



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 02 APRIL 2024

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnood	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-Daareewoo, 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
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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. 02 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 02 April 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)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Environment Bill (No. I of 2024). (In Original)
- (b) The Civil Aviation (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 52 of 2024)
- (c) The Civil Aviation (Amendment of Schedule (No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 53 of 2024)

B. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail

- (a) The Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 59 of 2024)
- (b) The Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicle, Road Service and Carrier's Licence) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 60 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Certificate of Audit and Report of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for the Financial Year 2022-23.
- (b) The Certificate of Audit and Report of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the Financial Year 2022-23.
- (c) The Certificate of the Director of Audit on the Annual Statements of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for Financial Year 2022-23.
- (d) The Certificate of the Director of Audit on the Annual Statements of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for Financial Year 2022-23.
- (e) The Annual Report of the Central Procurement Board for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (f) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 55 of 2024)

- (g) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 56 of 2024)
- (h) The Customs (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 57 of 2024)
- (i) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 58 of 2024)

D. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Central Water Authority (Dry Season) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 61 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) (Importation and Use of Corneal Tissue) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 51 of 2024)

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 54 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
RÉDUIT TRIANGLE – SOCIOCULTURAL ORGANISATIONS – PLOTS OF
LAND - RESTITUTION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State Land at Réduit Triangle initially allocated to the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, he will state if –

- (a) consideration will be given for the restitution of the original plots of land to the two organisations and, if not, why not;
- (b) the land has been allocated to other developers and, if so, indicate to whom and the purpose thereof, and
- (c) in addition to the restitution of the land to the said organisations, consideration will be given for compensation to be paid thereto in view of any prejudice caused to meet the cost of construction of their cultural centres.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to bid good morning to the Leader of the Opposition and thank him for the question put to me this morning.

The House may refer to PQ B/438 of 09 May 2023 and the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition, going back to 23 May 2023, which referred to land leased to sociocultural organisations in Réduit.

The wording of the present PNQ, of course, requires that I should set the context for the issues raised. Now, for recall, this land refers to the Réduit Triangle, which was made available for development, by the acquisition in 2001 by the then Government, of land from Lonrho Sugar Corporation under the so-called ‘Lonrho Deal’. Thereafter, in 2004, a planning exercise was carried out to decide what would be done with that land and ensure coherent land use.

However, in 2006, under a different Government, these planning proposals were reviewed, and the then Government granted land to a number of different public and private organisations for purposes that were varied and totally unrelated. For instance, today, the building of the Independent Commission Against Corruption stands in the immediate vicinity of a hospital whereas land has been attributed for all sorts of different purposes, namely –

- (i) the Electoral Commission Office;
- (ii) the Trade Union Trust Fund;

- (iii) a spiritual complex;
- (iv) a transformer room;
- (v) a retirement home;
- (vi) the Local Government Service Commission;
- (vii) National Archives, and
- (viii) a telephone cellular-based station.

As I have already said in this House, such injudicious and haphazard use of State Land was not in accordance with the basic principles of land use and planning and does not serve the public good; does not serve the national interest.

In the meantime, the region of Réduit has become increasingly central with various developments, including the extension of the Metro line. Accordingly, in 2021, in line with its mandate to ensure appropriate land use and monitoring of State Land leases, my Ministry conducted a survey that revealed that out of 24 plots of State Land, either leased or vested in the Réduit Triangle, only 11 had been developed whereas 13 had not. Thereupon, Government decided to proceed with a new planning exercise by clustering compatible activities, taking into account, of course, existing buildings and retrieving all unused land.

There were two exceptions –

- The first one was the land vested in the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage for the setting up of the National Archives and National Library because it had reached a very advanced stage in terms of the procurement exercise.
- The second was the land vested in the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology for the setting up of a planetarium because that land was not so-called ‘Illovo Land’ and it was on the other side of Rivière Cascade.

Mr X. L. Duval: You have said so...

The Deputy Prime Minister: In any event, both projects lie squarely within the scope of an educational hub. Now, the new planning exercise provides that alongside the educational hub, should be developed a medical hub together with related services.

Now, there were four sociocultural organisations concerned with the retrieval of land: the Hindi Speaking Union, the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Urdu Speaking Union. A number of meetings were held, I believe it was early 2023 or end of 2022, by the Prime Minister and/or the Minister of Arts and Cultural

Heritage with these four organisations to explain the rationale of Government's decision and to propose their relocation to a new site to be agreed upon by everybody, and all four organisations conveyed their agreement and my Ministry proceeded accordingly to retrieve the relevant plots of land in accordance with standard procedures.

Subsequently, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association changed their stand as regards retrieval of the land. In the meantime, the Government and my Ministry identified various alternative sites which were proposed to all the organisations and eventually, a site visit was effected by my colleague, the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, accompanied by representatives of all four organisations - because there was an ongoing dialogue - and at that site visit, all four organisations expressed their satisfaction and gave their verbal agreement. The alternative site is very centrally located at Côte d'Or and this site is now being acquired from Landscape Mauritius Ltd. by the State. The agreement was that each of these four sociocultural organisations would be leased a plot of land, the size of which would be no lesser than that which they held under a lease at the Réduit Triangle.

Since then, three of the organisations, namely the Hindi Speaking Union, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Urdu Speaking Union have formally conveyed their agreement to the offer made by Government whereas the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association has not accepted the offer.

Now, as regards part (a) of the question, the issue of restitution of the original plot of land does not arise and has never arisen for the simple reason that, as I stated, the Ministry of Housing has proceeded with a planning exercise in the national interest and Government has agreed to a new planning scheme, if I may so term it. Restitution would be tantamount to going back to the status quo ante with all the developments there. Restitution does not arise the more so as three of the four organisations have already conveyed their agreement to the relocation.

As regards part (b) of the question, the answer is in the negative.

As regards part (c) of the question, the issue of compensation does not arise as no prejudice has been caused to any of the four organisations by virtue of the cancellation of the leases, in view of the proposed reallocation of a plot of land to each one of them at a new site at Côte d'Or.

For recall, the leases of the land at Réduit Triangle dates back, in the case of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust, to July 2010; in the case of the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, to February 2013 (11 years ago), and in the case of the Urdu Speaking Union and the Hindi Speaking Union, the leases go back to September 2016. It is to be noted that all these leases carried conditions that construction had to start within nine months as from the date of signature of the lease agreement and that condition had not been adhered to.

Nonetheless, I would like to remind the House that this Government has always been supportive of all religions and cultures and cultural centre projects. As a matter of fact, over the last 10 years, the Ministry of Arts and Culture has allocated, for instance, no less than Rs37 million to the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust. Government will stand together with sociocultural organisations belonging to all religions to assist them in the furtherance of their projects.

Now, in the precise case of Côte d'Or and the sociocultural organisations that have agreed to be relocated there, firstly, let me stress that Côte d'Or is deemed even more appropriate, in view of the surroundings, for the activities of these four organisations and the development of cultural centres. Secondly, while the State is in the process of acquiring the land which belongs to Landscape, Landscape has already embarked upon works to develop the land. Right now, work is ongoing, the site has been cleared, survey of site has been completed, and excavation works are in progress. Government is coming in – and this was decided a long time ago – to ensure that all the basic infrastructure (road access, infrastructure for provision of water and electricity, including street lighting and all the drain infrastructure) is in place. That is already ongoing. The work has been contracted out and is proceeding smoothly. We are looking to an early completion of that work.

Thereafter, and again this was decided quite a while ago by Government, Government will construct, on behalf of each of these organisations we have mentioned, namely the Hindi Speaking Union, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Urdu Speaking Union, a cultural centre at its own cost. This testifies to this Government's unprecedented and sincere commitment to support all religions, all communities and all cultural centres in this country in the interest of peace, stability and shared development for all the people of Mauritius.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Tamil community and the Indo Mauritian Catholic community are extremely disappointed, as I am, that Government has not deemed it fit to reconstitute, to return the land that has been granted to them previously.

The Deputy Prime Minister referred to the land being undeveloped. Is he now aware, has he looked at the file now, as opposed to the last PNQ, to see, for instance, for IMCA, that it was his own Ministry that refused planning clearance for the IMCA to go ahead with the construction? And then, his Ministry has the cheek to take the land back because there has been no construction! I have the dates and I can table the documents.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope we are not going to have a repeat of the PNQ...

Mr X. L. Duval: You were not aware last time.

The Deputy Prime Minister: ...of 23 May 2023, when exactly the same points were made.

So, let me first recall that land development did not occur on any one of the four sites; we are talking of the four sociocultural organisations. Secondly, as regards the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, an association which I am very well acquainted with, it has never been brought to my attention, despite several meetings I have had with the persons responsible for that organisation, that there was any planning clearance in abeyance at the Ministry of Housing. That is a fact which I am stating here in Parliament.

Now, in early 2023, I remember meeting the President and Executive Committee members of IMCA. We explained to them the rationale for this project and why we wanted a coherent and orderly development for our country, and such is the mission of my Ministry. They were in wholehearted agreement. It was the same agreement that they indeed conveyed to the Prime Minister. They even...

Mr X. L. Duval: Tell him to reply short ...

Mr Speaker: Wait!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry...

Mr Speaker: Wait!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have any control over the question put by the Leader of the Opposition; the manner, the wording, the phrasing and the length. I have the same liberty to phrase my answers as I so wish.

Mr X. L. Duval: Not to waste time!

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is normal parliamentary procedure.

Mr X. L. Duval: And abusing!

The Deputy Prime Minister: So, what I was saying is that I had met again and again IMCA and they requested assistance as regards additional land in the east of the country, which we promised to look into. Of course, had there been a request for planning clearance before this exercise was embarked upon, it might have been considered. But once this exercise was initiated, the priority was relocation and beyond relocation. This Government is going further than any Government has done before, in terms of extending and I have just given the details...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, he should let us have a chance to ask a question. You are wasting time.

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... concrete help, concrete assistance to construct cultural centres and if IMCA wishes to join the other three organisations, certainly Government will consider.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, you have taken a year from the last PNQ to come up with this, no doubt because your speeches are too long.

I am going to refer you to two letters that IMCA has sent – one on 15 April 2019 and another one, follow-up on 25 June 2020 – pleading your Ministry for planning clearance. And you say that IMCA has agreed to your plan! I refer and I will table a letter, a very tough letter sent on 10 May 2023, signed by the General Secretary and the National President of IMCA where, believe it or not, they talk about genocide under the Geneva Convention. This is the letter; I will table it. Do you have any record that IMCA has agreed to this land?

An hon. Member: Shame!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr X. L. Duval: Do you have anything that you can table?

Mr Speaker: Wait!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Before I respond, could I have the date of the second letter mentioned?

Mr X. L. Duval: June 2020. You are not on top of this file!

Mr Speaker: No comments!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not respond to insults. That is not my manner of proceeding and I will not, there, suggest that the Leader of the Opposition is not on top of this file although he is offering us a mere repetition of what was stated in May of last year.

Now, firstly, in April 2019, I was not at the Ministry of Housing and Lands and was never made aware of the existence of such a letter. Likewise, I have not seen a letter of June 2020 and have never been made aware of it, but, let me insist once again, I personally met with the President and Executive members of IMCA at my office at the Ministry of Housing in Ebène in a very cordial atmosphere, and we discussed all the issues and activities pertaining to IMCA, and never was a matter of planning clearance at Réduit raised. Had it been raised, as holds true for any sociocultural organisation on leased State Land, it would have been given due consideration.

Now, let me go further to state that the letter of May 2023, with the language referred to by the Association, of course, came to the knowledge of Government and I will let the public judge.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, these organisations cannot be victims of the apparent disorganisation of your Ministry where before responding to one or two PNQs, you are not aware of what actually has happened in your Ministry. These people cannot be the victims of this disorganisation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will table these letters for the knowledge of the Deputy Prime Minister because his Ministry took the land back because it had not been constructed upon, whereas it is your own fault that it was not constructed upon.

Mr Speaker: So, let the Minister reply at this stage! Let the Minister reply!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the land had not been constructed upon in the case of all four organisations over a period stretching over, we said 2010 up until 2016, up to 2024. That is a fact, but the land was retrieved because most importantly, there was a newer survey and a new planning exercise. We can talk and talk and talk over many PNQs. The same PNQ as this one can be asked over and over again. The facts remain that all four organisations were not able to build.

This Government not only is proposing relocation to a more appropriate site and laying down the entire infrastructure but is furthermore embarking upon the unprecedented gesture. It is more than a gesture; an action of constructing cultural centres for the Hindi Speaking Union, the Indo-Mauritian Catholic Association, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust, and the Urdu Speaking Union. Never before has any Government put its words into action and shown its commitment to supporting the cultural development, the cultural centres of all the components of the Mauritian population.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, one year ago, I asked the same Deputy Prime Minister whether he would financially help these cultural centres and he categorically refused. And now, on the eve of the election, ha-ha, suddenly...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... suddenly, the money is found.

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

(Interruptions)

No, don't show me your hands! Don't show me your hands! This is disrespect! I am asking you...

Mr X. L. Duval: What?

Mr Speaker: ...to put your questions! Don't make comments!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am saying that on the eve of the elections, suddenly the Government now comes up with that money...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply to that!

Mr X. L. Duval: When he is saying...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply to that!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have the right to ask my question.

Mr Speaker: Put your question! Last time!

Mr X. L. Duval: I will put my question! What is the matter with you?

Mr Speaker: The matter is with you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Exactly! I will put my question.

Now, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister is saying that the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust agreed whereas we all know that the community itself and the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation have never agreed. Is he aware that all the Board members of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust are appointed by the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage and a large number of them are civil servants? These people cannot...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... represent the Tamil community or any community because in fact, all they do is representing the Government because they are civil servants.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, once a year, the Leader of the Opposition wakes up and he is suddenly concerned with the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association. Once a year! The last PNQ dates back to almost a year. The Leader of the Opposition, as opposed to the example of several Members of the Opposition, has not been involved in the demagoguery we have heard, and I had hoped that he would maintain the same standards today.

Let me again respond to him that since May 2023, this Government has not remained inactive, has not remained with its arms folded. We have moved very concretely since that time to identify, together with the four socio-cultural organisations, the land where they would be relocated. Proposals had been made for La Vigie; proposals had been made for, I believe, land in the region of Hermitage. It was only when the four organisations, in the presence of the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, gave their agreement and said they were happy and satisfied that we could then, in a consensual manner, embark upon this project in a concrete manner.

As soon as that was decided, action was taken to verify that the land was appropriate for the building of a cultural centre. Discussions embarked upon with Landscape for the acquisition of the land. Tendering procedures were undertaken and the contract was allocated by Landscape for the work to be done.

Right now, my colleague, the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, is in the process of meeting with these organisations or at least the three of them, to agree upon the precise location

of the plots which will be attributed to each one of the three. So, one can either talk and wake up once a year to do some new talking or one can act! And this Government is acting decisively to support all cultural centres.

Mr X. L. Duval: The DPM says ‘decisive action’ after 12 whole months have gone past! It takes a PNQ to get the truth out of you!

Mr Speaker, Sir, the DPM has not replied to the question. When the Government is talking to the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre, they are, in fact, talking to themselves because they are talking to civil servants and no civil servant is going to go against the instructions of a Prime Minister or even a Deputy Prime Minister. I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister now...

(Interruptions)

Money is not everything! There is also integrity, honesty and dignity.

I would like to ask the Minister whether, he will now apologise for having called these venerable persons “usual troublemakers” and their project “*projet galimatia*”.

Mr Bhagwan: *Dezorder!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, it pains me. This is not just any Leader of the Opposition; it is somebody whom I respect and who has got us accustomed to other standards of debate in this House. That he should now share in the same demagoguery that other Members of the Opposition do, really pains me.

Mr X. L. Duval: Are you denying?

Mr Bhagwan: *La communauté tamoule p atann twa!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me respond to what is being said. I thought the Leader of the Opposition would not share in the demagoguery I am now hearing from others on the Opposition side, and you can hear them.

Mr Bhagwan: *La communauté tamoule pe atann twa!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: And you can hear them as well as I do.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

An hon. Member: *Bwar Lysol do!*

Mr Bhagwan: *To pou disparet! To pou kone!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: *To pou disparet!*

An hon. Member: *Lysol! Lysol!*

Mr Bhagwan: *Ale ek Lysol do! Zot dan bez!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: These Members can put their Parliamentary Questions...

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Zot dan bez!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan!

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... instead of...

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan, order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can't you hear over there?

An hon. Member: *Met twa deor!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I have said order everywhere!

(Interruptions)

Order, both sides of the House!

Mr Bhagwan: *Dife pou lor zot!*

(Interruptions)

Dife pou lor twa! Mo pe atann twa!

Mr Ramano: *Met to helmet! Met to helmet!*

Mr Bhagwan: *Dan Quatre Bornes, dife pou lor twa! Dan Quatre Bornes, mo pe atann twa! Mo pe atann twa! Dan Quatres Bornes, La Source ! Mo pe atann twa dan La Source laba !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, both sides of the House! Last time!

Mr Bhagwan: *Mo pe atan twa dan La Source!*

An hon. Member: *Li pe fatigue dan La Source laba li...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, both sides of the House! Last time!

Continue with your reply!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Leader of the Opposition says it has taken a year for the truth to be stated. I don't know what truth he is referring to. We

have all stated the truth – what was the state land, who gave that land away in such a manner, what the project was; to go back to planning principles, how the retrieval of land concerned not one or two organisations but 13 different plots of land, including Ministries, the Prime Minister’s Office, private sector organisations and NGOs of different types. So, it is not one or two associations but 13 plots of land having been retrieved. Let this truth be known to the nation!

