board will play a pivotal role in ensuring that our

policies are effective and responsive to the needs of our citizens. This evaluation process will not only enhance accountability but will also foster a culture of continuous improvement within our Government.

Moreover, the Bill mentions of the establishment of the Strategic Advisory Council which will provide expert advice and guidance to the Board. The Council will consequently further strengthen the institution's capacity to deliver long term strategic plans for Mauritius. As the composition of the Council will consist of individual with diverse expertise, this structure will surely ensure that our strategies are preached by the best available knowledge and practices. By integrating insights from various sectors we can create policies that are not only innovative but also practical and implementable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the primary functions of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board is to undertake in-depth economic research and analysis. This capability will enable the Government to make informed policy choices based on empirical data rather than assumptions. By grounding decision in solid research, *Maurice Stratégie* Board will enhance the effectiveness of Government policies and programmes. *Maurice Stratégie* Board will provide support to the Government through the development of both short-term and long-term plans, visions and strategies. This comprehensive approach will ensure that we are not merely reacting to economic challenges but proactively shaping our future. The ability to conduct in-depth economic research and analysis will empower us to make informed policy choices that reflect the realities of our economy and aspiration of our people.

Furthermore, the *Maurice Stratégie* Board will drive public debate and provide recommendations to support collective choices on social, economic and environmental issues. This engagement is crucial in a democratic society where the voices of our citizen must be heard and considered in the decision making process. By fostering a culture of dialogue and collaboration we can ensure that our policies are not only effective but also widely supported. The M *Maurice Stratégie* Board will play a critical role in evaluating existing Government policies through strategic studies and assessments. The Board will identify areas for improvement and recommend adjustment to enhance policy effectiveness.

This evaluation function is vital for ensuring that Government initiative remains relevant and responsive to the changing circumstances. The Board will serve as a resource centre for the

identification, organisation and evaluation of public consultations and debates. This function will enhance transparency and accountability allowing citizens to engage meaningfully with the policy making process. It is our responsibility as elected representative to ensure that the voices of our constituents are not only heard but also integrated into the policies that govern their lives. As we look to the future, we must recognise that the challenges we face are not insurmountable. With the establishment of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board, we are laying the ground work for a sustainable and prosperous future for our nation. This institution will be instrumental in identifying and publicising successful experiences from around the world that can enrich our own policy framework. By learning from the successes and failures of others, we can craft solutions that are tailored to the unique context of Mauritius.

The *Maurice Stratégie* Board will also play a critical role in ensuring that our economic development is sustainable. In an era where environment concerns are at the forefront of global discourse, it is imperative that our policies reflect a commitment to sustainability. The Board will be tasked with evaluating the environmental impact of our policies and ensuring that the economic growth does not come at the expense of our national resources.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, esteemed colleagues, the *Maurice Stratégie* Board is a lot more than just a legislative document, it represents a testament to our dedication to a prosperous future for Mauritius. By endorsing this Bill, we are taking a decisive step towards economic resilience, innovation and sustainable growth. The *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill is a transformative initiative that will empower our Government to navigate the complexities of the modern world. It is a commitment to evidence-based policy making, public engagement and sustainable development.

Before I end, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank my colleague, hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, for bringing this important Bill to the House and we know how important it will be in the future for the development of our country, Mauritius. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, together we can create a robust framework for economic planning that will lead to improved quality of life for all Mauritians. Let us take this significant step towards a brighter future for our nation. I therefore urge all Members of this esteemed Assembly to support the *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill.

I thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Keep your conversation outside! Thank you. Hon. Uteem, please!

(6.05 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président de séance, le ministre de *l'Economic Planning and Development* nous propose une énième institution, le Maurice Stratégie *Board* pour faire quoi ? Une institution qui va élaborer de nouvelles visions et stratégies et développer un plan d'action à court et long terme. Non mais, sérieusement ! Après dix ans au pouvoir, à la veille des élections générales, Monsieur le ministre réalise qu'il lui faut une institution pour faire des recherches et le conseiller sur sa politique économique ? C'est maintenant que le gouvernement réalise qu'il lui faut un débat sur les grands enjeux sociaux économiques et environnementaux ?

Quel aveu d'échec de taille, M. le président, et ce constat ne peut pas être autrement. Quelle a été la vision économique de ce gouvernement depuis ces dix dernières années ? Déprécier la roupie, augmenter les prix des produits, augmenter le prix de l'essence et du diesel, augmenter les prix des médicaments, augmenter la dette publique, augmenter la taxe. En dix ans de pouvoir, votre stratégie et votre vision économique se résument à taxer, taxer, taxer, dette, dette, dette. Dix ans que le peuple souffre de la cherté de la vie et pour remuer le couteau dans la plaie, l'honorable ministre du Commerce déclare que les Mauriciens vivent bien car il y a une queue devant les restaurants à Bagatelle.

M. le président, cela me fait penser à Marie Antoinette à qui l'on disait que les paysans n'avaient pas de pain et qui répondit qu'ils mangent de la brioche. La déclaration de la ministre du Commerce illustre très bien la distance qui existe aujourd'hui entre ce gouvernement et le peuple ; un gouvernement coupé de la réalité, incapable d'imaginer que le petit peuple souffre. Bientôt, vous aurez à faire face à cet électorat et le réveil sera brutal.

Revenons au projet de loi ! Pourquoi avons-nous besoin de cette nouvelle institution ? On a déjà un ministère du Développement économique qui tombe sous la responsabilité du ministre de Finances. À quoi sert ce ministère ? À quoi sert le ministère de *Economic Planning and Development* ?

Auparavant, on avait des *National Strategic Plan* pour cinq ans. Plus maintenant ! Pourquoi ? Est-ce que l'honorable ministre fait-il toujours confiance à ces économistes qui travaillent au ministère du Développement économique ?

M. le président, c'est ne pas la première fois que le gouvernement essaye d'éviter les économistes, les fonctionnaires dans le développement d'une stratégie économique. La première fois c'était, rappelez-vous, le 22 août 2015. Le Premier ministre et le ministre de Finances d'alors lançaient en grande pompe, avec tout le soutien médiatique – son *High-Powered Committee on Achieving the Second Economic Miracle And Vision 2030*. Vous vous souvenez ? Deuxième miracle économique ? Vision 2030 ?

À cette occasion, il lança et je cite –

“The High-Powered Committee under my Chairmanship will oversee the preparation of a Blueprint for Vision 2030. The Committee will meet as often as needed to further enhance business facilitation and deliver on our investment targets.”

Et écoutez bien –

“If we need to burn the midnight oil to attain our objectives, we are prepared to go that far.”

Burn the midnight oil? 9 years later, the oil is still burning but there is no blueprint? There is no vision? There is only disillusion.

On entendit plus parler de ce fameux *High-Powered Committee*. Deux ans plus tard, juillet 2017, le gouvernement est venu de l'avant avec l'*Economic Development Board*. Quand on voit l'*object clause* du l'*Economic Development Board Act*, premier objet –

“(a) provide strong institutional support for strategic economic planning and ensure greater coherence and effectiveness in economic policy formulation;”

Quand on voit l'*object clause* à la section 4(1) –

The objects of the Economic Development Board shall be to –

“(a) *provide strong institutional support for strategic economic planning and ensure greater coherence and effectiveness in economic policy formulation;*”

Exactement! Exactement, presque mot pour mot les mêmes objets de ce Maurice Stratégie Board. Donc, la personne qui m’a précédée, il n’y a pas de *beacon for economic development*. Ce n’est pas un *significant milestone*. Ce n’est même pas un testament.

Le Premier ministre qui entre-temps avait changé en 2017 dans le premier deal *papa-piti* avait justifié la création de l’EDB en les termes suivants et je cite –

“In fact with the EDB, we are creating a significant institutional support to the formulation of economic policies and for medium term strategic economic planning. This has for many years now, Madam Speaker, been a conspicuous gap in policy formulation.”

The Deputy Speaker: Just correct the words ‘Madam Speaker’.

Mr Uteem: No, I am quoting from what the then hon. Prime Minister was addressing hon. Madam Hanoomanjee who was the Speaker then.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr Uteem: On ne peut pas être plus clair. En 2017, l’*Economic Development Board* a été mis sur pied pour justement formuler les grandes orientations de la politique économique et pour développer une stratégie économique à moyen terme. Pourquoi? Pour citer le Premier ministre –

“... because this has for many years now been a conspicuous gap in policy formulation.”

Parce que le premier ministre réalisa, déjà en 2017, qu’il y avait des lacunes dans la formulation des politiques économique du pays.

M. le président, j’avais intervenu sur ce projet de loi en 2017 et j’étais très sceptique quant à la justesse de confier l’élaboration de la politique économique du gouvernement entre les mains des nominés politiques et je n’ai pas eu tort. Le *cluster* de stratégie de l’EDB a été un fiasco total, manque de personnel qualifié, manque de ressources, recrutements et promotions douteux – *a recipe for disaster*.

Et c'est sans aucune pudeur et loin des projecteurs et du regard du Parlement que l'*EDB*, l'année dernière, en mars 2023, immatriculait une société privée sous le nom Maurice Stratégie, une compagnie privée.

Les *objectives* de cette compagnie privée comme énoncés à la clause 2 de la constitution et entre autres, je cite –

- 1) “*Conduct visioning exercises for Mauritius including the preparation of short, medium and long term plans.*”
- 2) *Undertake in-depth economic research and analysis to support policy choices.*”

Les mêmes objectifs pour l'institution qu'on est en train de créer avec ce projet de loi, même le nom est le même – Maurice Stratégie, compagnie privée et maintenant, on fait Maurice Stratégie Board qui sera connu comme Maurice Stratégie.

Pourquoi avoir créé une compagnie privée l'année dernière alors que le Parlement avait donné la responsabilité à l'*Economic Development Board* de venir de l'avant avec une stratégie économique ? Pourquoi venir avec une compagnie privée quand déjà l'*Economic Development Board* avait les ressources nécessaires pour faire les recherches nécessaires, pour conseiller le gouvernement?

J'espère que l'honorable ministre des Finances va nous dire dans son *summing-up* pourquoi l'*EDB* a créé cette compagnie privée. Quant à moi, je me demande, est-ce qu'on a créé une compagnie privée pour plus d'opacité, pour ne pas avoir à répondre des questions parlementaires sur cette compagnie privée comme dans le cas du *Mauritius Investment Corporation* où le ministre de tutelle refuse systématiquement de répondre aux nombreuses *PQs* et *PNQs* des élus du peuple sur l'utilisation de l'argent par le *Mauritius Investment Corporation* ?

Est-ce qu'on a créé une compagnie privée pour que les règles du *Public Procurement Act* ne s'appliquent pas à cette compagnie privée, pour mieux dilapider les fonds publics ou simplement pour caser les petits copains copines du gouvernement et de ses acolytes?

Ah, je crois que j'ai touché le point sensible, 'Maurice Stratégie' a été créé pour caser les proches du pouvoir et surtout pour permettre qu'il ou elle touche un salaire bien au-dessus de la grille salariale applicable aux employés de l'*Economic Development Board*, parce que si vous êtes employés par l'*Economic Development Board*, vous avez un certain niveau de salaire parce qu'il y a différents *cluster*. Il y a le *cluster* d'*Enterprise Mauritius, Board of Investment, FSPA*. Donc, on ne peut pas donner à un économiste un salaire plus élevé que les autres membres de l'*EDB*. Mais à travers une compagnie privée, certainement on peut les faire et selon mes renseignements, on l'a fait. Il y a des gens qui ont été employés par cette compagnie – 'Maurice Stratégie' avec des salaires très alléchants.

Aujourd'hui, à travers ce projet de loi, on va réglementer tous ces employés contractuels et les placer sur l'*establishment* pour qu'ils puissent toucher une pension.

Donc, aujourd'hui, M. le président, on est appelés à voter une loi pour que le ministre puisse caser ses protégés et leur payer le salaire qu'il voudra sans passer par l'Assemblée nationale. Les six membres du *Strategic Advisory Council*, les deux postes sur le *Board* sous la clause 6(3), l'*Executive Director* sous la clause 8 seront tous rémunérés selon le bon vouloir du ministre de tutelle. Donc, pas la peine de passer par le *Board* de Maurice Stratégie, pas la peine d'aller voir l'*Economic Development Board*. Aujourd'hui, avec cette loi, l'honorable ministre contrôle au moins neuf personnes: six personnes sur le *Strategic Advisory Council* et deux sur le *Board* et l'*Executive Director*. Donc, il peut choisir ce qu'il veut et payer la somme qu'il veut.

Et quelles qualifications ces personnes devront posséder ? Rien ! Il n'y a rien. Il n'y a aucune mention dans ce projet de loi de quelles seront les qualifications requises pour occuper un de ces postes. Un projet de loi digne de ce nom aurait au moins prévu une qualification minimum, au moins un *master*, un doctorat en économie, 15 ans ou plus d'expérience au plus haut niveau. Mais aujourd'hui, la seule qualification requise, c'est '*fit and proper person of high integrity*'.

Voilà, M. les députés, le projet de loi qu'on nous propose aujourd'hui à la veille des élections générales. *Jobs for the boys*, payés des deniers publics en toute opacité. Un sentiment de déjà-vu certainement parce que j'étais là en 2017 quand on avait voté l'*Economic Development Board Act*, et je suis sûr qu'on aura le même résultat.