Beyond the sly innuendos and the defamatory remarks of the Opposition. Firstly, the truth is that the whole of the Réduit Triangle Area has been looked at afresh with a new planning exercise. Secondly, the Leader of the Opposition refers to this Cultural Centre Trust with civil servants and so on. Now, when were these centres set up? This was set up between 2000 and 2005 by the MSM/MMM Government, and we are proud of that. Since then, they have done their work for the promotion of cultural developments of everybody in this country. They have been supported by Government, and Government has worked hand-in-hand with these organisations.

I don’t know whether the Leader of the Opposition is against cultural centres and cultural centre trusts.

(Interruptions)

If that be the case, he should say so! He should say so!

An hon. Member: Problem!

An hon. Member: Very cheap!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Because, Mr Speaker, Sir,...

An hon. Member: Cheap! Cheap! *C’est* cheap!

The Deputy Prime Minister: What does he call them? Eminent, venerable? The Leader of the Opposition has been in Government since 2005! To my knowledge, after 2005, never has he come forward to propose the change or the abolition of cultural centre trusts. These cultural centres exist; we are proud that we brought them into existence. We will go on working with

them just as we work with all religions and sociocultural organisations of all religions. Now, let me go back...

Mr X. L. Duval: Come on, Mr Speaker, Sir!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Now, let me go back to the truth.

Mr X. L. Duval: What is this?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am blamed by the Leader of the Opposition...

Mr X. L. Duval: Is this a monologue or what?

The Deputy Prime Minister: ...by speaking of usual troublemakers.

Mr X. L. Duval: Is this a monologue or what? Is this Prime Minister's Question Time?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Everybody in this country knows that this matter has been politicised just to score cheap political points.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *La honte!*

Mr Toussaint: *Nou kone kisanla sa!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Even if it has meant threatening the stability and the social community spirit of the population of Mauritius.

Mr Toussaint: Yes! *La honte!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: And this is not the first time the Opposition does so.

Secondly, there is a campaign that the Minister would have termed the project of the Tamil Cultural Trust '*galimatia*.' That is not what was said! They know fully well and the Leader of the Opposition first! The term '*galimatia*' was used to say that when there is no urban planning. Take any area of the country, if you allow, as did the Government after 2005 – and my

friends from the MMM will know what I am saying. Between 2000 and 2005, we put in place planning guidelines so that activities that emerge would be compatible; there will be an orderly and coherent development. After 2006, they did the contrary so that you have haphazard development. That is what was referred to! Now we are seeking to bring back some coherence in terms of development of land. That is the mandate of my Ministry and that is what we are doing, not only in Réduit, but across the country, to look at State leases that are not being utilised and State Land that is not being productively used. That is the work of Government! We are doing our work. We are supporting cultural centres and the population will judge.

Mr Speaker: Time over by six minutes!

Prime Minister's Question Time!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/90 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation. PQ B/157 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

I now call hon. Doolub!

AGALÉGA – NEW AIRSTRIP & JETTY – DEVELOPMENTAL AGENDA

(No. B/82) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Agaléga, he will state how the construction and operationalisation of the new airstrip and jetty facilities thereat fit in the developmental agenda of the Republic of Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already stated in this House previously, the socio-economic development of Agaléga had been neglected for far too long, and the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants had been receiving little attention, leaving them with the bare minimum for their subsistence. However, with the realisation, under my Government, of the two major infrastructural development projects mentioned by the hon. Member, namely, the airstrip and the new jetty, the stage is now set for Agaléga to embark on a transformative journey towards a better and brighter future for the Agalegans and their children.

In regard to these two projects in question, it is a fact that the state of the old airstrip, which was constructed in the early eighties, had worsened over time to such an extent that landing and take-off of the Dornier aircraft had become a challenging exercise in view of the serious risk for the aircraft, its crew members and passengers. Only some patching works had been undertaken in 1999, but that also did not last long. Thereafter, from 2003 onwards, some attempts had been made to upgrade the airstrip but to no avail. The state of the airstrip continued to deteriorate through lack of repair and maintenance. With each landing and take-off of the Dornier, both the aircraft and the airstrip sustained damages, so much so that a decision had to be taken by the Department of Civil Aviation to limit flying to Agaléga only for urgent medical evacuation and which was restricted to daytime only.

The old jetty, which is 60 metres long, was constructed in 1985 and is in a very bad condition, despite repairs that were effected over the years. Moreover, the old jetty could not allow ships to berth as such embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and goods had to be made via barges. Ships like MV Trochetia had to lay in anchor at some 400 metres away from the jetty at the St James anchorage located at a reef free area where the minimum depth of 60 metres was available. Not only that, in certain past voyages, MV Trochetia could not even anchor and had to be kept on the drive for both embarkation and disembarkation of goods and passengers in the high sea due to bad weather conditions resulting in greater risks, delays and additional financial costs.

Access to the Island by air and by sea therefore remained severely constrained because of the poor state of the airstrip and the jetty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on acceding to power in 2014, the then Government promised to ensure that the needs and requirements of our fellow citizens of Agaléga were catered for. The Government Programme 2015-2019 further provided as follows, and I quote –

“Government will equip Agaléga with appropriate amenities including an airstrip and a new jetty to improve accessibility and connectivity. In view of its specificity, the use of renewable energy will be promoted there.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, following consultations between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of India, a Memorandum of Understanding for the improvement in sea and air

transportation facilities at Agaléga, was signed during the visit of H.E. Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, to Mauritius in March 2015.

The realisation of these two major infrastructural development projects in Agaléga is yet another testimony of this long standing relationship of mutual benefits and trust between our two countries. These projects will go a long way towards improving the air and sea access to the island and contribute significantly to improving the standard of living of our Agalegan brothers and sisters as well as also broaden the scope of economic activities in Agaléga. In addition, the implementation of these projects will also cater to the future development needs of Agaléga as well as implementation of measures to promote, protect and safeguard our maritime security needs in the following areas, amongst others –

- (i) surveillance and monitoring of our vast EEZ of 2.3 million square kilometres;
- (ii) counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and human trafficking;
- (iii) controlling poaching and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;
- (iv) provision of hydrographic services;
- (v) promoting economic development, including blue economy initiatives;
- (vi) emergency response, including search and rescue;
- (vii) marine pollution response, and
- (viii) Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster relief activities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the actual works on these two main projects started in October 2018. However, mobilisation of resources and progress of work were severely affected by the challenging sea conditions which posed serious difficulties in the supply of construction material to the island.

It must be pointed out that the projects involved a significant amount of mobilisation of plant, machineries and equipment such as barges, tugs, dumpers, batching plants, pavers, sewage treatment plant, desalination plants, amongst others. This is exclusive of accommodation that had to be constructed for workers, workshops and medical facilities at site.

Later, the unforeseeable circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic had also severely impacted the project and resulted in decrease in work progress due to inability to mobilise manpower with required skills as well as construction materials which led, in fact, to considerable delay in the realisation of those projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must also point out that the Agaléga Infrastructural Development Project included surface dressing of the existing airstrip. As I said earlier, the coral bed airstrip is a primitive structure with periodic peeling-off of debris, due to the impact of landing aircrafts.

Accordingly, an additional layer of surface dressing was applied over the entire airstrip which was thereafter compacted with rollers to ensure the free debris were arrested. In addition, as a Standard Operating Practice, inspection and compacting was ensured, as and when required, before every emergency sortie of Dornier to Agaléga to ensure safer landing and take-off and avoid any damage to the aircraft.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new airstrip is 3 km long and 45 m wide in North-South orientation. Unlike the existing airstrip, the new airstrip is an all-weather concrete airstrip with capabilities for day and night landing.

This material intensive project required mobilisation of a large quantum of construction materials. All civil works of the airstrip, including taxiway and apron have been completed. The works on associated infrastructure such as Air Traffic Control Tower, Fire Fighting Services, Passenger Terminal Building, Aircraft Hangar and Electrical Substation were also severely impacted due to COVID-19 pandemic, but these works have also been completed, except for certain peripheral works like navigation, meteorological equipment, which are expected to be completed by December 2024. Trial landings during day time had been undertaken successfully by the Dornier aircraft and the ATR-72 in March 2023 and in February 2024, respectively. I would also like to point out that the new airstrip will allow night flights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the new jetty, I am informed that this was the more complicated aspect of the project with work interface at the sea. However, despite the several challenges, all works related to the new jetty have been completed and this jetty would be able to accommodate up to three ships at a time. Inaugural berthing of both MV Trochetia and CGS Barracuda were undertaken during the inauguration of the new jetty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the 2019 General Elections, the new Government renewed its commitment to develop the island and optimise its economic potential with the establishment of the new jetty and airstrip. In this regard, in spite of the setback caused by COVID-19 pandemic which impacted heavily on the implementation schedule, the Government of Mauritius extended its full support for the timely realisation of the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will be aware that I visited Agaléga from 29 February to 02 March 2024 for the inauguration of the new airstrip, the new jetty and six other small development projects jointly with H.E. Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, who was live from New Delhi.

The official delegation comprised, *inter alia*, five Ministers, namely the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management, the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, and the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, three Members of the National Assembly representing Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East, two Parliamentary Private Secretaries, the High Commissioner of the Republic of India, Senior Government Officials, representatives from five private press, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and the Government Information Service. All the costs, including travel and accommodation were borne by Government.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition was also invited to form part of the delegation, but his secretariat subsequently informed my Office that he would not be joining the delegation. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed also did not turn up despite being invited.

The inauguration ceremony was held on Thursday 29 February 2024 at 11 30 hours and was attended by a large number of Agalegans. H.E. Shri Narendra Modi and I jointly unveiled the e-plaques for the following projects –

- (i) the new airstrip;
- (ii) the new jetty, and

(iii) six other small development projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these six small projects are the following –

1. **Construction of a Library with computers and IT infrastructure.** The project has been implemented on the North Island in Village Vingt Cinq to cater to the needs of both school goers as well as the local residents. It is also equipped with four computers with internet connection.
2. **Construction of a larger shop.** The project has been implemented on the North Island in Village Vingt Cinq to provide a fully air conditioned larger shop with better storage conditions.
3. **Construction of an Office-cum-Administrative quarters on South Island.** The project has been implemented on the South Island in Village Sainte Rita as the South Island did not have an appropriate administrative office as well as the existing shop is small and old. This building also has an earmarked area which will function as community centre for South Island.
4. **Construction of Fish Landing Station.** The project has been implemented on the North Island at La Fourche. The purpose of the Fish Landing Station is to facilitate and promote fishing activities in Agaléga.
5. **Construction of a Community-cum-Multipurpose Hall.** The project has been implemented on the North Island in Village Vingt Cinq. It consists of the construction of a building to accommodate a Community-cum Multipurpose Hall for social activities.
6. **Two kiosks at boat-alighting points on both North and South Islands.** The project consists of the construction of one kiosk at La Pointe on the North Island and one kiosk at La Pointe on the South Island to provide shelter for passengers waiting to boat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these infrastructural development projects have been entirely financed by the Government of India.

I again express my deepest gratitude to H.E. Shri Narendra Modi and the Government of the Republic of India for their generous and valuable support in the socio-economic development of Agaléga.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the most visible and valuable benefits of the new jetty project is that all disembarkation/unloading and embarkation/loading operations are now being undertaken in much safer conditions. The House will recall that formerly, all such operations were undertaken on the high sea with all its inherent risks and difficulties. Furthermore, all those operations are now taking much less time as it used to before.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these projects have indeed translated my vision and that of my Government to spearhead development in every single part of our territory into a reality. In my speech at the inauguration ceremony, I stated that the quality of life of our Agalegan brothers and sisters will improve as these projects will generate significant economic activities and employment opportunities for both the North and the South Islands. I again reassured everybody, especially the Agalegans, that there has never been any agenda to transform Agaléga into a military base.

I note, however, that, in spite of the reassurance given, some Members of the Opposition here are continuing their campaign of disinformation and instilling fear and doubts in the minds of the people. They are still raising questions about the length of the new airstrip, which according to them is too long.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the length of the airstrip is commensurate with the objectives of these facilities, which I enumerated earlier. As I mentioned, the delegation which proceeded to Agaléga also included five members of the private press, who had reached Agaléga on 27 February 2024, that is, two days prior to the inauguration ceremony. Therefore, they had had ample time to visit every nook and corner of both North and South Islands. I must say that none of their post-visit reports have confirmed any of the allegations, accusations and insinuations that the Opposition had been making against the projects, both outside and inside the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the two Members from the Opposition, who were in Agaléga as part of the delegation, were also totally free to move around and see for themselves the projects being

implemented on the island. The Leaders of the parties in the Opposition could have asked those two Members whether they have seen the underwater tunnels or submarines, war planes or war ships which they had been talking about in the local media at a certain point in time.

I must say that it is only the Opposition here in Mauritius that is distilling all sorts of rumours on the Agaléga projects. Most of the people of Agaléga have, in fact, welcomed the realisation of these projects. I would invite the Opposition to listen to the speech of the Resident Manager of Agaléga at the Inauguration Ceremony.

In fact, in his speech, the Acting Resident Manager, Mr Emmanuel Jasmin, conveyed, on behalf of the inhabitants of Agaléga, his heartfelt gratitude to the Government of India for its tremendous support and assistance extended to Agaléga. He also thanked the Government to have kept the development of Agaléga high on its agenda and indicated that the dream of Agalegans for better connectivity and a better standard of living has been realised. He also mentioned the new relations and friendship between the inhabitants of Agaléga and the people of India through the Project Monitoring Team, the staff of AFCONS and RITES, and other technical specialists.

M. le président, durant ma visite à Agaléga, j'ai eu l'occasion de constater de visu le potentiel de développement qu'offre l'île et surtout le retard à être rattrapé dans différents secteurs tels que la télécommunication, le logement, l'éducation, la santé, la pêche, et d'autres.

Durant ma visite, j'ai aussi eu l'occasion de rencontrer les représentants des Agaléens qui ont fait quelques propositions, précisément dans le domaine de la santé, l'éducation et la formation, afin de continuer à améliorer la qualité de la vie des Agaléens.

M. le président, avec la réalisation de ces deux projets majeurs, qui vont grandement améliorer l'accès aérien et maritime, nous allons certainement pouvoir adresser les préoccupations des Agaléens avec beaucoup plus d'efficacité.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the interaction with the representatives of the Agalegan community of the North and South Islands, I have requested my Office to ensure the necessary follow-up on the issues raised by them. I must point out that a Committee at the level of my Office is currently working on a Master Plan for the development of Agaléga. The Committee

will work in collaboration with all the Ministries concerned and the O IDC to ensure that all issues, including those raised during my visit, are addressed, namely –

- (i) implementation of mitigation measures against beach erosion;
- (ii) protection of historical monuments;
- (iii) provision of sports facilities;
- (iv) development of fishing;
- (v) upgrading of health services;
- (vi) boosting food crops and livestock production;
- (vii) improving fire and rescue service;
- (viii) enhancement of educational facilities;
- (ix) improvement of land transport facilities;
- (x) improvement of internet and mobile connectivity;
- (xi) construction of housing units and maintenance of existing units and staff quarters,
and
- (xii) employment opportunities and training.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coconut oil extraction being one of the main activities on the island, I am informed that one new coconut oil extraction machine has been generously provided by RITES under its Corporate Social Responsibility programme. The new machine has already been delivered on site and will be installed shortly. In addition, the O IDC is in the process of procuring another new coconut oil extraction machine which is expected to be delivered and installed in two months' time. Moreover, the O IDC is working on a project for further exploitation of coconut by-products.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also heard queries regarding operation of commercial flights to Agaléga. I wish to reiterate what I said during my press statement in Agaléga on 01 March 2024. Proper planning and consultations need to be carried out with all relevant stakeholders for the airstrip to become operational for commercial flights. In addition to financial viability, there are several technical and operational requirements that need to be catered for to ensure the smooth operation of commercial flights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director of Civil Aviation and the management of Air Mauritius that, at present, the core facilities are available and same have already been

published in the Aeronautical Information Publication Supplement. However, there are certain other requirements that need to be looked into.

I am also informed by the Director General of Immigration that in accordance with Sections 2 and 22(1) of the Immigration Act 2022, the Terminal at Agaléga will have to be declared a “Port of Entry” to enable it to operate as such.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these requirements are being examined at the level of the Committee I just mentioned and subsequently, recommendations will be made on the way forward.

In regard to staffing of the new facilities, the Committee at the level of my Office is currently working on the operational requirements, including manpower deployment. Appropriate provisions will be made in the coming budget for those operational requirements from the Mauritian side. I must point out here that the airstrip and the jetty will be vested in the Mauritius Police Force which will have full control of these facilities. However, the Government of India will assist the Government of Mauritius in the operation and maintenance of the facilities, particularly in scarcity areas. Obviously, the human resource requirements will evolve over time. As I said, we do not foresee the start of commercial flights any time soon, as this will depend on the viability of such flights and the availability of proper and adequate accommodation and ground handling services.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the setting up of this new airstrip and jetty facilities in Agaléga is the fulfilment of yet another Mauritian dream, which many generations have cherished in their hearts. However, the realisation of such a mega project at 1,100 kms away from mainland Mauritius was a daunting challenge indeed. And I must say that the realisation of these projects would not have been possible without the support and assistance of the Government of India.