Avant de terminer, M. le président, je vais juste attirer l'attention de l'honorable ministre sur deux points. Premièrement, je crois qu'il y a une erreur de frappe à la section 6(3) –

“(3) *The members referred to in subsection (2)(g) and (h) shall –*
 (a) *be appointed by the Minister; and*”

Je pense que cela doit être au lieu de (2)(g) et (2)(h), plutôt (2)(h) et (2)(i), c'est-à-dire le représentant de l'académie et du secteur privé.

Et finalement, à la clause 19, je crois que l'honorable ministre des Finances n'a pas bien lu ce qui est prévu à la clause 19. Je le lis –

“*Any person [Je dis bien any person] or public sector agency who has any information relating to research or planning shall, on request, provide such information to the Executive Director.*”

Quand on dit ‘*any person*’, mais c'est grave. On ne parle pas de *Public Centre Agency*. *Public Centre Agency*, je n'ai aucun problème moi, mais quand vous dites que *any person who has any information relating to research*, donc, moi, je suis dans le secteur privé, j'ai fait des recherches privées, je dois communiquer toute information que j'ai à l'*Executive Director* et si je ne le fais, pas sous la section 21(2), je peux faire face à une amende allant jusqu'à R 500 000 et un terme de prison de 5 ans.

Donc, moi, je pense qu'à la section 19 on devra biffer ou du moins mettre des gardes fous parce que sinon, n'importe quelle personne qui fait des recherches aura l'obligation de donner, sans *copyright*, sous la *Data Protection Act*, sous le *Copyright Act*, toutes ses recherches au directeur général. Je pense que ce n'est pas l'intention prévue par ce projet de loi.

Voilà, M. le président, merci de m'avoir écouté. Je vous remercie.

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

(6.21 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are in presence of a very interesting Bill before this House and it is my pleasure, of course, to say a few words in support of this important piece of legislation.

In a dynamic and ever-changing global environment, the Mauritian economy continues to grow, to strengthen and to expand. Over the years, we have built a resilient economy. As opposed to a monocrop economy a few decades ago, the country has transformed into a competitive, well-diversified and broad-based one with several pillars such as tourism, manufacturing, financial services, ICT. From 400 USD in 1968 when we obtained our independence, the per capita income has constantly been growing to surpass the 10,000 USD.

The country has revisited its ecosystem in order to enhance its ease of doing business. Our ranking over the past years speaks for itself. On the strength of our reputation as well as our economic, social, but more importantly, on our political stability, we have preferential market access to nearly 70% of the world's population through the following –

- China Free Trade Agreement;
- Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India;
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA);
- Southern African Development Community (SADC);
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA);
- European Union Economic Partnership Agreement (EU-EPAs);
- ESA – UK Economic Partnership Agreement;
- Generalised System of Preferences (GSP),
- Indian Ocean Commission.

Yet, we still face challenges for sure. For instance, food security, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The world's population is growing rapidly and it is estimated that by year 2050, 9.3 billion people will be living on this planet and they will all need access to sufficient nutritious food.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is of view that natural resources are being depleted too much and we cannot feed that many people using the same methods used to grow food to date. Climate change is the biggest threat we face. If we do not tackle it, the consequences are grim. We have to constantly enhance our resilience to its effects.

Another looming challenge is that according to the World Economic Forum, 60% of the workforce will need re-skilling in the next five years. As we move deeper into the digital age, there is an increasing importance of talent, skills and human creativity in the global economy, especially in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution characterised by the rise of AI, robotics and other advanced technologies. Geopolitical conflicts and tensions are fuelling a surge of economic fragmentation and protectionism around the world. The global economy is being affected both directly and indirectly through financial, trade and commodity price channels.

The global drug problem presents a multifaceted challenge that touches the lives of millions worldwide. The impact of drug trafficking and organised crime is far-reaching and complex. We have to amplify our efforts and scale up interventions and international cooperation to resist and combat drug-related international organised crime. All the aforementioned challenges, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, compel us to revisit our economic architecture so that it responds to the ever-changing business, trade and social exigencies. As the saying goes ‘the only constant in life is change.’

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the world’s business and political leaders gathered in January 2018 at the annual Economic Forum in Davos, the mood was jubilant. Christine Lagarde, then the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), declared “the global economy is in a very sweet spot.”

One year later, that is, in 2019, a global pandemic hit. A lot has happened between then and now. War erupted in Europe and the Middle East. Tensions between major economies boiled.

And global growth momentum slowed down. It has suddenly seemed as if almost everything we thought we knew about the world economy was wrong.

Globalisation is clearly evolving in unpredictable ways. Globalisation hastened climate change and deepened inequalities. Nobody predicted that the planet would be hit by a pandemic of the scale that we have known four years ago. Nobody ever realised a war between Russia and Ukraine could have such devastating economic consequences over major part of the world. But again, we face them from a position of strength. And we face them together.

We are driving the kind of economic growth that will ensure every generation of Mauritians can reach their full potential. Our work is far from over. We must redouble our efforts to tackle the pressing issues that still confront us. We want to pursue our mission to create a more just, prosperous and inclusive society. In order to remain steadfast in our determination to deliver results, we need the right policies and strategies in place. This is precisely why the *Maurice Stratégie* Board Bill is of utmost importance.

Maurice Stratégie Co. Ltd was previously established as a think tank for the Government of Mauritius, operationalised under the Economic Development Board (EDB). Its aim was to be the leading source of data-driven evidence based socio-economic reports and insights to shape the country's policies for inclusive and sustainable economic development. And the best way to respond is a subject of fierce debate. But what is certain is that the economy of yesterday is not a guarantee that it will be the economy of today or tomorrow. Things have changed and are still changing rapidly. So, we cannot be static.

Economic transformation has always been a key priority for us. We must remain agile and continue to grow our economy by seizing new opportunities, and making ourselves more productive, innovative and competitive. This is why I fully welcome the setting up of the *Maurice Stratégie* Board as a body corporate.

The proposed research and planning bureau will serve as the backbone of strategic development. Its mission will be to gather, analyse, and disseminate critical information about policy and operational decisions, as clearly detailed in clause 4 of the Bill. By leveraging data and insights, *Maurice Stratégie* will enable authorities to identify and navigate challenges, and seize opportunities effectively.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our country has shown remarkable progress in pioneering new ideas and innovations. We have constantly developed policies to transform Mauritius in a highly competitive, export-oriented and digital economy. We are always striving for stable macroeconomic balances, sustainable debt, enhanced productivity, inclusive economic growth and increased global economic integration.

We are also very focused on creating a favourable investment climate, and boosting employment. We are always aiming at enhancing the ease of doing business. We want to have a strong economy; a strong economy that is clear about its purpose; a strong economy that outperforms the last decade, both in terms of economic output and economic activity.

So, how do we achieve all that? Research is the cornerstone of any efficient and effective initiative. *Maurice Stratégie* will be equipped with the human capital and tools to conduct a range of methodologies to ensure that our strategies are grounded in solid evidence.

As I go through the clause 5 (1) (a) and (b) of the Bill with regard to the Functions and powers of *Maurice Stratégie*, I see that the Bureau will “conduct prospective work” and “undertake strategic studies”. I believe that it is crucial for the Government to have evidence-based information to formulate policies that are implemented successfully. For instance, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if I may cite the example of the financial services sector, which has emerged as one of the most important pillars of the Mauritian economy. My Ministry has observed that the real contribution of the sector to the economy is not fully captured. This is the reason for which this year the Ministry has enlisted the services of a consultant to conduct an economic impact assessment of the financial services sector to assess the direct, indirect, induced and catalytic effect of this sector on our economy.

Evaluation is key to generating robust evidence on government interventions. Interventions include policies, programmes or new service delivery models. Evaluation ensures that government expenditure is spent wisely and, ultimately, provides effective and efficient services for the public. *Maurice Stratégie* will be empowered as per clause 5 (1) (d) to assess government policies.

Planning is where vision meets action. I believe *Maurice Stratégie* will play a crucial role in crafting strategic plans that align with national goals. By setting measurable objectives and identifying key performance indicators, we create roadmaps that guide our efforts. This strategic foresight will allow us to anticipate changes and respond proactively.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *Maurice Stratégie* improves democratic governance as clause 5 (1) (d) provides for public consultations and debates. Public consultation is a mean to give the

people a stronger and clearer voice in the policy process. It helps to improve policymakers' understanding of the public and is likely to help Government to be more proactive in addressing challenges. Public consultation is a way to draw on the collective intelligence and even wisdom of the society as a whole.

We need people to be at the very heart of our economy. An economy that works for everyone and for everybody. We need people that can share in our national success. To achieve that, why not consider their voice in our policy process? And this is precisely what *Maurice Stratégie* will strive to do. And I believe this will be instrumental to promote the emergence of new constructive developments.

Clause 5 (2) (b) of the Bill invites any public sector agency to submit requested data to *Maurice Stratégie* in the conduct of its activities. History shows us that the most amazing things happen when people or institutions come together to beat tough challenges. Challenges can only be tackled through partnerships. I have no doubt that the collaborative spirit will prevail as we believe that *Maurice Stratégie* will ensure that insights are shared and integrated into every aspect of its operations.

I have gone through clause 6 of the Bill regarding the constitution of the Board of *Maurice Stratégie*. Research has shown that the best approach to solving problems is to integrate the views of large numbers of people who are each likely to bring unique perspectives. The integration of these perspectives effectively pools knowledge and tends to produce conclusions that reflect a greater intelligence. The proposed board composition of *Maurice Stratégie* reflects the diverse perspectives, creative strategies and broad range of insights that will be brought to the table.

Clause 11 of the Bill provides for the establishment of a Strategic Advisory Council. Given the functions and powers of the Council as specified in Clause 12, I believe it will form the powerhouse in spearheading efforts to promote socio-economic growth.

Clause 11(4) lays emphasis on the appointment of members who are fit and proper persons of high integrity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has shaped its destiny as a resilient and vibrant economy with the guidance of people who inspire confidence and uphold the values that define a just and prosperous society. And we cannot stop overlooking this fact in our discussions for progress. Because people will remain our greatest assets.

In times of adversity, it is the determination of competent people with the right skills that enable us to weather storms and emerge stronger. And here we are talking about seeking the guidance and advice of experts to help in formulating policies that will be instrumental in creating and driving employment, wealth, and sustainable development and growth in the future.

I have no doubt that the members of the Strategic Advisory Council with their experience will be innovators, creators and hardworking individuals who will use their skills, knowledge and talent to propel our country forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Members can rest assured that the principles of proper governance, transparency and accountability are enshrined.

Clause 15 of the Bill makes provision for the copy...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, with all due respect, I think you are allocated about 15 minutes, I have allowed you some 3 minutes almost. I am mindful to allow you to conclude as well.

Mr Bholah: Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Clause 15 of the Bill makes provision for the copy of the annual report and audited accounts of *Maurice Stratégie* to be laid before the Assembly.

Maurice Stratégie will not serve merely as a support function. It is all set to be a strategic partner in our journey towards excellence. We can seize new opportunities for growth, improve the lives of all citizens, and build on our shared economic future together.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I suspend the Sitting for some 10 minutes.

At 6.38 p.m. the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.58 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated. My apologies for taking a bit longer.

Hon. Minister Padayachy, are you ready?

Dr. Padayachy: Yes!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avant de démarrer mon propos, permettez-moi de remercier les orateurs pour leur participation aux débats sur la création de Maurice Stratégie. Nous achevons aujourd'hui une pierre angulaire de notre programme gouvernemental pour la législature 2020-2024. Grâce à l'institutionnalisation de Maurice Stratégie qui reprendra les fonctions et les pouvoirs de Maurice Stratégie Company Limited, l'entité agira en tant que bureau de recherche et de planification.

Ces dernières années, nous nous sommes attachés à remettre l'économie sur les rails après la pandémie de la Covid-19 et ses effets désastreux aux quatre coins du monde comme chez nous. En équation avec la philosophie humaniste de notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, nous n'avons eu de cesse d'améliorer le pouvoir d'achat des ménages mauriciens et à réduire les inégalités à la suite de la hausse des prix dû à des chocs extérieurs, échappant à notre contrôle. Notre économie se porte bien mieux aujourd'hui. Elle est plus résistante et plus solide qu'elle ne l'a jamais été. Avec une croissance de 8,9% en 2022 et de 7% en 2023, notre parcours poste Covid-19 illustre la résilience des Mauriciens et le courage de ce gouvernement. Pour 2024, nous prévoyons une croissance de PIB, toujours robuste de 6,5%, un taux de chômage en deçà des 6% et une dette publique passant sous la barre des 75%.

M. le président, notre économie se porte bien et c'est en cette période de forte croissance qu'il nous faut anticiper sur l'avenir. En un mot, il s'agit de créer plutôt que de subir. En tant que responsable publique, nous devons préparer le futur de cette génération de Mauriciens et des suivantes et cela comme vous le savez dans un contexte mondial très incertain. Il nous faut nous armer contre de potentiels futurs chocs tout en redessinant les contours d'une stratégie nationale

qui nous apportera des niveaux de croissance et de développement toujours plus élevé. Dans ce contexte, Maurice Stratégie sera le véhicule qui nous aidera à atteindre cette destination.