Let me restate, in no uncertain terms, that the Agreement signed between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of India satisfy the principles of mutual benefit as well as that of being in strict compliance with the sacrosanct principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

There is no doubt that with the new facilities in Agaléga, there is a huge potential for developing economic activities on the Islands while preserving its ecosystems. As is the case for

Rodrigues and eventually the Chagos Archipelago, the socio-economic development in Agaléga will contribute to increasing wealth creation in our Republic but more importantly will ensure that none of our fellow citizens living in our outer islands are left behind while the Republic cruises towards a better and brighter future.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! I cannot allow you any further questions.

PQs B/92 and B/94 have been withdrawn. Questions to other Ministers!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/107 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, B/110 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. PQ B/121 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development.

I will now call hon. Quirin!

PUBLIC CONCERTS & CULTURAL EVENTS – SITES IDENTIFICATION

(No. B/99) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to public concerts and other cultural events, he will state where matters stand as to the alternatives sites proposed by his Ministry for the organization thereof, indicating –

- (a) if any appropriate site has been identified, giving details thereof;
- (b) if any meeting has been held with event organizers and artists in connection therewith and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (c) when Government will authorize the holding thereof.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to public concerts and other cultural events, my Ministry had several meetings with representatives of *l'association l'Union des Artistes* and event organisers to address, *inter alia*, this issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that *l'association l'Union des Artistes* had, at a meeting held at my Ministry on 21 December 2023, in the presence of the representatives of the Police Department, submitted a list of five proposed sites, namely Domaine VIP Business Park, Riche Terre Business Park, Domaine 7 Cascades, Medine Football Pitch, Côte d'Or and Domaine St Aubin. The Commissioner of Police has, after carrying out site visits at these five sites, informed my Ministry recently that only two of them, namely Côte d'Or and Domaine 7 Cascades have been found conducive for the holding of public concerts and other cultural events.

As regards the holding of public concerts at the Anjalay Coopen Stadium, I will refer the answer to the other PQ coming down afterwards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, seven meetings have been held with representatives of *l'association l'Union des Artistes* and professional event organisers on 17 July 2023, 27 October 2023, 21, 26 and 28 December 2023, 26 February 2024 and on 20 March 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (c) of the question, as mentioned earlier, in reply to another PQ B/1727 on the same issue, the holding of public concerts is regulated by the Public Gathering Act 1991 and other applicable legislations. Accordingly, necessary clearances have to be sought and obtained from the competent authorities prior to authorisation to be given for the holding of concerts and cultural events. It must be emphasised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the organisation of musical concerts has not been prohibited by Government, but, of course, appropriate clearances are required for same from relevant authorities.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je dois faire ressortir que l'honorable ministre avait pris l'engagement, qu'il avait promis de prendre les choses en main et que rapidement son ministère allait venir avec un *one-stop-shop* qui allait permettre aux artistes, aux organisateurs d'évènements de voir la lumière au bout du tunnel. Mais l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi pratiquement une année, malgré toutes les rencontres, les réunions qui ont eu lieu entre lui et les artistes et les organisateurs de concerts, aucune solution n'a été trouvée et aucune proposition concrète faite aux artistes et *professional events organisés* à ce jour ?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly the question does not relate to one-stop-shop. The question relates to appropriate sites for holding of concerts. So, my answer is limited to the question.

Coming to various meetings being held, of course, it does take time, Mr Speaker, Sir, because when we are talking about public concerts and cultural events, so many other authorities are concerned and involved. As I mentioned, we had a very constructive meeting where proposals were tabled in terms of where we can hold concerts. The Commissioner of Police has recommended certain sites which I mentioned. There is also the Anjalay Coopen Stadium that is being considered. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very wrong to say that nothing is being done.

Also, as I said, Government has never prohibited the organisation of concerts. It is a matter of getting the right clearances. And the one-stop-shop, I mentioned, we are working on it and we will come forward with it. But at no point does that hinder the organisation of concert. For instance, one example, Mr Speaker, Sir, following an application made by ECOS Production, there is a concert being held on 06 and 07 April 2024 by The Prophecy and other artists.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very wrong to say that nothing is being done or that concerts are not being organised.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, il y a une politique de deux poids, deux mesures dans l'octroi de permis par les autorités.

Mr Speaker: No, hon. Member, calm yourself down. The Minister just said that the question should be linked to the main question. So, this is a comment. This is an opinion you are making.

Mr Quirin: I am coming to my question.

Mr Speaker: Put a question!

Mr Quirin: Yes, I will do it!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: This is the preamble.

Mr Speaker: Put your question and I will listen to it!

Mr Quirin: *I will do it!* Comme je le disais, M. le président, certains concerts sont autorisés et d'autres pas. Le ministre a-t-il été informé que certains - je le dis bien - ripoux se font grassement payés afin de faciliter les formalités d'usage qui dans certains cas prennent des mois ?

Mr Speaker: Let the minister reply!

Mr Quirin: En est-il au courant?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, these are very serious allegations and warrant a proper complaint to the Police. So, rather than asking me that question, if the hon. Member has information...

Mr Quirin: Are you aware of what I am saying?

Mr Teeluck: If he has the information...

Mr Speaker: So, let me put the question straightforward. Can you substantiate what you just said in Parliament? If this goes to the court, you have to say the same thing that you just said here now! Can you? Hon. Quirin, can ...

Mr Quirin: I am asking...

Mr Speaker: Please, I am talking!

Mr Quirin: Yes!

Mr Speaker: Can you substantiate the allegation you just made in Parliament right now? Yes or no?

Mr Quirin: I am asking a question to the hon. Minister, whether he is aware....

Mr Speaker: No, no! Don't run away!

(Interruptions)

Mr Quirin: Was he made aware of certain facts?

Mr Speaker: Don't run away! Don't run away!

Mr Quirin: Event organisers ...

Mr Bhagwan: We are not running away!

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

Mr Bhagwan: He is asking a question!

Mr Quirin: It's a question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet! There is only one MP Quirin, and there is only one question.

So, I reiterate my question. Can you substantiate?

Mr Quirin: I am the one who asks questions in Parliament!

Mr Speaker: No, if you cannot substantiate, I disallow the question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Quirin: My question...

Mr Speaker: So, you cannot substantiate, I disallow the question!

Mr Quirin: I am not here to reply. I am the one who asks questions!

Mr Speaker: I am asking you: can you substantiate on the allegation against the Police?

Mr Quirin: I am not going to reply to your question!

Mr Speaker: If you can substantiate, I will allow the question.

Mr Quirin: I am not going to reply to your question!

Mr Speaker: If you cannot substantiate, I disallow the question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Quirin: Do what you want to do!

Mr Speaker: So, you cannot substantiate, I disallow the question!

An hon. Member: Bravo!

Mr Speaker: Let us continue!

BAIE DU TOMBEAU – DENSE TRAFFIC – ROAD DECONGESTION PROGRAMME

(No. B/100) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Road Decongestion Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the measures proposed for the improvement of traffic flow in Baie du Tombeau.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the village of Baie du Tombeau which comprises a geographical area of 7.2 km² with around 15,000 inhabitants, has experienced various residential, commercial and industrial developments during the past years, leading to a higher standard of living in that region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that, currently, the traffic flow along Baie du Tombeau (B29) is quite high, with a huge percentage of vehicles, including heavy ones using the road. In fact, the road consists of several bends, two of which are located before and after the existing Bruniquel Bridge. These bends represent a safety hazard to road users due to visibility problems and contribute to traffic congestion in the region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bruniquel Bridge which is of a width of 6 metres was constructed in the year 1926 with reinforced concrete and masonry. It consists of a poor structure and there is a lack of pedestrian facility, thereby constituting a potential traffic hazard, impeding the traffic flow of heavy vehicles in both directions of the road.

I am advised by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) that during morning and afternoon peak hours, traffic queuing is observed along B29 and B33 to exit the Motorway M2. Additional traffic congestions may arise due to vehicular breakdowns, road

crashes, road works and several vehicles awaiting for right turn onto public areas. In addition, very few alternative routes exist in order to redirect congested traffic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to addressing the issues I have mentioned, the RDA is currently realigning the road B29 over a distance of 700 metres so as to improve visibility, traffic flow and minimising risks of accidents thereat. Moreover, compared to the existing 6-metre bridge, a new bridge of 11-metres is being constructed, comprising two lanes of width of 3.5 metres each and footpaths on both sides of the bridge of 2 metres each so as to improve traffic flow and pedestrians movements in Baie du Tombeau. The actual Bruniquel Bridge will thereafter be used by pedestrians only.

Works have started on 26 April 2023 and have reached 70% and is expected to be completed in May 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the TMRSU is proposing to implement the following measures to improve traffic flow at Baie du Tombeau –

- (i) installation of a set of traffic signal equipment during next financial year at junction of the Baie du Tombeau B29 and Riche Terre B33 in order to improve traffic flow and road safety thereat;
- (ii) restricting on-street parking near busy and poor visibility intersections to help reduce traffic congestion;
- (iii) converting on-street bus stops into laybys along congested traffic stretches, subject to sufficient land being available;
- (iv) improving public bus service to encourage modal shift from private cars to buses;
- (v) extending the Road Decongestion Programme to the Cocoterie and Riche Terre roundabouts at Baie du Tombeau, and
- (vi) increasing the presence of Police Officers to help ease traffic congestion during peak hours.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the possibility is being envisaged to construct a grade separated junction at Cocoterie roundabout similar to the one that has been constructed at Quay D?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, currently with the coming into operation of the Quay D flyover, we are now constructing the flyover at Terre Rouge. So, we will wait to see what the incidences of traffic on the Baie du Tombeau roundabout are before deciding about a flyover because of the high cost involved. In our opinion, we think that we might not need a flyover at this stage. Baie du Tombeau might need some minor improvements, maybe like adding another lane to improve the traffic flow towards Terre Rouge where in the end, the traffic will go through the flyover towards the North. So, we will wait, analyse the situation and then we will decide accordingly. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

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

On resuming at 2.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! I call MP Aumeer!

CYCLONE BELAL – DAMAGED PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE –

REPARATION COSTS & COMPLETION DATE

(No. B/101) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Rs500 million earmarked for repairs of public infrastructure and amenities damaged by cyclone Belal, he will state –

- (a) where matters stand as to the works carried out thereunder, giving a list of the works effected as at date, indicating –
 - (i) the cost thereof, and;
 - (ii) expected date of completion, and

- (b) if any contract has been allocated for same and, if so, indicate the names of the respective contractors.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to PQ B/101 and PQ B/131 together as they pertain to the same subject matter.

In January 2024, Mauritius experienced torrential rainfall caused by cyclone Belal, as a result of which numerous roads, both classified as well as non-classified, were damaged. In view of the extent of damages, to ensure the safety of road users, Government earmarked a sum of Rs500 million under the Projects Development Fund for the urgent repairs. These works will be carried out by the local authorities, the Road Development Authority and the National Development Unit, in consultation with my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 254 road resurfacing and rehabilitation projects have been identified by the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management to the tune of Rs199.5 million. Out of these, contracts for 29 projects have been awarded by the District Councils of Moka, Flacq and Grand Port. I am further informed that the remaining projects are at bidding stage.

On its part, the RDA has identified a list of 58 projects out of which contracts have been awarded for 10 projects to the tune of Rs2.7 million and contracts for the remaining works will be allocated in the coming days under its Framework Agreement. In addition, the RDA has already effected emergency works across the island to restore the road networks including the lopping of branches and felling of trees.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard projects to be implemented by the NDU, 224 road projects and resurfacing projects have been identified which will be implemented on a priority basis. Currently, surveys and field visits are being carried out by the engineers to work out the scope of works. Works Orders for these projects are expected to be issued as from April 2024.

With regard to Constituency No. 15, I am informed that three road projects amounting to some Rs12.2 million will be implemented by the NDU and two others amounting to Rs14.1 million by the RDA.

I am tabling the information to parts (a) and (b) of PQ B/131. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Will the hon. Minister table the project that has been earmarked for Constituency No. 2 in regard to this sum that has been disbursed?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, since this is a new request, I will look into it.

Mr Speaker: Next question! I call hon. Juman!

ROCHE BOIS – NEW COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/102) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the construction of a New Community Health Centre at Roche-Bois, he will state where matters stand, indicating when the bid therefor was –

- (a) launched, and
- (b) awarded, indicating the –
 - (i) name of the successful bidder, and
 - (ii) expected completion date thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, the bid for the construction of a New Community Health Centre at Roche-Bois was launched on 07 August 2020.

As regard to part (b) of the question, the contract for the construction of the Community Health Centre at Roche-Bois was awarded on 19 February 2021 to Ganessen Construction Ltd for a contract amount of Rs36,237,936 excluding VAT. The contractual completion date was 04 July 2022 and after assessment by the HSCC, that is, the Consultant, 171 days of extension of time was granted to the contractor with a new completion date of 22 December 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry was informed by the Consultant that works on site stopped since October 2022. No significant progress of works was observed by the Contractor since. As

at end of November 2022, the progress of works was only around 14%. So far, an amount of Rs2.7 million had been made to the Contractor.

Due to unsatisfactory progress of works, the contract was terminated on 22 May 2023. I am informed that Performance Security amounting to Rs3,623,793.60 has been recouped.

The Consultant assessed the pending works and provided the revised scope of works, Bill of Quantities, cost estimates and tender documents to relaunch bids on 30 September 2023. On 17 October 2023, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development was approached to provide additional funds to complete the project. The project would be completed once additional funds are provided.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised to note that for Financial Year 2008-2009, provision was made only for extension works to the old Community Health Centre. The then government did not cater for a new facility, but merely provided a meagre sum of Rs2 m. for this project. It was never a question of building a new Community Health Centre.

I will also react to the comments made in the media by two Members on the opposite side of the House from Constituency No. 3 on this project. I will quote some of these comments –

«Mo demand le minis kifer sa projet-la pa inn complete. Parski zenfan Roche Bois, zenfan no. 3!»

Mr Speaker, Sir, since they have mentioned "*zenfan Roche Bois*", I will remind the House that all babies born in 2023, including those from Roche Bois are receiving a monthly allowance of Rs2,000 till they reach the age of 3.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ki sa ena a fer ek sa kestion la?*

Dr. Jagutpal: Every child reaching 18 years of age receives...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Minister, continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: Every child reaching 18 years of age receives an allowance of Rs20,000, including those of Roche Bois.

We are all aware that all senior citizens, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Ameer Meea: Senior citizens!

Dr. Jagutpal: ... of the Republic, including Roche Bois, earn a basic retirement pension of Rs13,500 since yesterday and today, already credited in their account.

Mr Ameer Meea: Démagogie!

Dr. Jagutpal: Every worker of Roche Bois, Mr Speaker, Sir, receives a minimum salary of Rs18,500. This is what this Government has done for the inhabitants of Roche-Bois!

(Interruptions)

It is not the first time that these Members of the Opposition are desperately trying to build up discriminatory motives.

The following comments were also made in relation to this project –

« Premier Ministre pe riye pe tire foto. Jagutpal pe sante dan maryaz. Sa gouvernman-la pe faire gro gro proze. »

(Interruptions)

These were the comments made by the Members of the Opposition.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Li pann tann nanye la !*

Hon. Members: *Ekoute!*

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, at least...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: ...at least these Members...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Pa* substantiate *kan fer dimal*! Can you substantiate? Can you substantiate?

(Interruptions)

Can he substantiate what he is saying?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, at least these Members recognise that this Government has completed so many, what they call, “*gro, gro proze*”. At least they recognise! Thank you for recognising this! But, at the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: No, no! Is it okay? You have finished?

Dr. Jagutpal: I will finish in two lines. Mr Speaker, Sir, I prefer by far *sante dan maryaz* than *danse macarena dan kanpman* at night, with relatives not...

Hon. Members: Ahhh!

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: *N’importe quoi*! Irrelevant!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: I will end up by tabling the health activities conducted for the inhabitants of Roche Bois.

(Interruptions)

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is clear and direct. It is about an Area Health Centre.

Mr Ameer Meea: Not about dancing!

Mr Juman: What does it have to do with child allowance, old age pension, etc.?

Mr Ameer Meea: Exactement!

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are two years ahead of the completion of the project. I want to know from the Minister where matters stand to date?

Mr Ameer Meea: Aussi simple comme le bonjour !

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since they have asked these questions in the media, I have replied to them. Unfortunately, they have asked the question before this PQ. Now, at the same time, I have given the details. I will not repeat it because it is clear. We will be getting the approval of the Ministry of Finance and everything has been done to relaunch this project. This is what the Government has done. There is nothing clearer than this.

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I understand, the project started in 2020 for an Area Health Centre, and in 2024 to date, the tender has not been relaunched. Am I right?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, of course! That is what I have said and this is what the procedures have been. Is it not fair and transparent to give all the details about the project? Don't you know that during COVID-19 time, everything got stuck up?

Mr Juman: 5 years!

Dr. Jagutpal: I have given all the details about this project.

Mr Juman: 5 years!

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, it has been four years.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

E-HEALTH PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/103) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the E-Health project, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, indicating the cost incurred therefor to date.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/231 at our Sitting of 18 April 2023, where the House was informed that the evaluation process for the procurement of an E-Health software has been completed at the level of the United Nations Development Programme.

To finalise the selection process, given the complexity and cost of the E-Health project, a thorough due diligence exercise was conducted by independent international auditors as mandated by the UNDP procedures for projects having a procurement value of at least USD 1 million. Thereafter, the procurement case was certainly the Advisory Committee on Procurement (ACP) at UNDP headquarters for final review and recommendation for award.

I am informed that after a step-by-step, rigorous and fair selection process by the UNDP and with involvement of observers from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and my Ministry, the contract for the implementation of this project was awarded to the joint-venture between TrioTree Technologies Pvt Ltd, India, Informatics International (MTIUS) Limited and Netcome Partners Ltd (Mauritius) on 09 January 2024. The total amount of the contract is USD 4,440,576, that is, approximately MUR 200 m. and the award notice is publicly available on the UNDP global Procurement Notices portal.

The consortium has already started engagement with my Ministry and the implementation of Phase 1 of the E-Health project, comprising a patient administration system, a patient portal, a blood bank system and analytics will span over a period of 18 months. Upon successful completion of Phase 1 of the project, Phase 2 will be considered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to costing, I am informed that the project is included in a co-financed portfolio between the UNDP and the Government of Mauritius, which was entered on 26 January 2022 and amended on 05 October 2023.

The contribution under the portfolio of the UNDP is to the tune of USD 3,129,669, approximately MUR 145,000,000, and our contribution is USD 7,728,981, that is, approximately Rs358 million. On the USD7,728,981 as at date USD5,400,652, that is, approximately Rs250 million have been disbursed to the UNDP in line with the provisions of the project portfolio.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the E-Health Project has proven to be a complex endeavour which has been faced with numerous challenges panning over the past three decades. I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry has undertaken a holistic and comprehensive approach to mitigate potential risk through the implementation process. The project also comprises procurement of IT equipment, site readiness through the provision of work stations, local area networks and electricity connectivity, the hosting infrastructure for the main data centre and the disaster recovery, internet access, training of hospital staff on basic IT literacy and E-Health solution, change management, formulation of a digital health strategy and related blue print, public engagement and providing the appropriate institutional, legal and policy framework.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister comment on the allegations made in the media regarding the selection of the E-Health Project? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes. Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has taken cognisance of the allegations made in certain media on the selection process for E-Health. The evaluation was conducted according to the UNDP Procurement Process. The UNDP Evaluation Team conducted a preliminary evaluation, a technical evaluation including a demo of solutions received and a financial evaluation.

Thereafter, the UNDP contracted out independent auditors to assess the legal and financial status of bidders as well as the verification of the software. The final review and recommendation were made at the UNDP Advisory Committee on Procurement at headquarters' level based on technical and financial evaluation of bids as well as the due diligence exercise. It's regretful that some media have been making these insinuations against a reputable organisation such as the UNDP. I wish to reiterate that my Ministry has complete trust in the UNDP and its process and we are pursuing the implementation of this long awaited project.

Mr Speaker: MP Ameer Meea!

**CANAL LE POUCE – KFC OUTLET & PARKING AREAS – PROPOSED
DEMOLITION**

(No. B/104) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed demolition of the premises of the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet and parking areas constructed on canal Le Pouce, following the recommendation of the Judicial Inquiry of 2014, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the Council has been advised by the Land Drainage Authority to remove all buildings, structures and slabs on Butte à Tonniors and Ruisseau du Pouce Streams because of frequent flooding in this area.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has already removed part of the slabs of Ruisseau du Pouce where the hawkers were operating. The part from Brown Sequard Street and Chaussée Street could not be removed as 14 out of 21 hawkers operating thereat and who had all lost their case, have lodged an appeal at the level of the Supreme Court.

In that context, a public relation exercise was carried out by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis with the hawkers to vacate the site and to move to Urban Terminal where they have been offered a stall to operate.

With regard to the construction of building by Pick N Eat Ltd, that is, Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has informed that construction of the building, for a retail outlet, was granted by an act of Parliament, namely, the Butte à Tonniors (Authorised Construction) Act 50 of 1992 while the parking areas on Pouce Stream for Rogers Ltd and MEDCOR Ltd were granted under the Pouce Stream (Authorised Construction) Act 32 of 1992.

As the authorisation for construction was granted through an act of Parliament by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, the latter was, on 04 April 2023, requested to initiate appropriate action to repeal the above mentioned Acts.

The Ministry of Housing and Land had, on 14 July 2023, requested the Attorney General's Office to advise on the way forward to repeal the two Acts under reference. In its reply on 25 July 2023, the Attorney General's Office had advised the Ministry of Housing and Land that a *mise en demeure* should first be served upon the companies in order for them to be apprised of the intention, to have the building and structures constructed over the Butte à Tonniars and Ruisseau du Pouce Stream removed and a delay be given for them to vacate the premises concerned. Subsequently, the two acts will be repealed.

In the meantime, several meetings and site visits have been held by my Ministry with Pick N Eat Ltd, MEDCOR Ltd and Rogers Ltd, Land Drainage Authority and Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to inform them of the necessity to free those areas of any structures and building to allow a free flow of water.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has, on 20 February 2024, requested the Attorney General's Office to prepare the *mise en demeure* to be served on the operators.

I wish to inform the House that a meeting was held at the level of my Ministry on 28 March 2024 with representatives of the Attorney General's Office,

Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, the Planning Division, Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, Land Drainage Authority and the Municipal Council of Port Louis to look into the demolition of the building, slabs and structures on the stream. The representative of the Attorney General's Office has informed that the *mise en demeure* has already been finalised and would be submitted to my Ministry shortly.

Mr Ameer Meea: M. le président, 11 ans après les inondations meurtrières, ayant coûté la vie à 11 personnes à Port Louis et tout récemment, on a vu les images de l'inondation du cyclone Belal, il est évident que les choses ne bougent pas. L'année dernière, en 2023, la municipalité de Port Louis avait fait un appel d'offres pour la démolition du bâtiment. La municipalité de Port

Louis avait déjà pris cette décision. Ce que moi j'aurais aimé savoir c'est – où en sont les choses par rapport à l'appel d'offres pour démolir non seulement le bâtiment du Pick N Eat (KFC) mais aussi l'aire de stationnement de la compagnie de Rogers ?

Dr. Husnood: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just explained in detail why it is taking time. This does not depend on the Municipal Council. This was an act of Parliament. It was not a Council's decision. It was an act of Parliament. We went to the Attorney General's Office. They told us that we have to go step by step, that's what we have done. We are going step by step. I have explained all this in detail. I get the impression that the hon. Member does not understand, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been 10 years...

Mr Speaker: No, this is not...

Mr Ameer Meea: 10 years since this deadly flooding has occurred!

Mr Speaker: Wait! I can understand all this, but you should put a specific question if you want clarification. If you are going to insist in all your questions – 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, you will have the same answer.

Mr Ameer Meea: I have to!

Mr Speaker: I am helping you!

Mr Ameer Meea: I have to do this!

Mr Speaker: I am helping you to put a good question. Please, do your work.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think you do not understand the situation...

Mr Speaker: No, don't comment upon me! I understand too much and I understand you! I understand your question very well. You are misleading the House!

Mr Ameer Meea: Really?

Mr Speaker: Of course!

Mr Ameer Meea: Really? I am misleading the House?

Mr Speaker: Of course, you are misleading!

Mr Ameer Meea: 10 years have elapsed, nothing has been done! You are telling me that I am misleading the House?

Mr Speaker: You have to put a specific question! Questions, Supplementary Questions should not contain comments!

Mr Ameer Meea: It's not comments! It's a fact!

Mr Speaker: The content of a question should contain question itself, not comments, not debate. So, put your question! I am giving you a last chance! If you have one!

An hon. Member: En 11 ans !

Mr Ameer Meea: My question to the hon. Minister is that after 10 years of this deadly flooding, is the Municipal Council of Port Louis back-pedaling on the project of demolishing these two buildings?

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister answer!

Dr. Husnood: He did not understand anything! I have explained that this was done by an Act of Parliament...

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: 11 ans! 11 ans!

Dr. Husnood: ...and the Municipal City Council cannot act on its own.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ferm sa...*

Mr Speaker: No, please! Don't do that!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Husnood: The Municipal City Council cannot act on its own. To repeal this Act, they have to get...

Mr Speaker: We are not in a stable! We are in a Parliament!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Lontan mo ti pou fini fer enn lalwa !*

Dr. Husnood: You have been there for 15 years! You have been there in Opposition! What have you done?

Mr Ameer Meea: *11 ans ! Twa to ti la 9 an !*

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: What have you done?

Mr Speaker: You are going out of your way! Order! What is this?

An hon. Member: *Pou tir marchands ambulants, kapav !*

Mr Speaker: You are not in a stable! You are in Parliament! You put a question, the Minister has to reply!

(Interruptions)

Have you finished Minister?

Next question!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Bizin pa generalize!*

Mr Léopold: B/105.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: *Tir marchand ambulants kapav!*

Dr. Husnoo: *15 ans to dan lopposition, fer to...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: *9 ans to minis ta! Nettoy to...*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: *15 ans!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: *9 ans to minis, enn ferfout to pann fer!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea, this is the last warning I am giving you!

Mr Ameer Meea: To him also!

Mr Speaker: I am giving you the last warning! Last warning!

Continue!

RODRIGUES – DENGUE FEVER – DEATHS

(No. B/105) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Dengue fever, he will state the number of persons in Rodrigues who have died therefrom, indicating if there is an increase in the prevalence of death resulting therefrom in Rodrigues over the last two years and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is providing full support to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly in the fight against Dengue.

At the outset, in the context of enhanced preparedness for Vector Borne Diseases, my Ministry, has, in July 2023, deployed amongst others, several thermal foggers, sprayer cans together with insecticides and larvicides.

Since the outbreak of Dengue fever in Rodrigues on 19 January 2024, my Ministry has been closely monitoring the situation prevailing on the island. In this context, several coordination meetings between the Public Health Team of Rodrigues and officers of my Ministry which included the Director General Health Services, Director Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Unit (CDCU), Public Health and Food Safety Inspectorate and Vector Biology and Control Division have been held on a regular basis. Moreover, since the beginning of the outbreak, the CDCU is in communication daily with Public Health Team in Rodrigues.

Upon request from the Commission for Health of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, two Public Health and Food Safety Inspectors were deployed immediately to Rodrigues to assist the existing team in vector control activities.

Moreover, a High Level team visited Rodrigues from 05 to 07 March 2024. The team led by the Director, Health Services responsible for Public Health comprised the Acting Regional Public Health Superintendent, the Director, Public Health and Food Safety, a representative from the Vector Biology and Control Division and two WHO Consultants currently in Mauritius having wide expertise in Entomology and Vector Surveillance.

The team has carried out an assessment of the Dengue Fever situation thereat as well as response strategies, including the identification of entomological and environmental risk factors associated with the outbreak. The team has recommended control measures and provided appropriate training in vector control activities, surveillance and reporting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the mission, a series of site visits and consultations were held with the local team of officers in Rodrigues and relevant stakeholders with a view to contain the proliferation of mosquitoes and larvae.

It was subsequently decided to deploy two Medical Health Officers to Rodrigues. One MHO has already been posted in Rodrigues while another one will be joining shortly.

We have also obtained the support of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) for technical assistance in the context of the current Dengue Outbreak. A team comprising an Entomologist, a Logistician and an expert in Risk Communication would be deputed from Reunion Island to strengthen the strategy for vector control and surveillance in place.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since the notification of the first case of Dengue Fever in Rodrigues on 19 January to date, 1,679, cases of Dengue Fever were detected. There are currently 158 active cases.

I am also informed that no case of death directly related to the dengue fever has been recorded by the Health Services in Rodrigues for the current outbreak and during the last two years.

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Owing to the assessment that the experts from your Ministry have made in Rodrigues concerning the Dengue Fever outbreak, have they been

able to explain why there is such an amount of deaths during this season compared to when there were COVID-19 pandemic season?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can you please repeat the last of the question? The amount of?

Mr Léopold: Owing to the assessment that your expert teams have made in Rodrigues, have they been able to determine as to why there is such an amount of death during the Dengue Fever outbreak compared to what had happened during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr. Jagutpal: Excuse me, I am sorry. I do not have this information right now. Should you come up with another question, I will arrange to provide this information. I cannot, at this point in time, have the comparison of the number of death at present compared to that of COVID-19. I will need statistics from the Ministry.

RIISING COST OF LIVING – PRICE CONTROL MECHANISM – COMMODITIES & MEDICINES

(No. B/106) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the increase in the price of commodities and cost of living, she will state if consideration will be given for –

- (a) a price mechanism control to be put in place therefor, and
- (b) certain products, including medicines, to be subsidised by Government to alleviate the burden of consumers.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry already has in place price mechanisms to control the Maximum Price and Maximum Mark-up on 38 categories of commodities for Mauritius. 36 essential products are controlled by a maximum price regime for Rodrigues.

Out of the 38 commodities, 12 essential commodities such as Gas oil, Mogas, LPG, Cement, Bread, Flour, Ration Rice, Onions and Potatoes, are regulated under the Maximum Price regime to ensure affordability and accessibility for every Mauritian.

The remaining 26 essential commodities are under the Maximum Mark-Up Regime. This regime strictly caps the mark-up range between 15% to 45%, encompassing items such as milk powder, breakfast cereals, canned fish, edible oil, Basmati rice, imported fresh fruits, infant milk powder and baby diapers, among others.

My Ministry has a dedicated team to carry out market analysis and continuous monitoring and proposals are made for intervention and control as and when the need arises.

Mr Speaker Sir, as regards part (b), I wish to highlight a significant milestone achieved by my Ministry in the previous year – a comprehensive overhaul of our price control framework for around 7,500 pharmaceutical products. In May 2023, this Government introduced a forward-thinking approach by implementing a regressive maximum mark-up mechanism.

This significant change, enshrined in the Consumer Protection (Pharmaceutical Products) (Maximum Mark-Up) Regulations, marks a departure from uniform mark-ups, towards a more equitable system where the mark-up on medicines is inversely proportional to their import cost. The higher the cost at import, the lower the mark-up. This means that essential medicines, particularly those with higher import costs, are now more accessible due to lower mark-ups.

Mr Speaker Sir, Government is currently providing significant financial support to ensure the affordability of staple food items for the public, as follows –

- a subsidy on LPG at an amount of Rs324.97 per cylinder of 12kg which cost Government Rs2.12 billion per year, while consumers buy same at Rs240;
- a subsidy on Long Grain White Rice of Rs8.30 for every half kilogram, which translates into an annual expenditure of Rs349 million. This subsidy amounts for 61% of the price for a half kilogram bag of rice and the retail price is Rs5.40 per half kilogram;
- a subsidy on fortified flour distributed by the STC of Rs16.08 per kilogram, amounting to an annual total of Rs595 million. The retail price paid by consumers is Rs4.85 per half kilogram, and

- in an effort to keep the cost of staple bread affordable, schedule bread receives a subsidy of Rs0.44 per 100 grams, enabling us to maintain its retail price at Rs2.60.

As regards pharmaceutical products, Government already provides for free health care which includes provision of pharmaceutical products to all citizens.

Thank you.

Mr Assirvaden: J'ai remarqué que la ministre a parlé d'un mécanisme mis en place au sein de son ministère pour le contrôle des prix et la ministre parle aussi d'*infant milk powder*. Madame la ministre, prenons trois commodités de base, utilisées par beaucoup de Mauriciens actuellement : le lait en général ou le lait pour les bébés, les couches et le fromage. Malgré vos mécanismes en place, ces trois produits ont augmenté de plus de 42 % en deux mois, 42 % ! Est-ce que la ministre est disposée, je dis bien, est-ce que la ministre est disposée à intervenir auprès de son collègue, le ministre des Finances pour trouver une solution pour les ménagères mauriciennes dans ces augmentations de prix car la dépréciation de la roupie, Madame, tue les Mauriciens ?

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Yes. Mr Speaker, Sir, for instance, out of the 26 essential commodities which are under the price control, it has been observed that 80% had a decreasing and stable trend while the increase is due to external factors such as exchange rates and freight costs which are beyond control. As I said earlier, there is a dedicated team at the level of my Ministry to carry out continuous market analysis and monitoring. Appropriate recommendations are made for intervention and control as and when required.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the regressive maximum markup mechanism had an immediate effective impact on the overall classes of classified medicine with a general fall of 4.6% in the retail price. However, there are other external factors – even for milk – such as the foreign currency appreciation, the international prices of milk, the freight costs which are beyond control and impact negatively on the retail prices.

Mr Assirvaden: A l'item (b) de ma question, Madame la ministre, on parle des médecines vendues en clinique, en pharmacie privée. Un exemple, Madame la ministre, le

Galvus Met, médicament pour les diabétiques, a augmenté de R 325 en quatre mois pour la boîte de quinze.

Je voudrais savoir de la ministre, est-ce que comme ministre de la Protection des consommateurs, elle ne voit pas l'urgence d'intervenir sur ce marché des médicaments pour contrôler les prix des médicaments qui tuent à cause de la dépréciation de la roupie le pouvoir d'achat des Mauriciens tous les jours ?

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have the regressive maximum markup on eight classes of pharmaceutical products namely –

- (i) anti-cancer;
- (ii) anti-diabetic, like you said;
- (iii) the cardiovascular;
- (iv) inhalers;
- (v) biologicals;
- (vi) vaccines;
- (vii) anti-acids, and
- (viii) antihypertensives

And like it is, we have reduced the profit that used to be made but unfortunately, I told you, there are things that are beyond our control like...

(Interruptions)

Definitely!