M. le président, depuis la pandémie nous avons constaté dans le monde entier que la planification est de nouveaux à l'ordre du jour. L'adage 'mieux vaut prévenir que guérir' a trouvé tout son sens et sa raison dans les épreuves que nous avons dû affronter ces dernières années. Dans le paysage global actuel, marqué par des conditions économiques imprévisibles et les effets croissants du changement climatique, l'importance de la planification et de la recherche socio-économique ne peut être surestimée. C'est particulièrement vrai pour les petits états insulaires en développement comme Maurice où les vulnérabilités sont amplifiées et où la résilience est essentielle au progrès et à la croissance.

Grâce à la création de Maurice Stratégie comme organe statutaire, la planification et l'élaboration de politiques fondées sur les données et des faits nous permettront d'allouer stratégiquement les ressources, d'anticiper les défis et de saisir les opportunités en veillant à ce que notre trajectoire de développement sont à la fois durable et inclusive. Nous ne devons pas nous tromper car les choix d'aujourd'hui formeront notre situation de demain et dans cette réalité en perpétuelle évolution, plusieurs défis de taille nous attendent.

M. le président, comme dans beaucoup de pays qui alignent croissance économique et progrès social, l'espérance de vie augmente. Signe de notre cheminement vers une économie développée, ce phénomène s'accompagne du vieillissement de notre population. Cette tendance aura bien entendu des implications au long terme sur la formulation de nos politiques publiques qu'il nous faut calibrer sur cette nouvelle donne. Je pense notamment aux services de santé ou encore aux politiques de l'emploi. Il nous faut dès maintenant plancher sur ces questions structurelles pour s'assurer que notre croissance économique maintienne son *momentum*.

M. le président, un autre grand défi sur lequel Maurice Stratégie sera attendu est celui des infrastructures. Afin d'améliorer encore davantage notre efficacité économique, nous devons disposer d'infrastructures adéquates, notamment en ce qui concerne les réseaux de transport, d'énergie et de communication. Il est impératif de trouver des solutions à la taille limitée de notre marché et élargir nos horizons économiques pour réaliser des économies d'échelle. Cela

rendra la production locale plus compétitive et augmentera notre indépendance à l'égard des importations.

M. le président, c'est deux exemples montrent bien en quoi la planification de long terme doit faire partie intégrante de la formulation de notre stratégie économique. Il est évident que nous avons besoin de politiques fondées sur des recherches rigoureuses et des données précises pour répondre aux besoins réels de notre société d'obtenir des résultats tangibles.

Pour les petits états insulaires en développement où les ressources sont limitées, la marge d'erreur est mince. Ne prenons pas ici à Maurice le risque des décisions mal informées. Bien au contraire, nous devons prendre des décisions éclairées qui concilient les besoins immédiats et les objectifs à long terme en favorisant la stabilité économique et l'équité sociale. En plus de leur indéniable intérêt économique, ces approches fondées sur des données améliorent également la transparence, augmente la confiance des opérateurs et garantissent l'efficacité des interventions publiques. À cet égard, Maurice Stratégie sera l'épine dorsale de notre stratégie socio-économique. Dans le cadre de son mandat, elle fournira des données et les analyses nécessaires pour éclairer la prise de décision. En se concentrant sur l'analyse des dynamiques économiques locales et internationales des impacts environnementaux et du développement social, cette nouvelle entité sera chargée de guider notre nation à travers les complexités du monde contemporain et avenir.

M. le président, nous avons veillé à ce que le projet de loi sur Maurice Stratégie tienne compte de tous ces éléments. La rédaction du mandat de l'institution s'est appuyée sur les meilleures pratiques internationale en s'inspirant de l'expérience d'institutions similaires ailleurs telles que France Stratégie, le Bureau Fédéral du Plan Belge et le Bureau D'analyse de la Politique Economique des Pays-Bas.

À cet effet, nous avons travaillé avec Expertise France et l'Agence Française de Développement qui ont délégué un expert Maurice pour mettre en place Maurice Stratégie, entreprendre le renforcement des capacités et travailler sur ce projet de loi. Je voudrais informer à la Chambre que Maurice Stratégie est déjà opérationnel en tant que société privée à responsabilité limitée depuis mars 2023 comme entité à but spécifique sous l'égide de l'*Economic Development Board*. Ce dernier avait déjà, en partie, pour mandat d'entreprendre la

planification économique. L'*EDB* se concentra désormais sur la promotion des investissements et des exports.

Maurice Stratégie, par le biais de ce projet de loi, bénéficiera d'une autonomie totale pour concentrer tous ses efforts sur la recherche et la planification économique pour le pays. Depuis sa création, Maurice Stratégie a déjà soumis au gouvernement un certain nombre de documents de recherche qui ont contribué à la définition ou à la révision de certaines politiques socio-économiques.

Maurice Stratégie a fourni un certain nombre de prévisions économiques aussi concernant les principaux indicateurs économiques et l'exercice de modélisation a été pertinent pour évaluer la conjoncture de l'économie.

Pour le budget 2023-2024, Maurice Stratégie a collaboré avec mon ministère afin d'évaluer l'impact économique de la réforme fiscale de l'impôt sur le revenu des personnes physiques. Cette grande réforme a permis à chaque contribuable de réduire ses impôts. L'institution a également travaillé sur des études qui ont évalué l'impact des mesures socio-économiques du gouvernement, cherchant à évaluer leur impact à la fois sur le PIB et sur les inégalités. Une étude sur la pénurie de main-d'œuvre a également été menée. Elle avait pour objet d'analyser le nombre de postes actuellement vacants dans l'économie et d'estimer l'impact de ce manque à gagner sur notre PIB.

Cette étude a jeté les bases de la constitution d'un comité de pilotage présidé par le secrétaire aux affaires intérieures. Ce dernier a d'ailleurs formulé un certain nombre de recommandations qui ont été prises en considération. Maurice Stratégie a également soumis un rapport sur le potentiel de production de l'économie mauricienne et a identifié des leviers pour améliorer la performance à long terme de l'économie. Maurice Stratégie mène également des enquêtes trimestrielles sur les sentiments économiques auprès du secteur privé afin d'évaluer le niveau de confiance des entreprises dans l'économie locale et dans tous les secteurs d'activités économiques.

Ce faisant, ces différents rapports constituent un pertinent support pour le gouvernement afin d'identifier les défis et les opportunités en temps réel et de prendre les mesures appropriées. Ils sont encore renforcés par les réunions régulières tenues par le comité mixte public-privé et

organisées par Maurice Stratégie et EDB. M. le président, depuis sa création, Maurice Stratégie a travaillé avec un certain nombre d'institutions internationales. Il s'agit notamment de la Banque mondiale, de l'OCDE, des Nations unies, du PNUD, l'UNECA, l'AFD et de l'Organisation internationale du travail. Ces différentes coopérations ont permis d'améliorer les capacités internes de recherche des équipes de Maurice Stratégie et de développer de nouveaux modèles adaptés aux exigences du paysage mauricien.

Aujourd'hui, Maurice Stratégie dispose déjà d'un modèle d'équilibre général pour évaluer l'impact des politiques. L'entité possède aussi un modèle de micro-simulation basé sur la méthodologie du *commitment to equity* dont le but est d'évaluer l'impact sur les inégalités et la pauvreté. Enfin, un modèle macro-économique pour prévoir les principaux indicateurs économiques a également été élaboré.

M. le président, ces modèles ont été testés et se sont révélés efficaces. En septembre 2023, alors que le taux de croissance du PIB était estimé à 4,6 % par le FMI, Maurice Stratégie avait prévu une croissance du PIB de 7,3 %. Les chiffres définitifs de l'année 2023 s'établissent à 7,1 %.

De même, en février de cette année, le modèle de Maurice Stratégie prévoyait un taux de croissance du PIB de 6,5 % pour 2024. À cette époque, le FMI prévoyait 3,6 %. Les derniers chiffres de *Statistics Mauritius* montrent un alignement de cette prévision à 6,5 %, soit le même taux de croissance anticipé par Maurice Stratégie.

M. le président, afin de préparer un avenir prospère, durable et inclusif pour tous les Mauriciens, Maurice Stratégie travaille actuellement sur un certain nombre d'études et de dossiers additionnels. Il s'agit de la révision du *Proxy Means Tests* utilisés pour déterminer l'éligibilité à l'assistance dans le cadre du *Social Register of Mauritius*. L'analyse du nouveau seuil de pauvreté relative pour mesurer la pauvreté à Maurice est l'établissement des critères pour évaluer les ménages vulnérables.

Maurice Stratégie progresse également sur le développement de nouveaux modèles pour évaluer les impacts environnementaux des politiques publiques et analyser le potentiel du développement de la *care economy*. L'entité commencera bientôt à travailler sur un plan stratégique pour Rodrigues. M. le président, ce que le projet de loi vise à réaliser, c'est le plein potentiel d'une organisation naissante qui travaille déjà à plein régime. Cela permettra de lui

fournir une structure pérenne, transparente et autonome au sein de laquelle elle pourra réaliser son mandat. Cela inclut le pouvoir de demander des informations pertinentes, des documents, des résultats de recherche, des données à toutes les agences du secteur public.

Il s'agit d'une pratique courante dans les institutions homologues établies au niveau international. A titre d'exemple, la loi de 1994 relative à la création du bureau fédéral du plan en Belgique stipule que les administrations fédérales, les entreprises et les organismes publics se doivent de fournir au bureau fédéral du plan toutes les informations nécessaires à l'accomplissement de ces missions. Cette pratique répliquée à Maurice permettra à Maurice Stratégie d'avoir un accès complet aux ressources nécessaires pour remplir son mandat.

M. le président, certains s'inquiètent également du fait que la structure de gouvernance de Maurice Stratégie soit composée de personnes nommées par des personnalités publiques. Permettez-moi d'ôter quelconque doute sur ce sujet. Afin de garantir une approche unifiée au sein des agences gouvernementales, le conseil d'administration de Maurice Stratégie sera composé principalement de personnes occupant des postes spécifiques au sein des agences concernées et non de personnes spécifiquement nommées à titre individuel. Ces nominations sont basées sur l'expertise de chaque poste visé.

M. le président, dans le cadre d'une démarche significative en faveur d'une plus grande représentativité, nous élargissons la composition du conseil d'administration de Maurice Stratégie. Cela conformément aux suggestions reçues lors des consultations avec diverses parties prenantes, y compris les associations du secteur privé et les partenaires internationaux du développement. Cela permettra que les perspectives critiques du secteur privé et du monde universitaire soient directement représentées à la table des discussions de Maurice Stratégie.

M. le président, en tant qu'entreprise privée, *Maurice Stratégie Co. Ltd* ne bénéficie pas de l'ensemble des protections juridiques nécessaires à son travail. La transformation de Maurice Stratégie en organisme statutaire viendra apporter une réponse pragmatique à cet important aspect. Une fois voté, ce projet protégera ainsi Maurice Stratégie, les membres de son conseil d'administration et son personnel pour tout ce qu'ils ont accompli ou omis de bonne foi dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions au titre de la présente loi.

Des garanties similaires existent dans les lois portant à la création d'autres institutions à Maurice et au niveau international comme France Stratégie. M. le président, dans le climat

mondial actuel caractérisé par les bouleversements entraînés par la pandémie de la Covid-19 et les incertitudes géopolitiques persistantes, il est essentiel pour Maurice de favoriser la résilience économique à long terme.

Comme l'avait si justement écrit Antoine de Saint-Exupéry –

« Tout objectif sans plan n'est qu'un souhait. »

Afin de faire de la vision de ce gouvernement une réalité pour tous les Mauriciens d'aujourd'hui et de demain, l'institut Maurice Stratégie est, M. le président, un moment clé, tout comme l'a été le vote du projet de loi des finances 2024 la semaine dernière dans cette auguste Assemblée et auquel l'opposition ne s'est même pas donnée la peine d'y assister.

L'absence de l'opposition mardi dernier alors que nous avons débattu et voté des dispositions essentielles pour améliorer le quotidien des Mauriciens allant de la revalorisation des pensions, à l'introduction du *School Allowance* en passant par la hausse de la *CSG Allowance* est tout simplement inacceptable. Comment peut-on faire fi d'une telle tradition démocratique et montrer si peu de décorum pour les institutions de ce pays ?

Ce matin encore, j'ai observé sans surprise que certains des membres de l'opposition ne se sont pas levés à l'entrée du président de la Chambre dans l'Assemblée, ni même des insignes parlementaires.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Dr. Padayachy: Quel manque de respect, M. le président ! L'honorable leader de l'opposition nous parle de planification économique en regardant 50 ans en arrière. Nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, le faisons en regardant 50 ans devant nous.

Au lieu de ce retour en arrière proposé par l'opposition, nous créons l'accélération du développement en le planifiant dans le futur.

Et l'honorable Uteem qui n'est qu'arrogance et j'aimerais lui dire que là où l'ignorance crie avec arrogance, le silence enseigne avec élégance. Monsieur le député, cela fait 20 ans que vous êtes dans l'opposition, posez-vous la bonne question – pourquoi ? L'arrogance, très cher député !