Mr Speaker: Next question!

BUDGET 2023-24 – ANJALAY COOPEN STADIUM – UPGRADE

(No. B/107) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Rs80 million earmarked for the upgrading of the Anjalay Coopen Stadium to also host concerts as announced in the Budget Speech 2023-2024, he will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to PQ B/107.

Insofar my Ministry is concerned, a total amount of Rs60 million was earmarked under the National Resilience Fund for the upgrading of the Anjalay Coopen Stadium with Rs10 million in this financial year and Rs50 million in the next financial year.

The upgrading of the Anjalay Coopen Stadium will be carried out in phases. Phase 1 includes civil works, mainly waterproofing works and the two other phases comprise electrical and mechanical works.

The Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development has carried out and completed its survey for the civil works. The scope of work is being finalised. Once available, my Ministry will proceed with a bidding exercise to recruit a service provider for the civil works.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the upgrading works are completed, the facility will be reopened to the public and the proposal to host concerts and events at the stadium will be considered. Thank you.

Mr David: M. le président, dans un communiqué de presse de l'Union des artistes daté du 20 mars 2024, les artistes ont déploré que la visite du stade Anjalay Coopen, dans le cadre de ce présent projet de R 80 millions, finalement ne semble pas concerner le stade principal mais les terrains avoisinants qui sont clairement inadaptés à la tenue des concerts. Puis-je demander au ministre – alors je pensais l'adresser au ministre des Arts – si toutefois il a un éclaircissement au sujet des terrains qui vont être améliorés et adaptés pour la tenue des concerts au stade Anjalay ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, comme je viens de le dire dans ma réponse, c'est le stade complètement et avec les terrains avoisinants qui, une fois les travaux complétés, seront mis à la disposition pour des événements sportifs, des événements culturels et artistiques.

Mr David: Puis-je demander au ministre un *timeline*, un calendrier, même approximatif sur l'exécution de ces travaux et le moment auquel vraiment nos artistes pourront commencer à se produire au stade Anjalay Coopen ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, avec tout le respect que je dois à l'honorable membre, je ne suis pas dans l'approximatif. Je suis scientifique dans mon approche et par rapport à ce que les officiers nous proposent et comme je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, les travaux seront faits sur deux phases. Pour cette année financière, nous avons un budget de R 10 millions, prochaine année financière, c'est-à-dire 2024-2025, nous aurons un budget de R 50 millions. Donc, nous allons procéder par phases. Donc, première phase comme je l'ai expliquée, comme le *scope of works* sera finalisé, on va procéder avec un *tendering exercise* et à partir de là, les travaux vont se faire. Donc, il faudra attendre.

Mr Speaker: MP Bhagwan!

GRA – 2024 HORSE RACING – STAKE MONEY – REGISTERED STABLES

(No. B/108) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the forthcoming 2024 Horse Racing season, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to –

- (a) the amount of stake money that has been agreed upon, indicating if the Authority has approved same;
- (b) the number of stables registered with the Authority to date therefor, and
- (c) if any due diligence exercise has been carried out with regard to the owners/shareholders participating therein by the relevant authority.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, je suis informé par la *Gambling Regulatory Authority* que pour la prochaine saison de courses 2024, l'organisateur des courses de chevaux, *People's Turf PLC* n'a pas encore communiqué le montant des enjeux à payer pour la saison de courses 2024.

PTP attend probablement que le calendrier des courses pour la saison 2024 soit publié par la *Horse Racing Division* avant de communiquer le montant des enjeux.

Il convient de noter que le paiement des enjeux relève de la seule responsabilité de l'organisateur des courses de chevaux et que ni la *GRA Act*, ni les règles de courses de la Division des courses de chevaux n'imposent d'obligations à la *GRA* ou à la *Horse Racing Division* en ce qui concerne la réglementation des enjeux.

Je dois également ajouter qu'en vertu de l'article 61 des Règles des courses, les conditions de chaque réunion de courses, y compris le montant des enjeux à payer par l'organisateur des courses de chevaux pour une course donnée, doivent être publiées au moins cinq jours avant le jour de la réunion des courses, et cela, afin que les entraîneurs soient informés à l'avance du montant des enjeux offerts et décident de désigner et d'aligner un cheval dans une course en tenant compte du montant des enjeux offerts pour la course en question.

En outre, l'article 30 du *Gambling Regulatory Act 2007* prévoit que l'organisateur des courses de chevaux doit être une société anonyme et que conformément à la loi et à ses conditions de licence, il doit être solvable et financièrement sain pendant toute la saison des courses. Et en fin de compte, la décision concernant le paiement du montant des enjeux doit être une décision commerciale saine pour l'organisateur des courses de chevaux.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, je suis informé par la *GRA* que le nombre d'entraîneurs approuvés et autorisés à exploiter une écurie par le *Horse Racing Committee* s'élève à seize à ce jour pour la prochaine saison de course 2024.

En ce qui concerne la partie (c) de la question, la *GRA* a procédé à des exercices de diligence raisonnable avant l'octroi de licences ou l'enregistrement des parties prenantes impliquées dans l'industrie des courses de chevaux, y compris les propriétaires, comme le prévoient les articles 15C (1) (h) et 93B de la *GRA Act*. Merci.

Mr Bhagwan: Depuis que le *People's Turf* a eu son permis pour organiser les courses et que les courses font partie du patrimoine, *sports activities*, est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire s'il est au courant et s'il a discuté avec la *GRA* ? Parce que nous assistons à une mort lente de

l'organisation des courses à Maurice, non seulement l'état du Champ de Mars, mais l'organisation des courses elle-même par la *People's Turf*.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en ce qui concerne cette question, je pense que l'honorable membre pourrait venir avec une question dessus et je me ferai un devoir d'aller demander des précisions à la *GRA*.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce qu'on peut savoir du ministre, est-ce que lui en tant que ministre et que la *GRA* qui tombe sous sa responsabilité, ne pense-t-il pas qu'il est temps de demander à la *GRA* de faire une enquête sur la solvabilité du *People's Turf*? C'est connu au niveau de tout le monde, ceux qui fréquentent le Champ de Mars, pas moi, mais je suis au courant et je lis, nous assistons à une mort lente, comme je l'ai dit, de l'organisation. Est-ce qu'il compte prendre la question avec la *GRA* pour commanditer une étude sur la solvabilité du *People's Turf*?

Dr. Padayachy: Je tiens à préciser que, comme j'ai répondu auparavant, l'article 30 du *Gambling Regulatory Act 2007* prévoit que l'organisateur de courses de chevaux doit être une société anonyme et que cette société doit être solvable et financièrement saine pendant toute la saison des courses. Et je prendrai au mot l'honorable membre et je demanderai des précisions à la *GRA*. Merci.

Mr Speaker: MP Lobine!

HIGHLANDS – GAS INCINERATOR – OPERATION

(No. B/109) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the gas incinerator and the cremation ground at Highlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix, information in each case as to the –

- (a) dates of the coming into operation thereof, and
- (b) number of times these facilities have been used 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 the LPG-Fired Human Incinerator at Highlands came into operation on 20 December 2021. I am also informed that there is no crematorium ground at Highlands whereat traditional cremation on wooden fire could be carried out since the necessary clearance from the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of Environment has not been obtained.

I wish to inform the House that there are 15 other incinerators across the island, along with that of Highlands, which have been funded under the Indian line of credit. The contract was awarded to Kanta Electricals India Limited on 26 July 2019. No provision for maintenance contract was made in the bidding document then.

As regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that three incinerations were carried out during the period January 2023 to August 2023, and the incinerator is not operational as from that date as several faulty parts thereof need to be replaced and no maintenance agreement is available despite several bidding exercise conducted by the Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has therefore, with the technical assistance of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, prepared a set of bidding document for procurement of repairs and maintenance of the 16 incinerators, including the one at Highlands. The bids have been launched on 27 March 2024 and the closing date for submission of the bids has been scheduled for 25 April 2024. If we get a promoter, it is expected that the contract would be awarded by mid-June this year.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Vice-Prime Minister, whether he is aware that there was a promise, that there was a traditional wooden pyre that was being used at Cinq Arpents and it was moved to Highlands in the same place where the gas incinerator is, and the inhabitants were told that they will be able to use either the gas incinerator or the traditional wooden pyre? May I get from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, why as at date, this has not been the case, that is, the use of this traditional wooden pyre?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that we have traditional pyres for Constituency No. 15 at Trois Mamelles and Phoenix. We have two places where you can have it done.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask a supplementary question? May I ask the Vice-Prime Minister if he is aware that the inhabitants of Cinq Arpents, Belle Terre and Highlands, for so many years, used to go at Cinq Arpents for those traditional wooden pyres to be used and now, it is causing serious inconvenience for them to go to Trois Mamelles or Allée Brillant or other places to undergo this traditional way of burying or cremating their dead ones? Are you aware of that?

Dr. Husnoo: No, we appreciate the difficulties, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, we were trying to solve the problem by having the LPG-Fired Human Incinerator. But, unfortunately, as I mentioned, there have been some problems with the contractor. Now, we have launched the bidding and we hope to get somebody who can repair these incinerators. As I mentioned earlier, I know for Constituency No. 15, there are two traditional pyres available at Trois Mamelles and Phoenix.

Mr Speaker: MP Woochit!

ROAD ACCIDENTS – RISING TREND & CAUSES – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/110) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to road accidents, he will state the reasons for the increase in the number thereof compared to last year, indicating the measures envisaged to combat the rising trend thereof.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/110, which has been addressed to the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, as it relates to my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 8,915 road accidents occurred last year, that is, 2023. Out of the 8,915 accidents, 6,366 caused material damages only; 2,063 caused light injuries only; 356 caused serious injuries, and 130 were fatal accidents.

For the year 2024, from 01 January 2024 to 29 March 2024, there were 1,402 road accidents out of which 164 caused material damages only, 268 caused slight injuries only, 40 caused serious injuries and 30 were fatal accidents. For the corresponding period in 2023, that is, from 01 January 2023 to 29 March 2023, there were 25 fatal road accidents causing the death of 25 people. A comparative analysis of the figures for the two corresponding periods shows that there has been a 20% increase in the number of fatal accidents. Out of the 32 persons killed from 01 January 2024 to 29 March 2024, six were pedestrians, four were drivers, fourteen were riders, five were passengers, two were cyclists, and one was a pillion rider.

The pedestrian and two wheelers accounted for 72% of the total persons killed for period January 2024 to March 2024. Among the victims –

- 1 was below 15 years;
- 4 were between the age of 16 to 25;
- 17 were between the age 26 to 50;
- 4 were between the age of 51 to 59, and
- 6 were senior citizens.

13 out of the 30 fatal road accidents were reported to have occurred between 18 hrs. to 6 hrs. while the remaining 17 were reported to have occurred between 6 hrs to 18 hrs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, causes of accidents are usually determined by the Police in their investigations. I am advised that the causes of road accidents are numerous. A road crash does not occur due to a single contributory risk factor. These include, but are not limited to the following –

- Loss of control of vehicle by driver;
- Carelessness, recklessness of driver;
- Inattentive driver;
- Attitude of drivers/motorcyclists;
- Reckless overtaking;
- Exceeding speed limits;

- Aggressive driving;
- Driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs;
- Fatigue;
- Slippery roads;
- Pedestrian wearing dark clothing;
- Animal or object on carriage way;
- State of the vehicle;
- Defective traffic signals;
- Non-compliance to traffic signals and road markings;
- Dark spots;
- Poor street lightings;
- Lack of respect for laws and the police, and
- Unskilled driving.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the major reasons causing road accidents is also the carefree attitude of drivers and motorcyclists. To control the increase in accidents, a behavioral change is required. In view thereof, my Ministry has, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, developed a curriculum on road safety education including the teacher's guide to be imparted to students of Grade 1 to 6. The continuum of road safety education would be extended to Pre-Primary Schools including private institutions, all Primary Schools, including private institutions, Secondary Schools including private institutions and Tertiary Education Centres.

Moreover, my Ministry in collaboration with the MITD, is in the process of setting up a Driver's Education and Testing Centre at Forest-Side to provide training refresher course to driving instructors and potential drivers in accordance to an approved national curriculum. The TMRSU has been working with key stakeholders for the implementation of road safety measures and installation of road safety furniture in line with a safe system approach that would be more forgiving to human errors in case of crashes.

Furthermore, in the light of the considerable increase in drug driving offense being detected and the impact of drugs on the cognitive driving behavior of the drivers and dangers such drivers represent on the roads, my Ministry would revisit the sentencing for drunk driving and the Road Traffic Act would be amended accordingly.

Concurrently, my Ministry is revisiting the Driver Licensing Scheme to introduce the probationary driving license which would put a set of restrictions on new drivers who have recently passed their test for an initial period of time. In parallel to all infrastructural and legislative measures, my Ministry has been conducting intensive and aggressive, sensitisation campaigns on billboards, television, radio, social media to raise awareness among road users, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is also reviewing the National Road Safety Strategy 2016 to 2025 with a view to actualising the recommended actions, infrastructural legislatures and sensitisation contained therein to be in phase with a changing environment and road infrastructures in place. Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister aware that from January this year till today, we have had already 35 deaths on our roads; as you stated compared to last year, there were 25? There is therefore an increase.

Mr Ganoo: Yes, I did mention, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Woochit: Can the hon. Minister provide a timeline for the implementation of the proposed measures that you just mentioned and any expected targets to reduce these road accidents?

Mr Ganoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. The list is long. In fact, there are measures which have already been taken. There are measures which are in the pipeline. There are engineering measures. There are legislative measures also. I can, if the hon. Minister wishes and by your leave, Mr Speaker, Sir, go through the list of all these measures. Let us take the measures that have already been taken –

- Introduction of stricter penalties;

- Implementation of a three stage audit process with the collaboration of the RDA;
- Introduction of 40 km per hour zones along streets and 40 km per hour along collector-distributor roads, what we call the ‘sea roads’ around the island;
- Installation of Belisha Flashing lights at different zebra pedestrian crossing sites across the island to raise the awareness of drivers that they need to be cautious at such locations;
- A Web-Based Road Crash Data Management System has been set up by my Ministry whereby data on accidents are plugged in the system and reports are generated which provide information on the characteristics of accidents such as dark spot areas, time and location of the accidents as well as the type of vehicles and persons involved, age of the driver, severity of the accidents amongst others. These data enable my Ministry to take appropriate remedial measures and policies are accordingly formulated to enhance road safety and reduce the number fatalities on our roads.
- Road safety inspections are being carried out by my Ministry along with hazardous road across the island to improve the safety performance of road.
- Traffic calming and road safety measures in terms of raised tables and speed cameras and road safety measures in terms of crash barriers, pedestrian crossings, cats’ eye, traffic lights, handrails, and guardrails are being implemented by my Ministry in various locations around the island to reduce the severity of the injured persons and deaths during road crashes.
- Hard shoulders are also being rehabilitated along motorway across the road.
- The Road Traffic Act has been amended to make it more stringent and to increase the fines for 204 offenses, and the fixed penalty system.

- The Road Traffic Act has equally been amended to increase the fines for speeding offences. The legislation has been amended to prevent driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Implementation of the drug driving legislation, awareness and sensitisation campaigns in relation to road safety are ongoing at the level of my Ministry.

Additional measures are being envisaged, Mr Speaker, Sir.

- I just referred to the review of the Driver Licensing Scheme to include the probationary driving license which would introduce a set of restrictions for a specified period of time for new and young drivers. The probationary driver's license is a proven measure to address the issue of novice drivers being overrepresented in road clashes.
- Enactment of new legislation regarding the mandatory use of child restraints in passenger cars to maximise the safety of passengers less than 10 years old.
- Introduction of Road Traffic Technical Prescription for Protective Helmet Regulations 2022 to ensure that all protective helmets intended to protect the wearers' head against impact during the road crash which would be imported and sold in compliance with the UN Regulations No. 22 standards.
- The introduction of the Road Traffic/Pedestrian Traffic Regulation to enhance the safety of pedestrian on our roads as statistics show that pedestrians are the most vulnerable on roads.
- Amendments to the Road Traffic Act to increase the number of cumulative road traffic offences from 11 to 32.

I can go on, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Dr. Boolell is absent! So, we move to hon. Yeung Sik Yuen.

**MORCELLEMENT RAMALINGUM, CUREPIPE – FLOODING COMPLAINT–
DRAIN PROJECTS**

(No. B/112) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Morcellement Ramalingum in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to if the Council is in presence of any complaint of flooding thereat and, if so, indicate the drains projects earmarked thereat, if any.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that on 26 March 2024, a complaint was received at the Council through an email from one Mrs A., regarding issues of drain at Chemin la Rivière and Domur at Morcellement Ramalingum, Forest Side. Here, I would also like to inform the House that the DPM and the PPS Dhunoo are closely following that complaint of flooding at Morcellement Ramalingum.

A meeting was already held regarding that issue with the complainant in the presence of hon. Dhunoo, PPS and Mr Maunthrooa, General Manager of the CWA, the National Development Unit and the Municipal City Council of Port Louis on 20 March 2024 to take stock of the situation and this was followed by site visits.

I am further informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that the National Development Unit, the Land Drainage Authority and the Municipal City Council of Port Louis are working on a drain network proposed to resolve the flooding problem thereat.

I wish to add that cleaning of open drains, weeding, herbiciding, lopping and mowing are carried out by the scavenging contractor appointed by the Municipal for Council of Curepipe, namely Atics Ltd on 01 March 2024.