M. le président, plus que jamais, Maurice besoin de choix éclairé afin d’être mieux préparé à relever stratégiquement les défis à venir et à ouvrir des perspectives de transformation pour répondre aux attentes et aux aspirations de chaque citoyen. Ce projet de loi contribuera au changement de paradigme amorcé par le gouvernement de l’honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth dans l’élaboration des politiques. Ensemble, s’appuyant sur des faits et des chiffres, nous définirons les contours économiques, sociaux et environnementaux de Maurice pour les décennies à venir avec vigueur, volonté et enthousiasme.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.

I now commend the Bill to the House and I will move for an amendment at Committee Stage to clause 6, in subclause (3), by deleting the words “subsection (2)(g) and (h)” and replacing them by the words “subsection (2)(h) and (i)”.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

THE MAURICE STRATÉGIE BOARD BILL

(NO. XI of 2024)

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 (The Board)

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 6 –

In clause 6, in subclause (3), by deleting the words “subsection (2)(g) and (h)” and replacing them by the words “subsection (2)(h) and (i)”.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 7 to 25 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Maurice Stratégie Board Bill (No. XI of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE STATE LANDS (AMENDMENT) BILL

(No. XII of 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, please.

(7.22 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the State Lands (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2024) be read a second time.

M. le président, j'aurais pu déclarer comme certains que j'interviens *under protest* tant j'ai été écœuré par le comportement scandaleux de l'opposition lors de la séance du 18 juin. Avec les tentatives sans précédent historique d'intimider les députés ayant voulu accéder à l'hémicycle pour remplir le devoir qui est le leur. J'aurais pu vous demander, M. le président, d'intervenir *under protest because of the utter lack of respect for the decorum of the House* en refusant de se lever à l'arrivée du président de l'Assemblée nationale. Ce matin même, comme le disait avant

moi, Monsieur le ministre des Finances. Mais je ne peux intervenir *under protest* parce que les règlements qui gouvernent nos travaux, les *Standing Orders*, ne le permettent pas et que nous, contrairement à certains, sommes respectueux des règles.

Ms Anquetil: Ah oui !

The Deputy Prime Minister: Ah oui, Madame!

(Interruptions)

Qui plus est, M. le président, ...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Phokeer pe riye dan so lakaz.*

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... j'aurais pu déclarer que je ne serais pas présent à l'Assemblée aujourd'hui pour répondre aux interpellations de l'opposition ou pour présenter en deuxième lecture ce projet de loi en prétextant exiger des excuses au préalable de l'opposition après leur comportement inacceptable lors des deux dernières séances.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mais, M. le président ...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mais, M. le président, vous conviendrez que je ne peux m'absenter de la Chambre.

An hon. Member: *Malelve !*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, with all due respect, I would like you to go towards the Bill.

An hon. Member: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Prime Minister: Bien sûr. Je ne peux m'absenter. Je dois présenter ce projet de loi...

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

The Deputy Prime Minister :... parce qu'il est de mon devoir d'être présent à chaque que siège l'Assemblée nationale par respect pour vous, par respect pour le législatif et que contrairement à certains, nous sommes respectueux de l'électorat. Et, que ce soit dans l'opposition ou au gouvernement moi je n'ai jamais, contrairement à certains, manqué à mon devoir.

That said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am going to speak on this Bill and the Labour-MMM Opposition is free to walk out as has become for them the rule.

An hon. Member: Under protest!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Under protest, *effectivement*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe it is imperative to set...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Gentleman!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Honourable!

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

Mr Quirin: ... *gagn dimal dan mahebourg!*

Mr Toussaint: *Pas gagn mo traka dan mahebourg. Gagn to prop taka twa !*

Mr Quirin: *Mo pa gagn to traka moi !*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Mr Quirin: ... *Pointe Jerome to pa le...*

Mr Toussaint: *Be li pe gagn mo traka. Dir li aret gagn mo traka!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Toussaint: *Get to zafer twa!*

The Deputy Speaker: I think I will ask both of you to go for a cup of coffee.

Hon. Toussaint, you want to go for a cup of coffee with him? Do you want to go for a cup of coffee with him?

Mr Toussaint: *Non! Sûrement pas!*

The Deputy Speaker: So, quiet please! Allow the Deputy Prime Minister to continue. I want to listen to him.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Balgobin: Under protest...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Balgobin! I think you want to make the coffee.

Please continue!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. So, allow me to set the context to explain the rationale for this amendment to the State Land Act and to dispel any misunderstanding after what I read this Sunday.

The State Land Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a very old piece of legislation which has been amended on multiple occasions. Together with the *Pas Géométriques Act*, it provides a framework governing State land, the management of State land in Mauritius.

At the very outset, I think it is apposite to note that out of the total land surface of the island of Mauritius, State land represents only 20% corresponding to 88,000 arpents, the rest being private free-owned land. Of that 20%, which is State land, 70% is under the control of what is now the Ministry of Agro-Industry – 70% over multiple land features including forest reserves and forests.

So, the State land, administered by the Ministry of Housing and Lands, represents 30% of all the State land of the country, that is, approximately 26,000 arpents. The use of such land is governed by zoning principles. The zoning principles date back to the 1980s, before that there was no zoning and have been revised in the 1990s. And these zoning principles classify the State lands which Housing and Land administers as either within the settlement areas/boundaries that is residential or outside the settlement boundaries. Such land as is administered by the Ministry of Housing and Lands is vested in different Ministries as and when required for infrastructural developments and various economic and social projects.

Additionally, the Ministry of Housing and Land has historically offered land on lease either for industrial purposes or for residential purposes. Industrial purposes would include hotels, industrial plants, commercial developments and at this point in time, there are 920 sites which are leased for industrial purposes and about 12,800 residential sites which are all building site leases which are leased, and these 12,800 include approximately 1,600 *campement* site leases, that figure being dynamic.

This is the background. Now, to explain this, I would like to distinguish between State land that can be sold to occupiers and State land that cannot be sold to occupiers. Let me begin by the State land that cannot be sold. We have three situations –

1. *Pas Géométriques*, this is the first situation;
2. Railway tracks, and
3. Defence land.

So, irrespective of size, whether those plots are small or large, they simply cannot be sold.

First, *Pas Géométriques*, there are approximately 7,000 arpents of State land that are classified as *Pas Géométriques* that can be leased but can never be sold. I said approximately 1,600 *campement* site leases which nowadays are leased for 60 years but also within the concept of *Pas Géométriques*, approximately 2,400 ex-CHA sites/plots which can be leased but which can never be sold. The principle is found in the *Pas Géométriques* Act which defines *Pas Géométriques* as ‘*domaine public*’, that is, inalienable and imprescriptible according to sections 2(1), 3(1) and 4(1) of the *Pas Géométriques* Act as amended in 1981 and thereafter.

Section 2(1) stipulates that –

“(1) The reserved lands along the sea coast commonly called the ‘Pas Géométriques’ and referred to in the Arrêté of Général Decaen of 5 May 1807, shall form part of the ‘domaine public’ and be inalienable and imprescriptible.”

Section 3(1) defines what is *Pas Géométriques* because I am sometimes told that a plot of land is not on the sea front and yet it is *Pas Géométriques*. Indeed, section 3(1) explains that –

“(1) The breadth of the ‘Pas Géométriques’ shall be reckoned from the line of the seashore which is reached by high water at spring tide, and shall never be less than 81 metres and 21 centimetres.”

So, a plot of land may be 80 metres away from the seashore and still be *Pas Géométriques*.

Section 4(1) includes within the definition of *Pas Géométriques*, it says –

“(1) The ponds of sea water, salt water marshes, lakes, bogs and basins situate wholly or partly upon the ‘Pas Géométriques’, the islets adjacent to the shore and which can be reached on foot at low tide, the creeks at the mouths of rivers, and the mouths of rivers, shall be deemed annexes of the ‘Pas Géométriques’, shall form part of the ‘domaine public’ and shall be inalienable and imprescriptible.”

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Pas Géométriques* principle was established during the French colonial period. It was established for the defence of the island and public utility. That is why it is called *domaine public* but this is not only Mauritius. Such *Pas Géométriques* have been established in other former French colonies or actual departments such as *la Réunion, la Guyane, Mayotte, Guadeloupe, la Martinique* and these reserves are now mostly managed for conservation purposes in view of mitigating coastal erosion and they are still, of course, *domaine public*.

Pas Géométriques, Mr Speaker, Sir, include 2,380 building sites in Mauritius and as I said, they cannot be sold. We have 136 such sites in Pamplemousses District, 328 in Rivière du Rempart District, 116 in Flacq, 498 in Grand Port, 550 in Savanne, 752 in Black River. These sites cannot be sold and I will come back to this question when I will discuss ex-CHA houses at a later stage. But let me open up parentheses here to refer to sale of State land in the district of Port Louis.

In November 2020, following an interpretation given to section 18 of the *Pas Géométriques* Act which states –

“(1) (a) Any lands situate within the limits of the District of Port Louis or in any village mentioned in the Schedule, and specified in section 2, are excluded from this Act.

(b) Any land under paragraph (a) shall be deemed to be, and may be dealt with as State lands which are not ‘Pas Géométriques’, but shall be inalienable and imprescriptible.”

So as from November 2020, my Ministry stopped; ceased the sale of land in the district of Port Louis. There was a lot of coming and going between the State Law Office and my Ministry. Finally, a definitive advice was delivered earlier this year and of which I apprised the House, I believe, in answer to a question from one of the hon. Members from Port Louis. In February of this year it was settled that as there had been no *Pas Géométriques* defined in the district of Port Louis, the section would not apply and building sites can be sold to lessees. Therefore before 2020, 595 sales of State land had already been finalised and following the advice of the State Law Office, around 1,300 applications are now being processed. I will close the parenthesis there.

So, first situation, State land that cannot be sold: *Pas Géométriques*. Second, railway tracks, now this is a matter of policy. As a matter of policy, building sites found on former railway tracks are not sold and there cannot be any permanent structures on that land.

There is a body that is called the Urban Transport Secretariat which oversees all development on and along all ex-railway tracks and ensures that these tracks are preserved for future extension of the light rail network. Because, of course, it makes sense, as we know, for the metro as it expands to follow the old railway tracks. This situation concerns some 39 plots in Sebastopol, Midlands, Rivière des Anguilles and Bois Pignolet.

The third category of State land that cannot be sold is called War Department land, which we call defence land. For instance, the former SMF Quarters in Vacoas, approximately 200 arpents, presently managed by the Prime Minister’s Office. So, these are the three situations where State land cannot be sold.

What about State land that can be sold? After independence and until 2007, when the then government brought amendments to the State Lands Act as a State land could not be sold, the then government introduced section 5 (3) of the State Lands Act. Today, we are amending section 5 (5). Section 5 (3) read –

“(3) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where the owner of the house standing on a portion of State Land, which was built as part of a housing estate commonly known as an ex-CHA Housing Estate, [where that owner] is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2,000 rupees.”

This section empowered my Ministry to sell land on which stood an ex-CHA house to the occupier, irrespective of size. Generally, we assume that a plot of land whereupon lies an ex-CHA house is around two and a half perches. It is very exceptionally more than 10 perches or 15 perches, and therefore, this was the general rule.

Now, ex-CHA, we know, refers to houses which were built in the early 1960s after the devastation wrought by cyclones Alix and Carol. The Central Housing Authority was then set up and it built 19,442 low-cost houses. What a feat! We tend to forget that. These houses were allocated to those families that had lost their homes due to Alix and Carol. Part of those houses, 300-100 approximately, were financed by the European Development Community (EDC). Hence, the appellation *lakaz EDC*.

In the early 1990s, government introduced the right to buy policy whereby the occupiers of the CHA houses could buy their houses at nominal prices of Rs500 or Rs800 or Rs1,000, but not the land. Now, what is the situation with the land? There are approximately or there were 19,442 plots because 19,442 houses were built. Of those houses, some 2,800 cannot be sold to this day. 2,800. Why? Either because they are on *Pas Géométriques*, approximately 900, or because they lie on private land, ex-CHA houses on private land – I will come back to that – or a few plots, 39-40 on ex-railway land.

So, 2,800 out of 19,000 simply cannot be sold. That is by law they cannot be sold. These 900 ex-CHA houses are spread over some 16 housing estates : Anse Jonchée, Baie du Cap, Bel Ombre, Coteau Raffin, Flic-en-Flac, Grand Baie, Grand Gaube, La Chaux, L’Embrasure, Le

Morne, Petit Bien, Pointe aux Piments, Pointe aux Sables, Providence, Surinam, Trou aux Biches, Trou d'Eau Douce. 2,800 houses.

It is apposite to note that in recognition of that situation, the State has lowered the annual rent to Rs10 per annum. As per the *Code civil*, the occupiers, who own their houses, but not the land which they lease from the state, they do have the leasehold which is a *droit réel*. They can use this right in a movable property as collateral if they want to secure a loan for instance. So, I was referring to the application of section 5(3) of the State Lands Act to explain that although Government, at the time, did legislate for sale of ex-CHA houses, the land for 2,800 families cannot be bought.

Then, there is the situation of ex-CHA houses on private land and that is simply extraordinary. In the early 90s when the then government built CHA houses, it secured land from sugar estates of the time, but never acquired the land. So, the houses were built on private land which has remained private. Now, how can the State sell the land which is not its own? 1,900 houses were built on land belonging to private owners over 31 sites. 31 sites all over the place, all over the island on private land: Bel Ombre, Bonne Veine, Quartier Militaire, Bramsthan, Caroline, Case Noyale, Grande Rivière Sud Est, L'Agrément, Lallmatie, L'Unité, Medine Camp de Masque, Riche en Eau, Roches Brunes, St Julien d'Hotman, Telfair, Verdun.

Fortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government has been able to finalise the acquisition of 20 out of the 31 sites. Some 1,100 of the 1,900 can now be sold. So, I am happy to say that the process is ongoing to sell that land. Some 500 letters of intent have already been issued, whereas in other cases, the occupiers now need to apply for the land. It is an ongoing process and the latest negotiations that have been fruitful relate to Constance, for instance, where the State has now acquired the land. At Cité Argy, at Quatre Cocos, we can now go ahead and sell that land. Also, with respect to Terragri, the land at Piton, which is also now State Land.

Negotiations are ongoing to finalise the acquisition of the 11 remaining sites, that is, Bois Chéri, Camp Diable, Camp Sonah, Cité Sainte Claire, Goodlands, La Sourdine, Montagne Blanche, Olivia, Plaine Magnien, Sebastopol and Tamarin. It is our hope that in the near future that land will be acquired by the State so that it can be sold to the occupiers. So, that is ex-CHA

land that cannot be sold either because either it is on *Pas Géométriques* or because it is on private land.

Now, the ex-CHA land that can be sold is governed by section 5 (3) of the State Lands Act. There are all in all 17,700 plots. I am giving approximate figures rounded up to the nearest thousand. Of the 17,700, some 16,000 applications have been received, including 700 that cannot be sold. More than 14,000 letters of intent have been issued and nearly 12,000 deeds of sale finalised. So, at this point in time, I can say safely state, two thirds of the ex-CHA land that can be sold has been sold to the extent that deeds of sale have been finalised.

Then there is Section 5(4) of the State Lands Act. Now this is quite particular, it states –

“Notwithstanding subsections (1) and (2), the Minister may, subject to the approval of Cabinet, by private contract, sell any portion of land, including any building thereon, forming part of the 1,000 arpents of land to be transferred to Government out of the 2,000 arpents of land to be transferred by the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association (MSPA) in connection with the Government-MSPA deal signed on 22 April 2008.”

So, this was the 2,000 arpents deal. So, where within the 2,000, 1,000 were to go for transfer for Government for housing and that land can be sold. Again, there is no restriction as to size. Under 5(3), there is no restriction as to size – ex-CHA. Under 5(4), 2,000 arpents deal, there is no restriction as to size. Irrespective of the size, the State is authorised, is empowered to sell the land but this is quite exceptional and there is only been one case in Khoyratty where around 100 plots of land were sold to the occupiers.

So, now I come to Section 5(5). Section 5(5) was introduced in 2013 and it reads –

“Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where a person holding a building site lease over a portion of State land of an extent not exceeding 422.087 square metres (10 perches), other than *Pas Géométriques*, on which stands a residential unit, [where that person] is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2,000 rupees.”

In other words, 5(5) in 2015 extended the principle introduced by 5(3) – Sale of ex-CHA land to all other State land but with a condition as to size. It could not be more than 10 perches which does not apply to the 2,000 arpents deal to which size restriction does not apply to ex-CHA land.

Now, this is what the present amendment is concerned with. Of that land that can be sold, which is not ex-CHA, there are about 10,000 sites: 9,000 sites have been applied for; 7,800 have been approved for sale and, of that 7,800, 2,700 deeds of sale have been finalised. The problem is what of the land which is more than 10 perches that can be leased but cannot be sold. This is what the present amendment seeks to address. This defines the ambit of what we are trying to do. Why was a cut-off point of 10 perches chosen? At the Ministry of Housing, there is no institutional memory that can explain why that was, save that the practice in those days, nowadays the State no longer grants building site leases because the NHDC and the NSLD build social housing and there isn't much appropriate State land left but up until 2013 when this amendment was introduced, the general rule was that when the State gave a building site lease for residential purposes, it would not exceed 10 perches.

So, our presumption is that is the rationale why the idea of 10 perches was introduced in the law but today that creates an injustice and the amendment is being proposed in a spirit of equity and fairness. It is proposed to allow a person holding a building site lease on state land above 10 perches and on which stands a residential unit to purchase that plot of land. Of course, it will promote property ownership and it will do away with the bureaucratic procedures of renewal of leases and for the Ministry of administering these leases.

Now the question arises – how many such cases are there? How many cases are there of state land of more than 10 perches which can be solved? The simple answer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is 285 only, of which 258 concern 10 to 15 perches, so just above 10 perches; 25 plots of 15 to 20 perches; 1 plot of 21 perches and 1 plot of 23 perches. So, this is not to favour big land owners, we are talking of working class, lower-middle class families that have the misfortune of having been granted at a time, a State land lease of slightly more than 10 perches. We are concerned that all the 9 districts are concerned with a higher concentration in Grand Port, Flacq and Rivière du Rempart but with a number of plots across the different districts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will have noted that there is a safeguard in the amendment which would allow Government, as and when it deems necessary, to insert after the words 10 perches the words: “or not exceeding such larger extent as maybe prescribed”. So, Government may still in its wisdom prescribe a maximum limit, should the need arise but the situation as at now is we are remedying an unjust situation that prevents 285 families – working class, lower middle class – who, through no fault of their own, cannot purchase State land that would otherwise be perfectly sellable. So, to that extent, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe what Government is doing today is a progressive step in favour of 285 families and I would hope that the Opposition would leave aside partisan demagoguery to lend support to this present Bill.

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

Mr Ganoo seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

(7.55 p.m.)

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):
Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Avant de commencer mon discours, M. le président, au départ du discours de l’honorable ministre Obeegadoo, on se croyait dans un mini forum de son parti politique qui a pour symbole un petit oiseau, et on comprend facilement l’agitation de l’oisillon qui a peur d’être bouffé par le coq. Donc, M. le président, je comprends cette agitation...

(Interruptions)

Et il a ses supporteurs parmi.

The Deputy Speaker: ... this point.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Donc*, now let’s come to the Bill, to serious things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

So, tonight, I shall address the House in relation to the proposed amendments to the State Lands Act which aim to increase the extent of State land that a person may purchase when they hold a building site lease over that portion of land and there is a residential unit on that land.

At first glance, this Bill appears to offer a straight forward benefit, facilitating the ability of lessees to convert their leased land into freehold thereby providing a sense of permanence and security to the home owners.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as Members of the Opposition, it is our duty to critically evaluate such proposals and consider the broader implications on our society, economy and environment.

Increasing the extent of land that can be purchased might stimulate certain economic activities such as construction and real estate development. However, it is crucial to ensure that these do not lead to speculative buying, driving up property prices and making it even more difficult for young people and first time buyers to enter the housing market. We must protect our citizens from the negative effect of land speculation and ensure that housing remains affordable for all. We also need to consider the environmental impact Mauritius as a small island with limited land resources. Any policy that affects land use must be carefully scrutinised for its environmental impact.

Uncontrolled expansion of residential areas can lead to the loss of valuable agricultural land, increase pressure on our already strained infrastructure and adverse effects on our natural habitats. We must ensure that any amendments to the State lands are aligned with our commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection. Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, transparency and fairness are paramount. The process by which land is converted from lease hold to free hold must be transparent and fair and free from corruption or favouritism. We must establish clear criteria and robust oversight mechanism to prevent abuse and ensure that the benefits from this policy are equitable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the amendment to section 5 which proposes to insert the phrase “or not exceeding such larger extent as may be prescribed after the words “(10 perches)” raises some issues. By introducing this vague and open-ended clause, we risk creating loopholes and inconsistencies in the application of the law. Who will determine what the largest extent should

be? What criteria will be used to make this decision? Although, the hon. Minister has given the information that it relates to 225 families with land around more or less 20 perches but the extent of the land that it can be increased is not in the Bill actually. It says more than 20 perches. Without clear guidelines and transparency, this amendment could lead in the future to arbitrary and potential unfair allocation of lands.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is worth to note that on 20 December 2013, the State Land Act was amended by the Financial Measures Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2013 to provide as follows –

“(5) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where a person holding a building site lease over a portion of State land of an extent not exceeding (10 perches), other than *Pas Géométriques*, on which stands a residential unit, is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2,000 rupees.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as per advice of the SLO dated 20 March 2014, State land which are *Pas Géométriques* cannot be the subject matter of sale as per section 5 (5) of the State Land Act as amended by the Economic and Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013 but I would like to give some information to the House on *Pas Géométriques* and of course, the hon. Minister also commented on that and he could clarify during his summing up. The House should note that 22 declared villages were removed from the First Schedule of the *Pas Géométriques* Act to allow the lessees the possibility of purchasing State land but these villages are situated on *Pas Géométriques*.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Housing and Land has kept in abeyance sale of building sites on *Pas Géométriques* and declared villages until a decision is taken. As such, *Chambre des Notaires* have been requested on 16 March 2016 not to process any deed of sale of land situated on *Pas Géométriques* and declared villages until further notice. So, I would like the hon. Minister to clarify during his summing up. Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a risk that this amendment could, I said could encourage speculative behaviour in the real estate market. By allowing larger portions of State land to be purchased, we may inadvertently fuel land speculation, driving up prices and making it more challenging for ordinary citizens to afford land.

This could undermine the very goal of promoting home ownership and stability for our people. The Government must also consider as I said earlier the environmental implications of this amendment. Allowing the purchase of larger parcels could lead to increased development pressures on our natural landscapes, potentially harming eco-system and biodiversity as I said, in relation to larger extent of land. We must strike a balance between development and conservation ensuring that our legislative changes do not compromise our environmental sustainability.

Having said so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to conclude that while the intention behind this Bill is commendable, it is imperative that we approach such amendments with caution and due diligence. We must ensure that changes to the States Land Act are transparent, equitable and in the best interest of all citizens.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I just want to draw your attention to one word you said “ordinary citizens”. I think all citizens are the same.

Mr Ameer Meea: No, not ordinary citizens.

The Deputy Speaker: That’s fine.

Mr Ameer Meea: I did not mention ‘ordinary citizen’.

The Deputy Speaker: Maybe I was wrong in hearing.

Mr Osman Mahomed: *Le citoyen lambda.*

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, but all citizens of this country enjoy equal rights.

An hon. Member: *Inn dir sa dan enn contexte.*

The Deputy Speaker: Next one. Hon. François!

(8.05 p.m.)

Mr J. F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The object of this State Lands (Amendment) Bill No 12 of 2024, as per the Explanatory Memorandum is to amend the State Lands Act, with a view to increasing the extent of portion of

State land a person may buy where that person holds a building site lease over that portion of land and there is a residential unit on that portion of land.

This Bill provides that, Section 5 of the principal Act is amended, in subsection (5), by inserting, after the words “(10 perches)”, the words “or not exceeding such larger extent as may be prescribed”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after having listened very carefully to the hon. DPM and I thank him for the clear-cut explanations. So, my brief intervention on this Bill is to seek further clarification from the hon. Steven Obeegadoo on a different perspective as I am seeking clarification as to the modality of this amendment application to our republic and specifically to apprise the population of its non-applicability to Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, land issues in Rodrigues, has always been of high political, economic, social and cultural concerns. Let me remind the House, that land laws interpretation in our Republic is a mix and overlap of Napoleonic Code and English Common Law.

It’s worth reminding the House that Section 54 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001 allows any land or other property which was formerly under the jurisdiction of the Government of Mauritius (post Autonomy of Rodrigues) under the State Lands Act is transferred to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

In Rodrigues, the State is the major landowner of the total land size of 110 square kilometres of the island. The legal status of land falls mainly under two types land tenure –

1. State land, where 90% are of *domaine public* inclusive of *Pas Géométriques*, and
2. only 10% of land - private land-freehold.

This is the difference as compared to Mauritius with only 20% State land and 80% freehold land.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to correlate the bearing of this present amendment, that all State land is imprescriptible and inalienable under our land laws. One will note that State land, commonly known as government land, is being allocated by leasehold system for residential use, commercial, industrial or agricultural use, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. This embodied a few conditions that safeguard the interest of the State.

It also provides the lessee secure leasehold rights through pledging to contract a loan, a housing loan and carry out secure developments on the land leased. In Rodrigues, the duration of a residential lease of extent 422 m² is 60 years and in return, the person pays an annuity to the Regional Assembly varying from Rs100 to Rs1,000 on average per year depending on the revenue of the beneficiary.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me specify that State lands in Rodrigues remains the property of the RRA, but any property on the land belongs to the beneficiary of the lease.

Here, it is extremely important, I have to say, that the State as a protector and for security of tenure, once the 60-year term of the lease has passed, the lease is usually renewed if the person is still alive. Otherwise, the lease is transferred to the name of child or spouse.

State land is one of the most valuable *patrimoine* for the people of Rodrigues. Mr Speaker, Sir, I recall that at a particular point in time in Rodrigues, there were certain political pressures for the conversion of land rights of State-owned lands into private ownership. A fair proportion of the population who understood the danger ahead for the people of Rodrigues was very anxious about this political proposal. As a Graduate Surveyor – I am a surveyor by profession – I was one of the rare persons who vigorously challenged and was dead against this unwarranted political proposal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2010, I put two Parliamentary Questions in this House in particularly PQ B/294 and B/495 to hon. Dr. Kasenally, then Minister for Housing and Land with regard to State lands in Rodrigues.

In PQ B/495, I asked the Hon Minister, and I quote –

“...whether he will state if his Ministry has recently held discussions with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly on a programme for the conversion of the tenants for life into owners with proprietary rights on their houses and the lands on which the latter stand and, if so, where matters stand.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, surprisingly, the hon. Minister then replied that –

“During courtesy calls in my office on 15 June and 22 July, 2010 Mr. Franceau Aubret Grancourt, Commissioner and Mr Johnson Roussety, the Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly respectively raised the issue with me and requested assistance from my Ministry.”

I further then asked the hon. Minister whether he is aware of what we call ‘*dilapidation et braderie de notre patrimoine – la terre Rodriguaise.*’ Yes, our State lands in Rodrigues at that time in 2010. He replied then –

“I am fully aware of the value of our patrimoine, whether it is in Rodrigues or Mauritius and so on (...).”

But he cannot interfere in the jurisdiction of the administration of State lands in Rodrigues. That was fair enough.

Mr Speaker, Sir, why I am raising this point again today is simply because, as also reported by the Truth and Justice Commission Report, dealing with land must clearly follow the provisions laid down in the Civil Code and the specific legislation – Land legislations. In this particular case, the State Land Act where our lands should be fully protected at all times. This is a huge responsibility that Rodrigues cannot downplay, even though the State lands are leased to private individuals for a specific number of years for the purpose of a development project as mentioned earlier.

Actually, some may not agree with me, but the truth is that no one knows exactly what the State land lease approval process is as there is no more a State Lands Committee for transparency. I heard hon. Ameer Meea talk about transparency.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to this Bill, the people of Rodrigues want to be fully reassured, specifically with regards to the actual alarming ‘*Saga later-scandal later ek festival later avec enn cri du coeur de la population – nou later, nou leritaz, nou tresor, ek nou pei pe vande.*’ That is going on in Rodrigues by the actual Regional Assembly governing political alliance.

People in Rodrigues want to be guaranteed that this present amendment does not affect their property rights, the proper administration and management of State lands in Rodrigues which falls under Section 54(a) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, again, why people of Rodrigues are worried thereat, it is simply because there is actually a sort of '*mafia et désordre dans la gestion des terres de l'État à Rodrigues*'. Et au niveau de l'OPR, nous luttons et voulons défendre et protéger l'intérêt de nos compatriotes de Rodrigues, aujourd'hui et demain pour les générations à venir.

M. le président, ceci-dit, l'OPR, mon parti politique avec mon collègue l'honorable Léopold, nous voulons que le peuple de Rodrigues protège ses biens communs et son patrimoine les plus importants. Nous ne voulons pas que le peuple de Rodrigues soit dépossédé de son patrimoine par l'argent facile et que demain, ils ne deviennent pas étrangers sur son île natale.

M. le président, je m'exprime ainsi, car nous ne voulons pas cautionner et accepter aucune démarche contraire à l'esprit de l'autonomie de Rodrigues et l'intérêt de la population de Rodrigues. Et je fais référence par rapport à ce qui se passe à Rodrigues actuellement d'où mon intervention sur ce projet de loi.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't be long. Before concluding, let me reiterate, my understanding to this Bill as proposed by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister which, in fact, is a legitimate amendment in relation to ease transaction and administrative procedures for an owner of a house standing on a portion of State land, where its sales cannot be entertained because the land extent are greater than 10 perches. That is greater than 422 m² as provided under the actual law in – I say – mainland Mauritius, as rightly explained by the hon. DPM.

Therefore, the present amendment will facilitate the sale of State lands greater than 10 perches as may be prescribed. And notwithstanding to other provisions of this Act, where a person holding a building site lease over a portion of State land other than *Pas Géométriques* on which stands a residential unit, a person is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of Rs2,000. So, this is an extension of section 5(3) –

“(...) where the owner of a house standing on a portion of State Land, which was built as part of a Housing Estate commonly known as an ex-CHA Housing Estate, is willing to buy the portion of land (...)”

And to conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in support of the Bill, I look forward to hearing further the hon. DPM's response and explanation behind the amendment, especially to reassure the good people of Rodrigues that this amendment – I listened to you well – to section 5(5) of the State Land Act, as it stands in this Bill does not apply to Rodrigues but in fairness and equity to the 285 families in an ex-CHA pending cases in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I made my point and on this note, I thank you for your kind attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Mr Speaker shall resume the Chair.

At this stage, Mr Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(8.20 p.m.)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the State Lands (Amendment) Bill. I shall be very brief, 10 minutes at most because the Bill itself is very short.

Although it is customary for one to comment on the speech of his predecessor, I think I cannot possibly comment on the speech of the hon. Francisco François. It is very pertinent to Rodrigues, so I shall leave it to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to address his concerns about the Rodriguan case which he has laid very well, I must say.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was the officer in charge of the Housing Unit of the Ministry of Housing and Lands between 2005 and 2008. During that period of time, I have either been involved or witnessed three very first-timers in terms of projects, interesting projects at the Ministry of Housing and Lands, including the present one which I am going to elaborate later.

The first one is the LAVIMS project which I had in the past, in April 2022, during my intervention on the Town Planners' Council Bill explained in details how it was fast-tracked by a Ministerial Committee chaired by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, then Prime Minister, after a

presentation and explanatory session I had made to that particular Committee. Today, the Parcel Identification Number (PIN) that is part of the LAVIMS process – I remember very clearly I explained to the Committee what is the meaning of Parcel Identification Number – is an indispensable tool for the sale of land in Mauritius, including State land under the section 5 of this Act. So, I believe no land transaction can be done today without a Parcel Identification Number.

The second project I witnessed is the granting of 2,000 acres of land in April 2008 for social housing and for agricultural diversification after discussions with the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association (MSPA) without any conditions in the context of empowerment. The hon. DPM, hon. Obeegadoo, has referred to the 2,000 arpents deal in his speech earlier. These huge parcels of lands have since become State land and shall be subsequently sold as per the same Act and current Bill as he explained inasmuch as it is these very lands that the current Government is using *inter alia* for the construction of social housing and over and above plots of land that have been bought.

So, without these 800 acres of land, out of the 2,000 acres that were meant for social housing and agricultural diversification, the 8,000 social housing units project would have never been possible. This is a fact and it is undeniable. On average, 22,000 to 25,000 units can be constructed on an acre, on an arpent of land, after catering for roads, drains and green spaces and spaces for leisure. So, if we had constructed social housing units without tender process of these lands like the NSLD has done, we could have constructed 18,000 units or so. I think this must go on record.

The third project I had participated in concerns this very particular Bill before us today. It is the historical amendment of the State Lands Act on 27 March 2007 so as to permit the sale by private contract of those portions of land on which ex-CHA Housing Estates have been built, that have brought us to the Bill before us today. As a matter of fact, this is the most fabulous instance of democratisation of access to land in the whole history of Mauritius, when the Labour Party decided to amend section 5 of the principle States Lands Act by adding a subsection 3, the following section which I am going to quote –

“(3) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where the owner of a house standing on a portion of State Land, which was built as part of a Housing Estate commonly known

as an ex-CHA Housing Estate, is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2000 rupees.”

It is worth that I mention that some 760 acres of State land was covered in this and divided over 122 sites and a whopping number of 19,422 ex-CHA Housing Units. I remember very well, we had conducted meetings with the notaries through the Chamber of Notaries so as to facilitate the buying process of these State lands to those buyers at an affordable price in the office of the then Permanent Secretary. I remember very well, Mr Abdool Noorani Oozeer at that time.

An hon. Member: Late!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Late Mr Abdool Noorani Oozeer. I remember very well, I had even conducted in May 2007 or so, explanatory sessions with the inhabitants of the locality at the town hall of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, now the constituency of the hon. Obeegadoo, so as to – to use the word used by the hon. François – explain to buyers the modalities involved in order to buy a plot of State land first time ever at Rs2,000 per lot. People were very excited indeed, because when they become owners of their lands on which ex-CHA had built and for which they were only owners of these housing units, there are a lot of many things they can possibly do, like mortgaging their property and take a loan to develop their businesses or to even further construct their houses, for example.

Also, this alleviates the complexities of having to go to the Ministry of Housing and Lands at that time, for any trivial matters having to do with State lands, like paying of leases and obtaining of permits; the so-called bureaucratic hassles the hon. Minister has referred to.

Having said so, let me now zoom in on the present amendments and in a first instance, it has to do with those State lands that are located on *Pas Géométriques*. In 2013, being *avant-gardiste*, the Labour Party had further amended section 5, again, in order to allow the selling, this time, of some 9,500 building site leases and all the NHDC housing units that were landed properties, of course not the flats, on the then nearly 14,000 housing that were already available at the material time in 2013. In so doing, every care was taken to avoid confusion by the addition of the following sub-section 5, which I am going to read now –

“(5) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where a person holding a building site lease over a portion of State land of an extent not exceeding (...) (10 perches),

other than *Pas Géométriques*, on which stands a residential unit, is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2,000 rupees.”

Very *avant-gardiste*. So, since these are in the Principal Act, the question of whether the price of Rs2,000 is being maintained and the issue of *Pas Géométriques* de facto does not arise.

Like I said, I am going to be quite short. Now, it would appear that the hon. Minister, hon. Obeegadoo has understood better than his predecessor, hon. Mahen Jhugroo, the concept of *Pas Géométriques*, during whose ministership, Port Louis was thought to be a *Pas Géométriques*. The SLO has fortunately statuated. But, applicants from Port Louis had to wait for a long five years for them to be able to buy their plots of land. I have raised this question in Parliament before. I have even asked questions during Committee of Supply; I remember very well in 2022. I hope their applications will now be processed expeditiously so that once and for all, they can become owners of their plot of lands.

I am done. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(8.30 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I come to the Bill, allow me to, first of all, congratulate you for your appointment as the Speaker of this august Assembly.

And, on the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, as an elected Member of this House and a citizen of this country, allow me to convey my deepest apology to you and this House for the disgraceful behaviour of the Members of the other side of the House on the day you were legitimately appointed as the Speaker of this House. Acts like these, Mr Speaker, Sir, by Members who are supposed to be honourable Members, really is a disgrace to our country. The people of Mauritius and those outside have followed what went on, on that day, and I am sure the population has taken note.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to this proposed amendment for which, first of all, I would like to convey my thanks to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister as this is going to bring justice to about 300 Mauritians who are concerned with this amendment. I would also like to thank my friends on the other side of the House who are here listening to me ‘under protest’.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as society...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ferm to labous!*

An hon. Member: *Enn malelve sa!*

An hon. Member: *Kontinye twa!*

An hon. Member: On a point of order!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Ils n’osent pas dire ça !

Mr Maudhoo: Under protest!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, as societies evolve, so too must the frameworks that govern them. Old laws, often rooted in historical context and outdated societal norms, can hinder progress and innovation. The rapid pace of technological advancement and shifting social paradigms necessitate a re-evaluation and adaptation of existing legal structures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in a modern and innovative country, reforms in laws are called to foster a more equitable and more essentially and adaptable and effective legal system. We have in front of us today a Bill of two pages, which proposes just a simple phrase, not even 30 words, which is to be added on the existing Bill which is as long as 30 pages itself. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, this single and simple phrase when you look at it, it may not mean a lot but when we look at it closely, zoom in, as hon. Osman Mahomed mentioned, we can see the willingness and determination of this Government to bring social justice in this country.

Our law as it stands today, Mr Speaker, Sir, sub section 5 of section 5 provides that a person holding a building site lease other than *Pas Géométriques* of an extent not exceeding 10 perches and on which stands a residential building may buy that plot if he so wishes. But

someone who has 10 perches and a half, Mr Speaker, Sir, he cannot do so because, the current sub section 5 of section 5 does not allow it. This sub section, Mr Speaker, Sir, was added in 2013, as rightly highlighted by my hon. friend who was trying to disturb me during my intervention, hon. Ameer Meea; my good friend, I should say. That is why he is here listening to me; even under protest, I appreciate. And we know, in 2013, the Labour Party was in power. Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Alliance Morisien* is a godsend government and we are here to bring relief to our citizens. For whatsoever reason, this sub section 5 was added in 2013, which limited the sale to 10 perches, I do not see any rationality behind limiting the 10 perches. It is a sort of injustice that we are going to remedy today.

When I talk of 2013, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was the same year that the population will recall, when *pandits* were allocated public beaches to run restaurants, with fried chicken on the menu at Trou aux Biches, the MMM, who was then, at that time, on and off with the Labour Party, even raised their voice against that. But now, they will have to defend these blunders and I must say, they are doing it brilliantly. But, *M. le président, la population n'est pas dupe*. And let me quote what was said in this august Assembly on Thursday 21 November 2013, I quote from the Hansard what hon. Ameer Meea said in this same House on that day –

« M. le président, la plage de Trou aux Biches est, aujourd'hui, devenue la terre de toutes les convoitises. Après la déviation de la route côtière pour l'agrandissement de l'hôtel de Trou aux Biches, aujourd'hui, le poste du National Coast Guard est menacé d'être délocalisé de cette plage pour permettre à un promoteur proche du pouvoir d'y installer son commerce de bateau de plaisance et une cafétéria. Cela après que l'Etat ait alloué 248 m² au Pandit Suryadeo Sungkur, dont la famille projette d'ouvrir un restaurant (...) »

Mr Ameer Meea: ...under protest *sa ein!*

Mr Nuckcheddy: I hope my hon. friend will remember what he himself said.