On 28 March 2024, Atics Ltd has again started cleaning the open drains which will end on 04 April 2024. Thereafter, immediately Atics Ltd will start cleaning the cross drains and same will be completed by 11 April 2024. In parallel, the service provider has embarked in the

cleaning of rivulets and bare lands as from Monday 01 April 2024 in accordance with the scope of service in the contract document for scavenging services.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am given to understand that the first complaint was in August 2021 and not in 2024. Is the Vice-Prime Minister aware that the region is being flooded with muddy water quite often and the inhabitants are incurring losses such as furniture, home appliances, wooden carpet and food items? Can he reassure the House that needful will be done urgently?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that I was informed by the Council that they got a complaint on 26 March 2024. That is what was informed by the Council.

Now, as far as the works that need to be done, I have just mentioned that we had a meeting with the Municipal Council, the NDU and with the Land Drainage Authority. Everybody is trying to work on the drain network, not just one drain but there is a whole network there to prevent this from recurring again in the future.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ARSENAL – SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS – FLOOD MITIGATING MEASURES

(No. B/113) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the construction of social housing units at Arsenal, opposite to the pépinière d'Arsenal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Social Living Development Ltd., information as to if it was subjected to severe flooding during the passage of cyclone Belal and, if so, state the measures being taken to reduce the risk of inundation thereat.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Social Living Development Ltd. (NSLD) that part of the site opposite the *pépinière* d'Arsenal and earmarked for the construction of residential units was indeed flooded during the passage of cyclone Belal due to –

- (i) on-site surface run-off;

- (ii) off-site surface run-off from adjacent areas, and
- (iii) consequential backflow of water due to insufficient capacity of the culvert located at A4 Road to evacuate the volume of water.

I am further informed that the accumulated water had, within 24 hours, either percolated or dissipated into the existing culverts on A4 Road.

As regards the measures being taken to reduce the risk of inundation on this site, I wish to refer the hon. Member to my reply to PQ B/1551 on 21 November 2023 whereby I enumerated the measures that would be implemented by the NSLD, as prescribed by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change as well as by the Land Drainage Authority. These measures include both on-site and off-site works as follows –

Onsite works include –

- a) upgrading of the man-made canal on the site;
- b) provision of a ridge to protect the site from canal and upstream flows;
- c) fitting of all internal roads with appropriate reinforced concrete drains, and
- d) provision of four attenuation basins.

Following a detailed design report prepared by the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd (DICL) and approved by the LDA, off-site works will now include –

- a) construction of a new culvert along Malakoff Road with substantial increase hydraulic capacity to ensure no backflow of water;
- b) construction of the new culvert along A4 Road with substantial hydraulic capacity and upgrading of water course upstream and downstream of the culvert, and
- c) construction of cut-off drains along the side boundaries to channel there any incoming off-site water to a safe discharge. I understand this refers to an upgraded natural drainage path and Rivière Citron.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as recommended by the LDA, all these measures, I am informed, will be implemented prior year to the handing over of the residential units to the eventual beneficiaries.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether in the course of management meetings that he chairs with the NHDC and NSLD, – I am sure he does because of the magnitude of the project, Rs.25 billion for 8,000 units – has he had the opportunity to take cognizance or question whether severe flooding has to do with the fact that on-site works to protect the construction activities, as recommended by the Land Drainage Authority, were not implemented simply because if that was implemented, design and build contract to the tune of Rs2.7 m. per unit would not have been possible because the cost would have been much more?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not sure I understand the question of the hon. gentleman. All I can say is that yes, indeed, there are weekly meetings where the NSLD reports progress on all its sites. The NSLD's attention has been drawn to the fact that we need to draw lessons from the passage of Belal as regards flooding and risks of flooding on all of our 37 sites, including Arsenal.

(Interruptions)

Maybe you might want to listen to my answer first?

The intention of Government is to ensure that no residential complex be delivered, be handed over to eventual buyers until and unless we have done all that is within our knowledge as advised by the technical authorities to guard against risks of flooding. As the hon. gentleman may be aware, in the past, we have had issues when unfortunately the NHDC, in years gone by, a long time ago, had not precisely done what needed to be done to guard against climate change.

Now, we know that climate change is upon us. The NSLD has strict instructions to follow the technical advice provided by the relevant authorities. Of course, we cannot question that advice. We can only ensure the timely implementation of the advice.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I raised my hand so that I do not lose my second question.

Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether, in the course of management meetings, he has had the chance to question if variations for extra cost have been incurred by the

NSLD because of the flooding that has occurred during the passage of cyclone Belal, which may have caused damages to ongoing construction works?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I do not have such information at hand. If the hon. gentleman would wish to communicate the information that he has and he is obviously well-informed, I shall be happy to look into it.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQs B/115, B/119, B/129, B/130, B/135, B/137, B/140, B/141, B/153 and B/154 have been withdrawn.

The next question will be from hon. Abbas Mamode!

E-HR PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/114) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the E-HR Project, he will state the –

- (a) status thereof, including the coverage thereof in Ministries and Departments;
- (b) number of public officers accessing the system;
- (c) cost thereof;
- (d) transformative impact thereof in service delivery, and
- (e) plan, if any, to interface with other government IT systems.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed in the context of digital transformation of the Public Service, my Ministry has launched and implemented the E-HR project which is an unprecedented transformative initiative and an award-winning project at the national level in the African continent.

The E-HR system consists of two main elements, namely the Leave Management System (LMS) and the Core HR Module which leverages technology to streamline and digitalise various HR processes within the public service.

This move towards digitalisation is aimed at significantly enhancing the overall efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and responsiveness of the Public Service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the E-HR system has been implemented in phases. The initial phase of the Leave Management System was successfully implemented on a pilot basis at my Ministry and the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and the system is fully operational since July 2021.

The second phase of the Leave Management System started in March 2022 and ended in May 2022. In the second phase, 20 additional organisations were covered. Phase 3 of the LMS started in June 2022 and was completed in December 2022, covering the remaining organisation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, as at March 2024, the Leave Management System is live in all Ministries, Departments and other Government institutions, representing 79 organisations and covering more than 47,000 employees, which equates to approximately 83% of the public officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (c) of the question, the total cost of the E-HR project for the three phases amounts to approximately Rs22 million.

With regard to part (d) of the question, the objectives that were set were met beyond expectations and have contributed significantly to improve and streamline intricate HR processes which have alleviated substantially the work of the HR Cadre. Users of the system are now able to seamlessly engage with respective Ministries and Departments with a user-friendly portal for a number of HR functions which include leave management, updating of personal data, accessing payroll and the management of their leaves.

As a result of this streamlining of processes, my Ministry has been able to optimise on HR Resources and to cater for more strategic HR functions such as Strategic Planning, Training, Need Analysis, Succession Planning and Rotation Policy instead of dealing with daily operational HR matter.

Furthermore, the project has significantly contributed to the reduction of our carbon footprint as the paper intensive HR processes have now been replaced by digitally enabled ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as part (e) of the question is concerned, the E-HR system has already been integrated with the Electronic Attendance System. The integration of the Leave Management System with Electronic Attendance System streamline the leave management processes by allowing for a seamless communication between the two systems and ensuring real time leave updates on the Electronic Attendance System.

The E-HR project consists of a strategy asset. The whole HR database is kept centrally and in a secured environment. This asset is being made available to other systems which are being implemented in other departments of the Government. The E-HR system will also interface with pension, passage benefit and car loan system and an online case brief system which are being developed by the Accountant-General's office and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, respectively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry intends to interplay the E-HR with other systems with a view to promoting a whole of Government's approach towards public service delivery which places the citizen at the centre of the public service. In this context, my Ministry is actively engaged with other stakeholders such as the Mutual Aid, Civil Service Association Ltd with regard to facilitating public officers in their loan application with the institutions.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you. Being given that this is a new project and we have been made to understand that it concerns 83% of the public service, can the hon. Minister inform the House if there has been any complaint or is the Minister satisfied with the new system being implemented?

Dr. Ramdhany: Affirming positively to such a laudable initiative to an unprecedented transformative initiative which is an award-winning project at national level and even African continent but we have to sustain such initiatives for workmen's class. We are putting Wi-Fi spots on the workplace for a better connectivity so that they can use the E-HR system.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Bodha!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 12 – FULLY CONFRETE HOUSING SCHEME – PROJECT DETAILS

(No. B/115) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Fully Concrete Housing Scheme, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Empowerment Foundation, information as to the number of –

- (a) housing units constructed thereunder in Constituency No. 12, Mahébourg and Plaine Magnien, since January 2020 to date, indicating the –
 - (i) location thereof;
 - (ii) date of delivery, and;
 - (iii) names of the beneficiaries thereof, and
- (b) on-going projects thereunder, indicating their –
 - (i) respective cost;
 - (ii) expected date of completion, and
 - (iii) delivery thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 16 – OPERATIONAL INCINERATORS

(No. B/116) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to incinerators in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the recent systems installed, indicating the number thereof in working conditions, in particular the one situated at Glen Park.

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 one LPG Fired Incinerator has been installed at La Marie in Constituency No. 16 and same is operational since 20 December 2021.

I am further informed that the incinerator is not being put to use as from August 2023 since several faulty parts thereof need to be replaced and no maintenance contract is available despite bidding exercise carried out by the Council on 17 October 2023 and 30 January 2024.

I wish to inform the House that there are 15 other such incinerators across the island, along with that at La Marie which have been funded under the Indian Line of Credit. The contract was awarded to Kanta Electricals India Ltd. No provision for maintenance contract was made in the bidding document initially.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as already indicated in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/109, bids have been launched for repair and maintenance of the 16 incinerators on 20 March 2024 and the closing date for submission of the bids has been scheduled for 25 April 2024. It is expected that the contract would be awarded by mid-June this year.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Vice-Prime Minister for his answer. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there was a commissioning by the Indian company once the installations had been done in La Marie and in other parts of Mauritius?

Dr. Husnoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, there were 16 incinerators which were done under this project as I mentioned from Line of Credit from India and it was commissioned by a team.

Mr Bodha: Can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister what is the cost of this project which was funded by a Line of Credit from India and who is going to pay for the repairs?

Dr. Husnoo: The contract was awarded to Kanta Electricals Ltd. for the sum of USD 2,256,000 and now as I mentioned, actually after we had problems with the incinerators, we contacted the original contractor, that is, Kanta Electricals Ltd but unfortunately, we did not get a reply at all. So, we are trying to do another bid locally to see if we can find somebody who can repair these incinerators.

Mr Bodha: I presume that the repairs will be made by...

Mr Speaker: Next question, MP Navarre-Marie!

CANAL DAYOT & SABLE NOIR – RETICULATED SEWERAGE SYSTEM – PIPES CONNECTION

(No. B/117) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the regions of Canal Dayot and Sable Noir, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the connection of pipes to the reticulated sewerage system thereat.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that the region of Canal Dayot was earmarked for connection to the public sewer network under Phase 2 of the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project which was awarded to contractor Sinohydro Corporation Ltd. (SCL). However, the contract with Sinohydro Corporation Ltd was terminated due to the latter's poor performance under the contract. It was subsequently decided that the outstanding works under the above contract be carried out in a phased manner.

In a first instance, priority was given to implementing projects so as to make beneficial use of the already constructed sewer infrastructure under the said contract.

Thus, bids have been launched by Wastewater Management Authority in respect of Phases 3 and 4 of the project and these cover the regions of Morcellement Le Rock, Morcellement Raffray, les Guibies, Anse Courtois and Claude Delaitre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on one hand, Phase 3 of the project will consist of the construction of the remaining part of the trunk sewers which is around 2.2 km, and which is of prime importance as it will serve to connect the reticulation network and some 225 house connections. The works will also include construction of remaining sewer reticulation network, decommissioning of the two pumping stations and one wastewater treatment plant, and CWA pipe replacement and connection works. This phase of the project will have a duration of three years.

Following the approval of the Central Procurement Board, bids were launched on 24 November 2023, with closing date on 20 February 2024. The bids received are currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board.

On the other hand, Phase 4 of the project will comprise the design and construction of some 1,240 house connections in the regions of Morcellement Raffray, les Guibies, Anse Courtois and Claude Delaitre. This phase will have a duration of 2 years. Following approval of

the Central Procurement Board, the invitation for bids was launched on 28 December 2023, with closing date on 19 February 2024. The bids for Phase 4 are also under evaluation at the Central Procurement Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since Sinohydro Corporation Limited has not yet carried out any sewer infrastructure works in the region of Canal Dayot at the end of its contract, the Wastewater Management Authority proposes to carry out wastewater works at Canal Dayot in a subsequent phase. Connection of flows from the Canal Dayot region will be possible only after construction of four river crossings across St Louis River from Canal Dayot region to the sewer main. The project will also include laying of 1.1 km of reticulation networks and connection of around 110 houses. It is expected that works at Canal Dayot would be undertaken under Phase 5 of the project and procurement procedures could start as from early 2025.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for Sable Noir region, this is considered to be a low-lying area near the coast. There is at present no wastewater project earmarked for this region. However, an integrated feasibility study could be undertaken in the future for the Sable Noir region and environments. I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, sur les 48 kilomètres de tuyaux à être installés, le ministre pourrait-il nous dire combien de kilomètres ont déjà été placés par la compagnie chinoise ?

Mr Lesjongard: I have already replied to that in the past. Out of the 48 km which was supposed to be laid, the contractor Sinohydro has laid some 17.7 km, which represents some 37.3% of the work to be completed.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. Le ministre pourrait-il nous dire si le coût de ce projet, entre mai 2023 à ce jour, avait été annoncé à hauteur de R 37 millions, si ce coût a enregistré une hausse ? Si oui, de combien et pour quelle raison ?

Mr Lesjongard: Si l'honorable membre peut répéter, je n'ai pas trop compris. R 37 millions ?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Oui. De mai 2023 à ce jour, est-ce que le ministre pourrait nous dire si le projet annoncé au départ à hauteur de R 37 millions, a connu une hausse, si oui, de combien, et pour quelle raison ?

Mr Lesjongard: Je ne comprends pas trop. C'est quel projet de R 37 millions ?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le projet de tout-à-l'égout à Sable Noir et Canal Dayot.

Mr Lesjongard: Le projet de tout-à-l'égout à Canal Dayot n'est pas de l'ordre de R 37 millions. C'est beaucoup plus que ça. Si je ne me trompe pas, ce que j'avais annoncé au coût de R 37 millions, c'était le *permanent resurfacing that was allocated to the contractor Gamma Civic to complete works that were left over by the contractor Sinohydro*.

Mr Speaker: So, we move to the next question! Hon. Armance is absent.

RÉDUIT – STATE LAND – CULTURAL CENTRES' REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/119) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State land earmarked for cultural centres at Réduit, he will state if any decision has been taken thereon by Government in the light of representations made by the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association thereon.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker So, MP Ms Joanna Bérenger!

CHAMAREL, ROAD B104 – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(No. B/120) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the works being undertaken on the road B104 at Chamarel, he will state if an Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out thereinto prior to the start thereof and, if so, when, indicate if a copy thereof will be tabled and, if not, why not.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question pertains to road B104 and I am informed by the RDA that there are currently no ongoing works along that road.

Ms J. Bérenger: Il s'agissait de la route B103. Peut-être que le ministre peut quand même donner l'information ? Est-ce qu'une étude *EIA* a été faite avant que les travaux soient entrepris sur cette route ?

Mr Ramano: Ce sera avec plaisir, Madame. Mais, M. le président, la question a trait à B104, et si l'honorable membre vient avec une autre question qui a trait à B103, je me ferai un plaisir de lui répondre.

Ms J. Bérenger: *Pe sove !*

Mr Ramano: *To pa konn poz kestion! Ki sove?*

An hon. Member: Exactement !

Mr Speaker: What is happening? What is happening now?

Ms J. Bérenger: *Nanye pa ti anpes ou reponn !*

Mr Speaker: When I am quiet, you people are unruly! What is happening in this House?

(Interruptions)

I want you to be quiet also!

So, the question B/120 was from MP Ms Joanna Bérenger. Is that answered already? Yes.

Ms J. Bérenger: *Non, li pa reponn li !*

Mr Speaker: So, we move on to...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Li pa anvi reponn !*

Mr Speaker: So, we move on to MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: B/121.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Li'nn rat sime!*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Al fim to simik trankil twa!*

Mrs Mayotte: *Ey!* On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mrs Mayotte: The hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger said: '*Al fim to simik to fer bien twa!*' Is that acceptable in the Parliament, please?

Mr Speaker: No! MP Ms Bérenger, please apologise for that!

Ms J. Bérenger: He needs to apologise!

Mr Speaker: Please, please apologise for that!

Ms J. Bérenger: Okay, okay, I apologise!

Mr Speaker: Yes, good!

So, we move on MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

An hon. Member: *Maintenant tou dimounn kone! Bravo Mayotte!*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Pou enn fwa, li pe...*

An hon. Member: *Ankor dan gardri!*

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 – FLOOD-PRONE AREAS – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/121) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to flooding in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin and Petite Rivière, he will state if a survey has been carried out to identify the flood-prone areas following the recent floods caused by cyclone Belal thereat, indicating the –

- (a) damages caused as a result thereof, and
- (b) remedial measures envisaged to address same.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Land Drainage Authority has already identified a list of 20 flood-prone areas in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin Petite Rivière, specifically in the region of Petite Rivière, Gros Cailloux, Albion, Coromandel, Chebel, Barkly, Mont Roches, and Beau Bassin.