Mr Speaker: Let him talk! You have made your noise.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, those were the days when MMM was pretending to be by the side of the vulnerable.

Mr Toussaint: *Lame prop!*

Mr Nuckcheddy: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of amending the State Lands Act to allow Mauritians to buy State land which they were occupying was raised in this House a day before the intervention of hon. Ameer Meea, on 20 November 2013, by the then Leader of the Opposition, hon. Paul Bérenger, in a PNQ.

The then Minister of Land and Housing replied that amendments will be brought through the Finance Bill and the measures will be effective as from January 2014. But we all know that 2014 was the year of on and off and this Assembly met for 8 times only. The Leader of the Opposition was so busy with his on and off that he had no time to see that proper amendments were brought. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are a God sent government. We are bringing this amendment today to complete the job they left.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amending all laws is a vital process that allows societies to adapt to changing conditions, address injustices and foster progress. While challenges exist, the need for such amendment is clear in light of social evolution, technological advancement and the commitment to equity and justice. By embracing the process of legal reform, we can create a more just, equitable and responsive legal system that better serves society as a whole. In doing so, we reaffirm the foundational principal that laws must evolve to meet the needs and values of the community they serve.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would say that the necessity of amending all laws is evident. We live in a world that demands adaptability, compassion and justice. By recognising the importance of updating our legal framework, we empower ourselves to build a more just society, one where law serves everyone equally and effectively.

It is our responsibility to ensure that legal systems reflect the values we hold dear today, paving the way for a brighter and more equitable future. Let us commit ourselves to this vital work for the laws we amend today will shape the lives of generations to come.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I welcome this proposed amendment and provide my full support. Long live Mauritius! Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(8.39 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I shall be very brief just as the other Members before me have been.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall firstly congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister for bringing this Bill before the House. Mr Speaker, Sir, land and access to property have always been issues which have been dominant in the shaping of the history of the world and many countries. The quest for more land, the quest for conquest of land in other neighboring countries as we all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been resulting in wars, conflicts, tension, turmoil and having other negative results.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the right reason because of basic needs of humanity as we know are food, clothing and a house. This Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, has demonstrated since it has come into power, how we have been putting housing in the forefront of our agenda. In our history, itself, Mr Speaker, Sir, we remember how an important segment of our population in the past was dispossessed of their land. We recall the bitter struggles they have had to wage in one time in our history without much success.

I was saying how land can determine the history of a country and this is a case in point. We know today, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the trials and tribulations of a large majority of that segment of the component of our population I have in mind, are probably responsible for the difficulties they are still meeting, for the poverty which has been transferred from generation to generation because they were deprived and dispossessed of their land at one time in our history.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, to come to the Bill, as I said, this Government has demonstrated its commitment to housing and access to property. This is why I say that because I have been Minister of Housing some 25 years ago in 1996 to 1998 as far as I remember and it is for the first time in our history that a government has been able to plan, to build and is in the process of delivering 8,000 houses as a first phase and 4,000 in the second phase, that is, 12,000 to our fellow citizens. Now, this is an extraordinary feat, Mr Speaker, Sir.

400 units per 20 constituencies; 8,000 units which will be delivered by the end of this year. Another feat of this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the sale, the cost, the price that these

to-be-owners will be purchasing the property. I think it has already been announced that thanks to this heavy subsidy that this Government, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Housing, the Prime Minister have agreed upon, Mr Speaker, Sir, these 8,000 to-be-owners will pay approximately only one third of the price of these residential units. If that is not a feat, I do not know what we can call as an accomplishment in the history of *le logement social dans notre pays*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, to come to the Bill, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has already listed the milestones with regard to the sale of State land, Mr Speaker, Sir. Yes, the first one is, in fact, during the early 80s when Sir Anerood Jugnauth was Prime Minister, the sale of the CHA houses themselves. Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo was the Minister of Finance at that time.

Then, in 2007, where reference has already been made to that specific amendment, Mr Speaker, Sir, where it was provided notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act [and so on] where the owner of a house standing on a portion of state land which was built as part of a CHA Housing Estate Community is willing to buy the portion of land the Minister may sell it to him by private contract for the price Rs2,000. So, that is the second milestone. I must also recall that when I was Minister of Housing, although the offer had been made to the owners to purchase/acquire the units of the houses, many of them didn't do so. They were unable to find the money to buy these houses. Although it was, as the Minister said, Rs500 or Rs800 in those days.

But in 1996, when I was Minister, I remember on the celebration of the World Habitat Day, we decided as Minister to write off the arrears of all the occupiers who were owing the CHA and which was preventing them from acceding to the ownership of these houses. They were not able to pay for these houses although it was offered to them for the sum of Rs500 or Rs800, Mr Speaker, Sir. In all, Rs5 m. was owed by the different occupiers on the different sites. This was written off. This was foregone at that time by government. In addition, the rent was reduced to Rs12.50 per month and that was announced in 1996 on the World Habitat Day which we were celebrating on that day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, then came the 2007 Bill, the State Lands was amended. As a previous Minister of Housing, I was, of course, very close to this housing dossier and I remember, I intervened, Mr Speaker, Sir.

During the debates in 2007 when the CHA occupiers were being given the chance to purchase, to acquire the plot of land, I remember raising this issue and I am quoting from the Hansard, this is what I said –

“Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I really hope that Government will seriously go further and come in the near future with another piece of legislation to allow other State land lessees [and I said] of less than 7 perches to buy the State land they are occupying. ”

Mr Speaker, Sir, this was the first time I remember that this was canvassed in this House because we know State land is not alienable, is not prescriptible but we know also that the law allows the sale of State land in certain conditions. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1983 when again the Former Prime Minister Jugnauth was there, a State Land (Alienation) Act was passed. You know what was the purpose of that law? The purpose of that law was to vest State land in the Ilois Trust Fund and this was the Fund which was set up in the Ilois Trust Fund Act but in 1983 the State Land (Alienation) Act was passed and as a result of which the State land was vested in the Fund and the Fund then sold different small plots of land to the Ilois community in our country.

So, to come back, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the 2007 Act, as I said, during those days, during those debates, I tried to impress upon the Labour Government then, that occupiers of other State land on which there was a residential unit should be given the chance to acquire their property. Then came the 2013 Bills which was referred to by the hon. Osman Mahomed, the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and the Economic and Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill; there were two Bills which were passed in 2013 and there were debates on those two Bills, Mr Speaker, Sir. It was clause 42 of this Bill, the Economic and Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill of 2013, which amended the State Lands Act providing –

“Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where a person holding a building site lease over a portion of State land of an extent not exceeding 422.087 square metres (10 perches), other than Pas Géométriques, on which stands a residential unit, is willing to

buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2,000 rupees.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the debates at that time, again this is what I said, I am sorry I have to quote myself but as a previous Minister of Housing, I had always thought that it would be a good thing, *un grand pas en avant*, if the State would be making it possible for any occupier of State land to be given the possibility to acquire that plot of land. And of course it was up to the State to decide upon what was to be the extent and in that case, as we saw, the Government decided it should be 422 m^2 *c'est-à-dire 10 perches* and this is what I said, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“I am very happy about this measure. In fact, Government is translating the measures announced in the Bill today. (...) I was the first Member in this House since 2005 to have proposed that, and I am very happy that the hon. Minister has taken this [suggestion] on board.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, *je rends hommage à la vérité* not only in 2005 but also in 2007, 2008, 2012, I have all the questions with me. In 2012, I went even to say that the sale of building sites less than 10 perches. My Speaker, Sir, I have with me a PQ in 2008 -

“(No. B/289) **Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to State land, he will state if he will consider the advisability of selling the building sites thereof of an extent of less than 10 perches to the occupiers thereof.”

But I must say that the Minister was very sympathetic to this question and he says this Government will spare no effort and so on. *Ça c'était en 2008*, Mr Speaker, Sir, and then as we can see the law came in 2013.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what are the advantages? Why has the Minister proposed this Bill to the House, Mr Speaker, Sir? For many reasons: firstly, to democratise access to land, to empower vulnerable people to own land for whom land ownership would have remained an illusion, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, empowering our fellow citizens in this country who can't spend their whole life paying rental to the Ministry of Housing and so on. So, empower them so that they can benefit from other opportunities, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This Bill will also spare the lessees from unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, Mr Speaker, Sir. Every year they have to go to the Ministry of Housing, renew their lease and this will spare the Ministry itself of administrative tasks and will give our public officers in the Ministry of Housing to be more productive, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, these are the reasons, another one, Mr Speaker, Sir – I think hon. Mr Nuckcheddy said that – there will be no more need now for Government approval for these people to pledge their rights to financial institutions. We all know what a hassle it will be even though when you are a lessee, you want to borrow some money from a bank and if you are a lessee of State land, how difficult it is. Now, for a wedding ceremony, for a son to go abroad, no need now to go and seek the Ministry's approval, Mr Speaker, Sir, no need to pledge their rights and so on.

So, all these are the advantages of this Bill which the hon. Deputy Prime Minister is bringing before this House, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I will make a special appeal to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministry, as you know in the Constituency of Black River – I think some statistics were just given earlier – there are so many lessees of State land. I am not talking of *Pas Géométriques*, we are aware of what is the problem about *Pas Géométriques*, I do not want to go into that issue but what I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that many of the inhabitants of this Constituency have been applying to the Ministry and have been requesting the Ministry to see to it that they become the owners of their land which they are leasing presently. It is State land, it is not *Pas Géométriques* but I know many of them are still queuing up, are still waiting, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, I would appeal to the Deputy Prime Minister and to the Ministry to expedite matters and to see to it that the needful is done.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by the provision of this amendment in the law, we are talking of only 285 plots of land. So, I fail to understand the argument of hon. Ameer Meea about the impact on agriculture and so on, transparency and fairness. We are talking of residential land, Mr Speaker, Sir, where the land that has been leased to these 285 people who will benefit from this amendment. We are talking of residential land, that is, allowing them to purchase their land so that they become owners of small residential plot of land which will give them so many benefits and advantages.

So, I would like to once again thank the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. I think, *c'est un pas de l'avant, c'est une grande avancée encore une fois*, Mr Speaker, Sir. And this demonstrates

once again, the commitment that our Government has towards our fellow brothers in this country in the field of access to property.

I am done. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

(8.57 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Let me thank speakers who have ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: It's okay! It's okay!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Forgive me. Forgive me!

Mr Speaker: It's okay! You must be feeling nostalgic!

The Deputy Prime Minister: The second reading was presided over. At the time of the second reading, the Deputy Speaker was in the Chair. Forgive me, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I was saying that I had listened with great attention to all the speakers whom I thank. I paid a lot of attention to the interventions of members for instance from this side of the House, hon. Nuckcheddy underlined the progressive dimension of this measure and hon. Ganoo gave us a historical account starting from the right to buy CHA houses under Sir Anerood Jugnauth and then the different amendments to the State Land Act as from 2007.

True it is, hon. Ganoo, perhaps by virtue of the Constituency that he has always represented since 1982, the Constituency where there had always been serious issues of housing and access to land. He has always been a keen participant in debates on housing and land issues and indeed had very commendable passage at the Ministry of Housing. His speech was very instructive. Although, I was listening to hon. Ganoo, and of course I wish to assure him that the hard-working officers of my Ministry will continue to expedite matter concerning lease applications from his constituents but he did mention at one point of time, the unprecedented fact that NSLD beneficiaries will be paying 1/3 of the cost of the houses.

In fact, my hon. friend, minister Ganoo, might be interested to know that according to our latest calculations, the all-inclusive cost per unit of an NSLD flat, including the off-site works, the drain connections, all the infrastructure that has to come with the NSLDA houses – the access road, the lighting and so on – if a portion brings the per unit cost in the region of Rs 3.6/3.7 million so that at the end of the day, while we have kept the actual cost to the beneficiary below Rs 1 million, in fact government will be providing practically three-quarters of the cost of the housing unit. Three quarters – 25 % for the beneficiary, that is the solidarity the concern and the care this government feels and acts upon towards the most vulnerable and the poorest section of our people, Mr Speaker, Sir, unprecedented, historically.

I have also listened carefully to hon. François and I must say he did give me some advanced warning earlier today that he would raise the issue of Rodrigues. So, let me clarify matters. This amendment applies only to the island of Mauritius. Land issues until we recover the Chagos and Tromelin, concern apart from the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues and Agaléga. Now Rodrigues consists of 108 square kilometres, of which 23,000 *arpents* of state land; 90% is state land. 23,000 *arpents* and there had been no concessions, so it remains the property of the State.

Now, when we voted in 2001, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, this was the MSM-MMM government headed by Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Hon. Ganoo and myself were MMM ministers. This was of course, long before hon. Uteem and hon. Ameer Meea had joined the MMM. We provided in section 54 of the Act for the vesting of powers, rights and property in the Regional Assembly so that all the State land on the island of Rodrigues was vested in the Regional Assembly. Everything was transferred to the Regional Assembly.

And this, Mr Speaker, Sir, testifies to our belief in autonomy for the Rodriguan people, our respect for the people of Rodrigues and our love for Rodrigues. Never before, and never since had there been such a gesture from Mauritius to Rodrigues. So, today, with the exception of the Plaine Corail ground –the aerodrome of Plain Corail for which responsibility lies in the central government of Mauritius, all the State land of Rodrigues is entrusted to the Regional Assembly. So this amendment to the State Lands Act concerns only the island of Mauritius and I confirm, does not relate to State Land on the island of Rodrigues.

Likewise, the island of Agaléga about which there's been so much hype. You know I am referring to the allegations of the military base and I note that only a few days ago, hon. Bérenger made a public statement to say there is no base on the island of Agaléga.

Agaléga is 6,000 *arpents*, managed by the Outer Island Development Corporation, just to clarify matters. All the land is State Land; no sale of State Land on Agaléga is permitted. My Ministry has granted 59 building site leases on the Island of Agaléga to Agalean families. My Ministry has vested 6 plots of land to different ministries for the upgrading of –

- two primary schools;
- a refugee centre;
- a prayer room for those of Muslim faith;
- the operation of a new runway at Village 25;
- a new jetty at Village La Fourche;
- two religious leases to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Port-Louis for the erection of churches, and
- one industrial lease to the MBC for use as a station and installation of a solar hybrid system.

Mr Toussaint: *Pas des chalets!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: So, this Bill – *pas des chalets! Pas des chalets!*

This Bill concerns the island of Mauritius and only the island of Mauritius.

Hon. Osman Mahomed, came as close as he could to supporting the amendment. In fact, he did not say much about the Bill but chose to speak of the achievements of the Labour Party and his own achievements and I do not need to comment. Just one factual correction, he mentioned how the NSLD construction of 8,000 housing units would not have been possible without the 2,000 *arpents* deal.

In fact, of the 38 sites on which houses are being built by the NSLD, only nine relate to the 2,000 *arpents* deal. It was very useful to have those nine sites, but it is only nine out of 38! In fact, we have had a lot of problems, as you are well aware of, to obtain land which is buildable, where we can construct houses. Which is why, in addition to COVID-19, it took so much time to get started. Thankfully, that is now resolved.

Hon. Osman Mahomed did not have much to say about the amendment, and I will not respond to the issues on the achievements of the Labour Party. In fact, I think hon. Aadil Ameer Meea did so! I listened carefully to what he had to say. He mentioned a concern about agricultural land. But this is not agricultural; these are industrial site leases where houses already stand. So, it has no relevance at all to land for agricultural purposes.

He also spoke of land to be sold. These are long time occupiers. 285 families, long term occupiers of State land, have bought their houses. If they were to sell these houses, they would have to buy another house. So, I do not really see where the issue of speculation could arise.

But, in fact, hon. Aadil Ameer Meea made general remarks about speculative buying, environmental protection, to be equitable, loopholes, inconsistencies, transparency. Funnily enough, he was not looking to this side of the House! He seemed to be looking to his left and in front, and that was very puzzling!

Then, he came up with something I knew nothing about. 22 villages – I think that was the figures he mentioned – that had been removed from the Schedule, I believe from that list *Pas Géométriques*. I am very thankful to hon. Ameer Meea because I was not aware. Immediately, I asked my collaborators to try and find out what this is about and when did this happen because it certainly did not happen when I was Minister of Housing. What I have learnt – this is not of my personal knowledge, but the information provided to me – is that a number of villages were removed from the list of *Pas Géométriques* land. I was not even aware that this is possible. But apparently, this was done in June 2014!

Hon. Members: *Ein!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is what I am told!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Own goal! Own goal!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ki own goal? Mo kone mwa !*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Now, true it is, at the time...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, order!

An hon. Member: *Dir Osman! Osman pa kone!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: At the time, I remember from my MMM days, hon. Ameer Meea was the spokesperson for housing of the MMM, and this was June 2014! My memory is not what it used to be. I do not quite remember who was the government of the day in June 2014!

But I am responding under protest, of course! Who are we talking of when we are talking about fairness and transparency? I wonder why were these villages removed from the list of *Pas Géométriques!* Then, after June 2014, listening to hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, the matter was referred to the State Law Office. Who by, I wonder! Because it was after June 2014!

Apparently, the State Law Office advised that you cannot do this. You cannot remove 22 villages from the Schedule governing the *Pas Géométriques* Act. So, if one talks of transparency, free from corruption, loopholes, inconsistencies, I wonder what hon. Aadil Ameer Meea is getting at. Very intriguing indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir!

But, anyway, be that as it is, I am sure under protest, they will thrash it out at their end of the House!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Navin rass to tiket !*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me end by thanking all those who have intervened, by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for coming back under protest, of course, to listen to the summing up, and thanking all the officers of my Ministry and officers of the State Law Officer who have reflected upon, measured the implications, prepared and proposed the amendments to the House.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The State Lands (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2024) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 02 August 2024 at 4.00 p.m.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 9.15 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 02 August 2024 at 4.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT CLEANING AUTHORITY – CLEANING &
EMBELLISHMENT WORKS – SENSITISATION ACTIVITIES**

(No. B/621) **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 the National Environment Cleaning Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the cleaning and embellishment works and sensitisation activities carried out across the island since its inception to date.

(Withdrawn)

**FORMER PRIME MINISTER, DR. N. R. – OFFICIAL OVERSEAS MISSIONS
– PERIOD 2005-2014**

(No. B/623) **Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the official overseas missions undertaken by Dr. N. R., GCSK, FRCP, former Prime Minister for the period 2005 to 2014, he will state the –

- (a) countries of transit, indicating the duration thereof;
- (b) composition of the accompanying delegation, indicating the capacity in which they travelled, and
- (c) name of the hotels selected for accommodation by the former Prime Minister.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE OFFICERS – CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES

(No. B/625) **Mr A. 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 the capacity building programmes for officers in the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Commissioner of Police, information as to if overseas training programmes are being provided as part thereof and, if not, if consideration will be given for the provision thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PETIT CAMP BRANCH ROAD – ROAD ACCIDENT – POLICE INQUIRY

(No. B/626) 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 a road traffic accident which occurred on 24 September 2023 at Petit Camp Branch Road around 1300 hours, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the Police inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating –

- (a) the number of vehicle/s involved therein, giving details thereof;
- (b) the casualties resulting therefrom, if any, and
- (c) if the driver/s involved were subjected to any alcohol and/or drugs test.

(Withdrawn)

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE – HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE – NATIONAL STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

(No. B/628) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the High-Level Committee on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence, he will state the implementation status of the strategies of the National Strategy and Action Plan as at date.

(Withdrawn)

MAHA SHIVARATREE – GANGA TALAO – UPGRADING FACILITIES

(No. B/629) Mr N. Bodha (Second 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 forthcoming pilgrimage of Maha Shivaratree, he will state if consideration will be given for additional

facilities to be put in place for the upgrading of the spiritual site at the Ganga Talao in connection therewith.

(Withdrawn)

**CAMP MAPOU – FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND – CLEANLINESS &
MAINTENANCE**

(No. B/654) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Camp Mapou football playground inaugurated in June 2024, he will state if he has been made aware of the current condition thereof in terms of cleanliness and state of the field thereof and, if so, the measures envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

MSAW – ANNUAL REPORT & AUDITED ACCOUNTS (2015-JULY 2024)

(No. B/655) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if copy of the Annual Report and audited accounts thereof for financial years 2015 to date have been laid on the Table of the Assembly and, if not, the reasons thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**FAMILY SUPPORT BUREAU/CDU, PORT LOUIS – AMENITIES &
MAINTENANCE**

(No. B/658) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the operational facilities, cleanliness, and maintenance of the Family Support Bureau/the Child Development Unit near Telecom Tower in Port Louis, she will state the measures envisaged to improve the current condition thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 2 – FLOOD-PRONE AREAS – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. A/56) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third 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 flood-prone areas in Constituency No. 2, Port Louis South and Port Louis Central, he will state if a survey has been carried out to identify the houses which may be at risk of collapsing especially during cyclone and/or heavy rainfall and, if so, indicate the

- (a) outcome thereof, and
- (b) measures taken and/or being envisaged in relation thereto.

Reply: Different episodes of heavy rainfall during the last rainy/cyclonic season 2023/2024 have affected different regions in Constituency No. 2, most specifically, the regions of Marie Reine de la Paix and Tranquebar along Le Pouce stream area.

I wish to inform that no survey has been carried out, but instead, I am informed by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre that several coordination meetings and site visits were carried out between 23 to 25 April 2024 in the presence of representatives of the Geotechnical Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, JICA experts, Land Drainage Authority, Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd (DICL), National Development Unit, Municipal City Council of Port Louis (MCCPL), Special Mobile Force and local Police at Marie Reine de la Paix and Tory Lane, Nazareth Bridge, Tranquebar with the following outcomes –

- 1) At Marie Reine de la Paix, following the heavy rainfall event of 21 April 2024, it was found that 5 families residing in 4 houses need to be relocated. The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has issued Notice Concerning Dangerous Buildings (under Section 22 of the Building Control Act 2012) to those families on 29 April 2024.
- 2) At Tory Lane, Nazareth Bridge, Tranquebar, the foundation of 1 house belonging to the Lebon family has been exposed due to the scouring effect and 6 other houses in the same locus are at risk of erosion. The Land Drainage Authority has

recommended the relocation of the 7 houses as they are exposed to the risk of severe inundation and further structural damage to the buildings.

- 3) At Graver Street, Tranquebar, the relocations of families of the 1 collapsed and 3 vulnerable houses are being considered by the National Development Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development.

I am further informed that a site visit was also carried out by the National Development Unit under the lead of PPS, hon. Mrs Sandra Mayotte at Tranquebar, near Labourdonnais Street and Vallée Pitôt on 20 May 2024, where 11 families at risk were identified.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform that a Special National Disaster and Risk Reduction Management Council Meeting was held on 03 June 2024 under my chairpersonship and which was followed by a high-level follow up meeting on 06 June 2024 to look into measures for the relocation and rehabilitation works to be implemented at the Mgr Leen, Marie Reine de la Paix and Nazareth Bridge, Tranquebar.

At the meeting of 06 June 2024, it has been agreed that the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development will provide technical assistance for the design and supervision of the rehabilitation of Ruisseau Creole at Armoury Bridge at Mgr Leen, Marie Reine de la Paix.

The Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development has accordingly submitted the drawings and the cost estimates for the rehabilitation of Ruisseau Creole at Armoury Bridge to my Ministry for the Municipal City Council of Port Louis (MCCPL) to undertake the procurement exercise.

Also, there are three bridges which need to be upgraded, namely one along classified road at Marie Reine de la Paix and two secondary bridges in the vicinity. These works have been entrusted to the Road Development Authority.

With regard to countermeasure works at Nazareth Bridge, I am informed by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning that according to a site inspection carried out on 03 May 2024, no encroachment has been caused over the river reserves by the family who are residing on that State land which has been leased to them. As such, the MCCPL has requested the Land Drainage

Authority together with the Drain Infrastructure Construction Ltd to take into consideration the implementation of the reinstatement/construction of the retaining wall of the river bank thereat.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has also informed my Ministry that the CAB office of Colline Monneron has received a complaint that residences are nearly to collapse due to soil erosion. A joint site visit was conducted by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis on 06 May 2024 at No. 6, Perruche Street, Morc. Raffray, Pailles in the presence of inhabitants thereat and they reported that during the recent torrential rainfall, their houses were inundated. The inhabitants also expressed great fear that another rainfall event may cause flooding which may lead to the loss of lives in this area and they requested that remedial actions are taken.

This matter will be taken at the level of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre.

I also wish to inform the hon. Member that the Municipal City Council of Port Louis had effected desilting works of Ruisseau du Pouce (earth drain) along the stretch from Crownland Tory to Jules Mallac Street, Tranquebar and the works were completed in February 2024.

Furthermore, following the last heavy rainfall of 21 April 2024, desilting works along the stretch from near Jules Mallac St., Tranquebar to near Impasse Chan Kin Tranquebar (John Kennedy St.) is in progress.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has been requested to continuously maintain the cleaning of drains at these sites and also undertake lopping or cutting of trees so as to prevent damage by roots to the drains/canals.

Additionally, I am informed during the meeting referred earlier that the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd is implementing the construction of a flood wall at Nazareth, Tranquebar. The scope of works involves the construction of a masonry and gabion floodwall over a stretch of 400m, concrete lining of the river bed over 400m, desilting works over 125m and installation of handrails over 100m. The scope of works is, however, being amended to include countermeasure works thereat.

At the level of the NDRRMC –

- a) the families have been sensitised to vacate their vulnerable premises during heavy rainfall events;
- b) close follow up at the level of National Emergency and Operations Command together with dedicated communiqué will be addressed to the Police Main Command and Control Centre (PMCCC) for patrolling in these vulnerable areas during heavy rainfall event and opening of emergency centres, if required, will be ensured;
- c) targeted alert messages to the vulnerable families through the National Multi Hazards Emergency Alerting System will be sent;
- d) regular sensitisation sessions on precautionary measures for the benefit of the families and tailor-made Community Disaster Response programme (CDRP) will be conducted with the collaboration of the MCCPL, and
- e) Local Emergency Operations Command will ensure close follow-up on the affected families during heavy rainfall events.