To that effect, projects are being undertaken by the National Development Unit and Drain Infrastructure Construction Ltd to mitigate the flooding events in these regions. As at date, six projects have been completed, seven projects are at design stage, one project is at land acquisition stage, and seven projects are at survey stage.

With regard to part (a) of the question, following the recent floods caused by Belal, the LDA has observed that Kinoo Lane, Citronelle Avenue and Lobine Lane which are in the region of Petite Rivière, were inundated with approximately a flood mark level of 40cm at Kinoo Lane and Citronelle Avenue and a flood level of 20cm at Lobine Lane. This was due to the overflowing of natural and manmade streams which cross the build-up areas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Reduction Management that damages were observed to road infrastructure necessitating upgrading and resurfacing works and that 26 cases of house flooding were reported.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (b) of the question, with a view to mitigating flooding at Kinoo Lane, Citronelle Avenue and Lobine Lane, the LDA has proposed the following remedial measures –

1. Immediate cleaning of the main RDA drain along B78 of a stretch of 500 metres, and
2. As a long-term measure to increase the conveyance capacity of the streams and drains within the build-up areas in these localities.

On the other hand, I am further informed that the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill has obtained financial clearance to proceed with the following works –

- Reconstruction of roads in the region of Coromandel;
- Patch work and resurfacing work on roads wherever required;
- Cleaning of drains in the region of Beau Bassin, Mont Roches, Barkly and Coromandel, and
- Implementation of flood mitigation measures at Napier Broom, Beau Bassin.

Thank you.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Avec le changement climatique et une pluviométrie plus intense, les données ont changé et les endroits inondables sont devenus plus nombreux. Est-ce que le ministre a l'intention de faire un *Flood Risk Assessment* pour savoir quels chemins, quels bâtiments ou quelles maisons sont à risque d'inondation et de cartographier les drains existants de la circonscription No. 20 pour permettre d'identifier les endroits où il y a un manque de drains ou les endroits qui nécessitent de nouveaux drains ?

Mr Hurreeram: Ceci a déjà été fait, M. le président et d'ailleurs, le *Land Drainage Authority* a déjà identifié 1 700 drains construits à travers le pays et ceci est en cours et bien sûr, comme l'a si bien dit l'honorable membre, c'est une situation dynamique et on est en train de s'adapter *as and when required*. Merci.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Suite aux pluies de Belal, l'honorable ministre a sans nul doute reçu plusieurs plaintes par rapport aux maisons inondées que ce soit à travers la mairie, le *District Council* et les *CAB*, autres que celui qu'il vient de mentionner et d'ailleurs, je suis moi-même en possession de différentes requêtes que je peux lui communiquer plus tard. Est-ce que le ministre peut donner un *timeframe*, peut donner la garantie à ces habitants de la circonscription qu'avant la prochaine saison cyclonique que tous ces problèmes en question seront résolus et que les habitants n'auront plus à craindre que leur maison soit une fois de plus inondée ?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, when dealing with flood, we need to understand that we are into mitigating. We are not into resolving, it is absolutely impossible to have a dry feet policy in case of flash flood and flooding. The LDA, the NDU, the RDA, the TMRSU, the Local Government, the Ministry of Local Government, we are all working together to try to make our island as safe as possible. So, giving a timeframe, I don't think it is fair to ask.

Mr Speaker: MP Anquetil!

NATIONAL GENDER POLICY – TECHNICAL COMMITTEES – OUTCOME

(No. B/122) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the setting up of the 4 technical committees in the private sector, academia, media and civil society organisations, as recommended in the National Gender Policy, she will state if same have been set up and, if so, when, indicating in each case –

- (a) the number of meetings held, and
- (b) the outcome thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the launching of the National Gender Policy 2022-2030 in March 2022, my Ministry has been implementing all the recommendations mentioned therein. It is being implemented in a phase-wise manner where the mechanism put forth has been set up, namely –

1. The National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming;
2. The Inter-ministerial Gender Technical Working Group Committee, and
3. Dedicated gender cell in all Ministries and Departments as well as at the level of Local Authorities.

As at date, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have reached 48 gender cells across Ministries and Departments. Given that the National Gender Policies span over a period of eight years, my Ministry is sustaining gender mainstreaming at the public sector level, including Rodrigues and will thereafter extend across all the four sectors that is, the private sector, the media, the academia and civil society organisations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a guideline will be used for the setting up of the gender technical working groups on gender mainstreaming in the four respective sectors I have just mentioned. These guidelines are presently at drafting stage, taking into consideration the dynamics of our societal set-up and the varying requirements of those four sectors I have mentioned. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre la composition de chaque comité ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: The composition is going to come when the paper, the terms of reference and the guidelines are finalised, that is, when it is going to be put forward.

Ms Anquetil: Une dernière ? Je vous remercie, M. le président. Pouvons-nous obtenir de la ministre la liste des officiers de son ministère, nommés dans chaque comité ainsi que leurs compétences respectives? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes, I can, for the four technical working groups, you mean? Can I just clarify whether the hon. Member wanted the members of the four technical working groups? Is that the question?

Ms Anquetil: Yes!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I will very happily table it in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/123, B/126, B/127, B/134, B/144, B/147, B/149, and B/155 have been withdrawn.

CIGARETTES IMPORTATION – AMOUNT PAID & TAXES COLLECTED

(No. B/123) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to cigarettes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the quantity thereof imported since January 2023 to date, indicating the –

- (a) amount paid therefor;
- (b) country of origin, and
- (c) amount of taxes collected therefrom.

(Withdrawn)

CANTON NANCY, PAMPLEMOUSSES – FROPPIER BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION – CONTRACT

(No. B/124) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of Froppier Bridge at Canton Nancy, Pamplémousses, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Development Unit, information as to the –

- (a) date for the award of the contract, indicating the name of the contractor;
- (b) specified duration of the works;
- (c) contract value thereof, and
- (d) expected completion date thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I submitted in response to PQ B/1225 and PQ B/1315 for the Sitting of 17 October and 24 October 2023 respectively wherein I gave detailed information regarding the complexity of the project, resulting in delays encountered for the execution.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I mentioned already in my previous reply; I will give it again. I informed that on 05 April 2022, the Road Development Authority awarded the contract for the upgrading of the Froppier Bridge at Canton Nancy, Pamplémousses to Gamma Civic, so it remains Gamma Civic till now.

With respect to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the works started on 12 April 2022 and were initially scheduled to be completed on 04 November 2022. However, given the various difficulties faced during the execution of work, the completion date has had to be revised.

Regarding part (c) of the question, as I already mentioned twice previously, the sum of the project, the contract value is still Rs33.4 million inclusive of VAT.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (d) of the question, I am informed by the RDA that the actual progress on site is around 55% and major offsite works namely; the preparations of forecast elements have been completed.

The project is now expected to be completed by the end of June 2024 with the restoration of traffic onto the new bridge and I must put on record, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must thank my colleagues: the PPS Ramkaun and hon. Minister Callichurn for the precious help to the Ministry and the RDA to solve all the issues that we have had on site. Thanks to them, we have greatly advanced in the project. Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Can the hon. Minister inform the House why there has been a noticeable absence of workers on site in the recent months and today itself, leading to significant delays and disruption of the road users?

Mr Hurreeram: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, that's not the case. In fact, there are very few people working on site because as I said, there are precast elements that are being prepared off-site. So, works are done off-site, they will come and place it on site. So, currently, yes, there is no work on site.

Mr Woochit: Mr Speaker, Sir, the work was supposed to be completed on 04 November according to the Minister and would end at the end of June. So, are there any penalties or any consequences outlined in the contract with the contractor?

Mr Hurreeram: Delays do not automatically mean having penalties, etc., Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, it was a very difficult site. Replying to the question he had put to me on 17 October and 24 October, I had explained that it was a difficult site. We have had an old bridge which at some point in time we wanted to preserve, but seeing that it could create additional problem around the vicinity, to buildings in the vicinity, we have decided to do away with the existing bridge. So, we have had to secure what we already have on site, the building on site. So, all these do take time, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, of course, we have had inclement weather and that also adds up to the delay.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQs B/133, B/145 and B/156 have been withdrawn. Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

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

Mr Gobin seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

(4.24 p.m.)

BALFOUR, BEAU BASSIN – THEFTS – CAMERAS INSTALLATION

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement, pursuant to the matter raised by the hon. Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, on adjournment of the Sitting of the House on 26 March 2024, pertaining to alleged increase in thefts and other crimes in the region of Balfour, Beau Bassin and to the suggestion to have security cameras installed at the junction of Rue Trotter and Henri Lemaire.

I am informed, by the Commissioner of Police, that since 2020 to 29 March 2024, six cases have been reported to the Police, that is, two in 2020, two in 2021 and another two in 2022. No case has been reported in the year 2023 and for the period January 2024 to 29 March 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that for the installation of Safe City cameras, the following factors are considered, namely –

- (i) crime prone areas;
- (ii) accident prone areas;
- (iii) strategic public areas in cities, towns and villages;
- (iv) educational institutions;
- (v) places of worship, and
- (vi) major roads, where there are heavy traffic flows.

A total of sixty-eight Safe City cameras have been installed and are operational in the Beau Bassin region, including eleven in five sites along Trotter Avenue and its vicinity, Balfour. The five sites are –

SN	Site	No. of Cameras
1.	Junction Rennards Street and Trotter Street	2
2.	Balfour Avenue in front of Balfour Garden Gate	3
3.	Royal Road Beau Bassin near Tang way	2
4.	Junction Gaetan Raynal and Shand Streets	2
5.	Boulevard Cowin and Queen Alexandra Streets near Mosque	2

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that, nevertheless, the Police have taken additional measures to reinforce security in the Beau Bassin region through patrols. Moreover, in the context of Ramadan, special policing arrangements have been made in the vicinity of mosques across the island for the security of those attending prayers, as well as for the other road users.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(4.27 p.m.)

ST LOUIS METRO STATION – AGGRESSION & THEFTS – POLICE OFFICERS – POSTING

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall make a statement following matters raised by hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, at adjournment time at the sitting of 26 March 2024, regarding alleged cases of thefts and aggression occurring within the vicinity of the St Louis Metro Station.

The hon. Member said the following –

“En effet, cette station est devenue un véritable repère de voleurs et ceux qui utilisent ce service de jour comme de nuit sont souvent agressés et dépouillés de leurs biens.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that according to information provided by the Metro Express Limited, it has not received any report of theft at the Metro Station of St Louis.

As part of the security measures already in place, the St Louis Metro Station is already equipped with cameras and a video surveillance system as well as an emergency call system which can be activated by any passenger, by pressing a button to alert the Operation Control Centre of Metro Express Ltd, for instance, in case of any emergency or dangerous occurrence.

According to information provided to me, there was an alleged case of theft which occurred far outside the station on a footpath located at the end of a municipal road and next to a residential area.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to further enhancing security within the above locus, my Ministry has requested the Commissioner of Police to deploy Police Officers at the St Louis Metro Station, especially during off-peak hours as a deterrent measure against potential defaulters. The Police have, in addition, been requested to reinforce patrols within the precincts of the Station, including at the staircase that leads to the Pailles Road so as to make the locus safer for passengers and residents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the Metro Express Limited, along with other relevant authorities, would continue investing in the surroundings for the betterment of neighbourhood and for community development.

To this end, a full embellishment of the vicinity has been implemented, including the landscaping thereof, mural painting and provision of additional lighting at the said locus and the periphery.

Works for the creation of a new drop-off area along Pailles Branch Road have also started with a view to further unlocking the area.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should also not lose sight that the Metro Express Project has generated several benefits within the area of St Louis-Camp Chapelon by providing a modern, rapid and affordable mode of commute for the public and the residents. The area will continue to be upgraded with additional projects which are being or would be implemented by different organisations with the support of the Government.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Jagutpal!

(4.30 p.m.)

SIDS – 8TH MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH – DEVELOPMENTS

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to apprise the House of the pivotal developments stemming from the 8th Meeting of Ministers of Health of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) within the African Region of the WHO, convened in Victoria, Seychelles from 25 to 27 March 2024.

Acknowledging the shared health challenges faced by SIDS, the WHO Regional Office for Africa endorsed the establishment of a regional SIDS forum, uniting Cape Verde, Comoros, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles. This forum stands as a beacon for SIDS to confront health vulnerabilities head-on, fostering resilience and sustainability. Since its inception in Seychelles in 2006, SIDS Health Ministers have committed to biennial gatherings to exchange insights and monitor progress in health development. Invitations were extended to Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau to join the SIDS network, with a specific focus on pooled procurement.

The participants pledged to collaborate to strengthen national measures for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, and endorse common positions on proposed international agreements and regulations, notably the new Pandemic Treaty and International Health Regulations (IHR). Furthermore, we remain committed to exploring all avenues to access available funding mechanisms to address the health impacts of climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, two countries expressed keen interest in hosting the SIDS Pooled Procurement Secretariat, namely Mauritius and Cape Verde. The deliberation was based on the

Evaluation Mission Reports, whereby Mauritius had secured a score of 39 out of a possible 40 points, representing an outstanding 97.5%.

After meticulous consideration, amidst commendable candidacy from both Cape Verde and Mauritius, a closed voting system ensued, culminating in Mauritius securing victory with 4 votes against Cape Verde's 3. Consequently, consensus was reached to designate Mauritius as the host for the Secretariat, entrusted with spearheading the operationalisation of the SIDS Pooled Procurement Initiative.

This pivotal responsibility bears testament to our dedication to facilitating increased access to affordable, quality-assured, and safe medicines and medical supplies across SIDS. The establishment of the Secretariat will harmonise medicines management systems, elevate supplier performance, and alleviate procurement burdens. Moreover, it lays the groundwork for guiding principles and a robust governance structure, comprising a secretariat and technical committees.

I express profound gratitude to Cape Verde, Seychelles, Comoros, São Tomé & Príncipe, Guinea Bissau and Madagascar for having endorsed this decision. I further reaffirm our unwavering commitment to fulfilling this duty with utmost diligence for the collective welfare of all nations.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Ramyad!

(4.34 p.m.)

EXPORT-ORIENTED TEXTILE & CLOTHING ENTERPRISES –GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Ms N. Ramyad):
With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a statement on the additional Government support being extended to Export-Oriented Textile and Clothing Enterprises in the face of unprecedented challenges that are impacting on their export performance.

I wish to emphasise that the Export-Oriented Textile and Clothing sector remains a backbone of the manufacturing industry in view of its significant contribution to employment, foreign exchange earnings and Gross Value Added. The importance of the Textile and Clothing sector was highly valued during the COVID-19 pandemic through its versatility to shift to production of essential products to ensure health and safety of the population. At the same time, it was among the very few economic activities to generate substantial foreign exchange earnings for the country during the lockdown periods.

It should be reckoned that the sector is currently evolving in a highly volatile business environment characterised by rising production costs, severe competition from low-cost producing countries, geopolitical tensions in the Middle-East, ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and lack of visibility regarding renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

The compounding effects of these pronounced challenges are already being witnessed by Export-Oriented Textile and Clothing Enterprises as evidenced by a contraction in their exports by 16.6% for the year 2023, as compared to 2022. I wish to underline that such a distressing situation prevailed in 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, where export plummeted by more than 15%, when compared to 2019. However, Government took bold actions to reverse the deteriorating trend and this resulted in an export growth of 8.7% in 2021 and 8.0% in 2022.

The Textile and Clothing sector is again at a crossroad whereby it has to overcome daunting challenges arising from shortage of skilled labour, increase in industrial electricity tariffs, lower level of technology uptake and constraints to embrace sustainable practices, with the overall objective to maintain competitiveness and remain in business.

Feedback obtained by my Ministry from textile operators, tend to indicate that these restrictive factors are likely to persist in the near future, thereby putting additional pressure on their smooth manufacturing operations. I wish to stress that Government has been proactive in taking remedial measures to address these impediments as evidenced by more streamlined work permit policies, establishment of an Energy Efficiency Audit Scheme and implementation of a Manufacturing 4.0 Initiative, amongst others, for the manufacturing sector.

Furthermore, dedicated schemes such as the Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme and Freight Rebate Scheme, are already in place to accompany operators in their export drive. I wish

to highlight that a total amount of more than Rs1.6 billion has been disbursed since 2015 under these programmes.

On another note, it is acknowledged that the increase in National Minimum Wage and Salary Compensation in 2024 have put enormous pressure on the cashflow of Export-Oriented Enterprises, impacting on their overall competitiveness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already underscored that the Export-Oriented Textile and Clothing Enterprises are facing a more precarious situation and they need to be fully supported to navigate through the ongoing turbulences. The Mauritius Export Association (MEXA) is also on the same wavelength and has urged for more targeted assistance towards this category of enterprises.

In this perspective, Government is going the extra mile by providing an additional monthly financial assistance of Rs1,500 and Rs1,000 per full-time employee to cater, respectively, for the payment of the National Minimum Wage and the 2023 Salary Compensation to these companies for the period April to June 2024.

May I end, by mentioning that this Government has, at heart, the sustained development of the Textile and Clothing sector and will leave no stones unturned to ensure its long-term viability for greater economic prosperity.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Environment Bill (No. 1 of 2024) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BILL (NO. XXIII OF 2023)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(4.40 p.m.)

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, today is a very special day to intervene on such an important Bill, as on 02 April 2008, the United Nations General Assembly declared the 02 April as World Autism Awareness Day to draw attention to the growing need for innovative programmes designed to support those with autism.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities and I would like to congratulate the Minister, hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth for bringing this piece of legislation to the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the United Nations, at least 1.3 billion people or we can say 16% of the world's population experience some form of disability. In general, persons with disabilities often experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes such as a lack of employment and education opportunities, lower wages and the increased cost of living that often comes with a disability.

In developing states, Mr Speaker, Sir, poverty itself can increase rates of disability through malnutrition, unsafe working conditions, inadequate access to healthcare, a polluted environment, and a lack of access to safe water and sanitation.

Upholding the rights of people with disabilities is not only a moral imperative, it is a practical necessity if humankind is to overcome the many existential challenges it faces. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goal will require everyone's active participation in developing and implementing innovative solutions. We cannot afford to leave 15% of the population, out of the equation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by the Minister, in Mauritius, we have 84,500 persons representing 6.8% of the total population, out of which 34,273 suffer from a disability of 60% and derive a Basic Invalidity Pension. Mr Speaker, Sir, these persons with disabilities must be supported in fulfilling their intellectual and creative potential on par with everyone else in society. We can all work together to build an inclusive society, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030, all people everywhere enjoy peace and prosperity.

Mauritius, as a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Agenda 2030, will go through a transformative journey and work across sectors, by mainstreaming the principle of disability inclusion with its policy and implementation framework. Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a stepping stone on our transformative journey. The purpose of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. The 2030 Agenda commits in the same spirit as the CRPD to empower those at risk of vulnerability including persons with disabilities. It also promotes universal respect for human rights, equality and non-discrimination.

Speaking of the Bill, it gives the enabling framework for a National Disability Empowerment Authority with its own sets of roles, objectives and powers. It is a one-stop shop regrouping all the previous institutions, and through this Bill, making them more accessible. The 2030 Agenda commits in the same spirit, that we shall promote universal respect for human rights, equality and non-discrimination.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, this Bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights. Mainstreaming a human rights-based approach to disability, in combination with targeted measures, will make the concern and experience of persons with disabilities an integral dimension of the implementation and evaluation of policies. This legislation is bringing about in all political, economic and societal spheres so that persons with disabilities benefit equally. The ultimate goal is to achieve a quality of outcomes and foster an inclusive culture within our Mauritian nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the vision of our Government and our Prime Minister? It is to build an inclusive Mauritius for all Mauritians. Our Government came up with measures to always help the less fortunate and those who need special care. I can list the many things that we have done, Mr Speaker, Sir –

- The introduction of the minimum salary which is now Rs18,500.
- We waived the age criteria for children who are less than 15 years old to benefit from a Basic Invalidity Pension of Rs13,500 right now, Mr Speaker, Sir.
- The alignment of all pensions, including the Basic Invalidity Pension and the Basic Retirement Pension, like I said today, is at Rs13,500, Mr Speaker, Sir.
- The introduction of the full cost of cancer care and treatment in local private hospitals and foreign hospitals for children diagnosed with cancer.
- For children from 0-3 years, an allowance of Rs2,000 monthly.
- A *Prime à l'Emploi* Scheme up to Rs15,000, with objectives to bring women and persons with disabilities into employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me seize this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance for bringing these social measures and making this a reality. Today, I feel proud to be part of a Government that has at heart the development of these people. When we think about a child with a disability for example, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you think of a child with trisomy syndrome, someone can look at him differently. But for me, it is a child with an extra chromosome, an extra smile and a special human being.

I do not think, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Bill should divide the House. We shall be on the same line to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. I have been listening to the arguments of the Members of the Opposition, from the Leader of the Opposition to the other Members of the opposite side of the House, but I cannot see any argument against this Bill. I think we should be on the same line. We should have a dream that tomorrow, as rightly said by hon. Francisco François, why not tomorrow have, ‘a constitutional law amendment on elections for a fair representation of persons with disabilities through the reservation of one or two seats for persons with disabilities in our Parliament.’

The vision of our Prime Minister and this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is inclusiveness. We have already embarked on inclusive Mauritius, whether in making a new sports project like

we have recently inaugurated in Malherbes, MUGA, where it is accessible for people in wheelchairs and where they can also exercise. There is special equipment for them. For instance also, the new *Hôtel de Ville* at Curepipe. When I was preparing for this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, I read that the former Minister, hon. Sheila Bappoo, when presenting the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons (Amendment) Bill, TEDP, she mentioned in her closing remarks that she was surprised when she went to *l'Hôtel de Ville de Curepipe* for a centenarian birth anniversary, and that the person, she was on a wheelchair, and people had to carry her. But, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the new *Hôtel de Ville*, there is accessibility through a lift.

What we want to bring, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not need to bring the law; we need to educate our people; we need to tell them. For example, if you go to Tribeca, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is accessibility for people with disabilities. You will see, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is becoming a new norm among the people of the new construction industries and it is important. I had the opportunity with my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Obeegadoo, we went for a site visit for a new housing development that is being done at Wooton. When we went there for a site visit, the first question we asked the people who were constructing the houses, the builders and contractors, was whether provision is being made for people with disabilities. And we can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is being done. When construction is being made in these new housing developments, you can see that people can access even with a flat structure in the house, to go to the bathroom, to the toilet, to the kitchen. The specificities are being taken care of. Whether for the new metro stations, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is also being taken care of. Whether it is the new market at Goodlands, Mr Speaker, Sir, the contractors have taken this at heart. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are leading by example, and we will continue in our effort to build a new and modern Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk about inclusiveness, as the PPS of Constituencies No. 6 and 17, I had the opportunity to go to Doorgachurn Hurry Government School where we can see the students with disabilities studying with students who are normal and I think this will be the new norm, Mr Speaker, Sir. If we want, we will need, and I will make a proposal to the Minister to educate and create awareness on how we have to treat people with disabilities. Why not a crash course for our Members of Parliament also? Because we need to have awareness and people need to see how we have to behave and to treat people with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Government is going in the right direction. The argument of the Opposition is that we have taken so long to come up with the Bill but when I was reading the Bill, the previous one and the policy papers that were presented by the previous Government, they have taken 16 years to make amendments. Just to tell you, it is very tedious work and to create this inclusiveness in Mauritius, we all have to be on the same line. I don't think this is a Bill that we have to argue or make *démagogie* but, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me end on the quote of Robert Michael Hensel – let me tell you who Robert Michael Hensel is. He was born with a birth defect known as Spina bifida. He is also a Guinness World Record holder for the longest non-stop wheelie in a wheelchair covering a total distance of 6.178 miles. As part of setting his record, he raised the money for wheelchair ramps throughout Oswego in New York, his home town. Let me end with his quote Mr Speaker, Sir –

“There is no greater disability in a society than the inability to see a person as more.”

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. David!

(4.54 p.m.)

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Le leader de l'opposition l'a dit au début de son intervention mardi dernier, sur ce sujet de la protection et la promotion des droits des personnes handicapées, l'opposition parlementaire ne compte pas le sure-politiser, mais évidemment, exprimer son point de vue, ses critiques et ses suggestions dans le seul but de mettre au premier plan les personnes qui vivent avec un handicap dans notre pays. Et le leader de l'opposition l'a précisé, nous souhaitons être la voix de celles et ceux qui ne peuvent pas se faire entendre. Et qu'en est-il, M. le président, de celles et ceux qui ne peuvent pas entendre ?

Puis-je commencer par proposer à Madame la ministre que ces débats sur ce *Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill* soient retransmis sur la chaîne télévisée parlementaire en langage des signes, même en différé car j'ai noté qu'il existe certaines contraintes techniques pour une transmission en temps réel mais même en version enregistrée et différée, une telle démarche permettrait un accès à l'information et la participation active et inclusive des 4 500 personnes sourdes et malentendantes de notre république. Et à ces 4 500

personnes, se rajoutent selon le *Population Census* de 2022, les autres 80,000 compatriotes qui vivent avec d'autres formes de handicap, soit un total et l'honorable Dhunoo l'a rappelé, de 84 500 personnes handicapées contre 60 000 en 2011, soit une progression de 40 % en seulement 11 ans.

Face à ce nombre grandissant, quel le doit être l'approche de cette société dans laquelle nous vivons tous et qui doit être inclusive de notre diversité, non pas seulement ethnique, culturelle ou religieuse mais également la diversité des besoins, des situations et des capacités ? Et c'est précisément, M. le président, la réponse apportée en 2006 par la Convention des Nations Unies relatives aux droits des personnes handicapées qui est venue célébrer la diversité et la dignité humaine, en ayant pour objet et je cite l'article premier de cette Convention –

« De promouvoir, protéger et assurer la pleine et égale jouissance de tous les droits de l'homme et de toutes les libertés fondamentales par les personnes handicapées et de promouvoir le respect de leur dignité intrinsèque ».

Et ce même premier article de la Convention des Nations Unies donne une définition des personnes handicapées que je cite dans sa version anglaise pour mieux la comparer à la définition du projet de loi dont nous débattons. La Convention précise, je cite –

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interactions with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Alors que le bill actuel a choisi de définir à la clause 2 du projet de loi –

“person with disability” means a person who has one or more disabilities;”

Et plus haut, dans la même clause –

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

Voyez-vous, M. le président, la nuance peut paraître subtile, voir invisible mais elle est fondamentale car elle traduit l'esprit même de la loi et je déplore que le projet de loi que nous présente Madame la ministre, a choisi d'éliminer dans ses définitions les notions d'interaction de barrières et d'obstacles. Alors je vais ici parler en référence à l'article 1 de la Convention des Nations Unies, de l'interaction de handicap avec les diverses barrières qui peuvent faire obstacle

à la pleine et effective participation des personnes handicapées à la société sur la base de l'égalité avec les autres. Et je me pose la question et je la soulève ici dans notre hémicycle face à ce projet de loi dont nous débattons, 14 ans après avoir ratifié la Convention des Nations Unies relatives aux droits des personnes handicapées, avons-nous réellement compris que le handicap n'est pas une situation inhérente à une personne mais d'abord et surtout, la conjugaison de l'état d'une personne et de son environnement qui ensemble génèrent le handicap et nuisent à la participation de cette personne à la vie de la société ?

Pour illustrer plus concrètement ce propos, être dans un fauteuil roulant, ce qui renvoie un facteur personnel, et vivre dans une ville ou un village où les infrastructures sont accessibles, on parle ici d'un facteur environnemental, permet alors de participer à la vie de la collectivité dans les mêmes conditions que n'importe qui d'autre. Il n'y a alors pas ou peu de handicap. Être malentendant et regarder les débats parlementaires en langage des signes, redonne le droit fondamental à l'information à cette partie de la population et je me dois de rappeler ici que l'une des trois réserves émise par l'île Maurice lors de la ratification de la Convention des Nations Unies en 2010 concernait l'article 9 de la Convention au paragraphe 2(d) qui consiste à faire mettre en place dans les bâtiments et autres installations ouvertes au public une signalisation en braille et sous des formes facile à lire et à comprendre. Comment se fait-il que 14 ans après, un projet de loi portant sur la protection et la promotion des droits des personnes handicapées ne soit toujours pas en mesure de lever une telle réserve car je n'ai vu aucune mention ou indication dans ce sens dans le projet de loi ?

M. le président, ces facteurs environnementaux qui sont des obstacles auxquels les personnes handicapées font face quotidiennement sont définis par l'organisation mondiale de la santé comme je cite –

« Des facteurs qui, par leur absence ou leur présence, limitent la fonctionnalité et créent un handicap, par exemple, la manque de technologies d'assistance, le manque d'accès à des environnements physiques et aux technologies d'assistance appropriées et les comportements négatifs vis-à-vis du handicap. »

Je dois justement rajouter que ces obstacles ne sont pas toujours physiques ou technologiques, car selon de nombreuses recherches sur le handicap, l'obstacle le plus difficile à surmonter ce sont les stéréotypes, les préjugés et les mentalités. Alors, évidemment, faire

évoluer la mentalité et changer le regard de la société sur les personnes en situation de handicap, c'est un travail colossal et collectif.

Je tiens ici, M. le président, à saluer l'engagement, le dévouement et la détermination de toutes ces associations et ONG mauriciennes qui se battent jour après jour pour protéger et valoriser les personnes en situation de handicap, en mettant en avant leurs capacités au lieu de leurs limites. Évidemment, nous en tant que législateurs, il est de notre devoir de poser le contexte légal pour favoriser l'inclusion, faciliter l'éducation, développer l'innovation et anéantir la discrimination face au handicap, y compris lorsque la discrimination prend la forme de certains termes discriminants au sein même de nos lois.

Je propose, par exemple, M. le président, que ce projet de loi vienne modifier le *National Pensions Act* pour supprimer le terme '*invalid*' et ainsi remplacer le '*invalid basic pension*' par le '*disability basic pension*', simplement pour supprimer ce terme et cette notion d'invalidité au sein de notre population qui vit avec une forme de handicap.

M. le président, il nous faut changer la perception même que notre société se fait trop souvent du handicap, que ce soit par ignorance, par peur, et dans certains cas extrêmes, par haine. Les personnes en situation de handicap ne doivent pas être considérées comme moins capables ou traitées comme des victimes souffrant de leur déficience, mais plutôt comme des individus ayant des droits, des capacités, et des talents. Et pas seulement dans le domaine du sport ou de la musique où nos athlètes paralympiques et nos artistes font déjà notre fierté nationale, mais aussi dans le secteur professionnel, et évidemment, la politique ne doit pas échapper à cette règle.

N'avons-nous pas eu un immense leader politique qui a dirigé notre pays alors qu'il ne voyait que d'un seul œil des suites d'un accident ? Ce handicap n'a jamais amoindri la vision que Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam a nourrie tout au long de son combat jusqu'à devenir le père de la nation mauricienne. Et que dire de Franklin Roosevelt, qui a été le premier président américain handicapé physique à accéder à la Maison-Blanche ? À quand, M. le président, le premier membre de notre Assemblée nationale en fauteuil roulant ? Faudrait-il encore que les espaces de notre Parlement et notamment l'hémicycle soient accessibles aux personnes à mobilité réduite. Évidemment, les barrières à l'engagement politique pour toutes les personnes handicapées doivent être brisées. Mais pour revenir à l'insertion professionnelle, je dois dire que je regrette

que le projet de loi qui est censée protéger et promouvoir le droit des personnes handicapées ait au départ fait l'impasse sur les quotas des travailleurs handicapés dans le milieu de l'entreprise.

C'est finalement au stade des amendements du *Committee Stage* à venir que les quotas seront réintroduits, pour ne pas dire amoindris, car contrairement à l'obligation des 3% d'emploi des travailleurs handicapés pour les entreprises à partir de 35 salariés qui figurait dans le *Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act* de 1996, texte qui d'ailleurs se retrouve abrogé par la nouvelle loi, désormais, ce sera 3% seulement pour les grandes entreprises qui emploient plus de 200 employés. Et pour les plus petites entreprises, l'obligation ne concernera plus que celles qui emploient au minimum 50 salariés, en imposant une ou deux personnes seulement jusqu'à 200 employés.

Le gouvernement du jour vient donc avec une nouvelle loi qui fait moins bien que l'ancienne loi lorsqu'il s'agit de l'insertion professionnelle des personnes en situation de handicap.

M. le président, le dernier point que je souhaiterais aborder, avant de conclure, concerne la garantie constitutionnelle des droits des personnes handicapées, et cela me ramène à presque quatre ans de cela. C'était le 28 juillet 2020, lors de ma question parlementaire B/406 sur l'introduction du *Disability Bill*. Madame la ministre, l'honorable Jeewa-Daureeawoo, m'avait alors répondu que l'un des freins était la probable nécessité de modifier les sections 3 et 16 de la constitution de notre pays pour que les droits fondamentaux des personnes handicapées soient entièrement respectés.

Et à mon grand étonnement, je constate aujourd'hui que le projet de loi ne fait aucune mention quelconque ou à venir à un amendement constitutionnel. Mais plus étonnamment encore, hier soir, lors d'une émission sur une radio privée consacrée aux provisions de ce projet de loi, émission à laquelle a d'ailleurs participé Madame la ministre, juste après son intervention, son prédécesseur, l'ancien ministre de la Sécurité sociale, Monsieur Etienne Sinatambou, est venu affirmer qu'il avait déjà déposé des amendements constitutionnels au Conseil des ministres avant les élections générales de 2019, afin de garantir le droit des personnes handicapées au sein de notre constitution. J'aimerais donc demander à Madame la ministre ce qu'il en est de cette question constitutionnelle, alors qu'il existait visiblement un document déjà préparé par son ancien collègue. Cinq ans que des amendements constitutionnels ont donc été a priori envoyés au

Conseil des ministres ; neuf ans que nous attendons un *Disability Bill*, et finalement, un projet de loi qui nous est présenté à quelques semaines de la dissolution du Parlement, avec un texte qui ne lève aucune des trois réserves de la Convention des Nations Unies, et qui nous laisse donc avec une impression, si j'ose dire, de trop peu, trop tard.

Le chantier de l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap est encore vaste et le prochain gouvernement qui commencera sa nouvelle mandature bientôt aura à améliorer les dispositions de la présente loi, à étoffer ses provisions, à mettre en place un plan d'action concret à l'image du *Action plan on Disability* de 2007, nourri par les convictions et l'innovation, et faire de sorte que notre pays soit à la hauteur de cet immense enjeu d'égalité et d'accessibilité pour tous. Car ce que nous voulons, M. le président, c'est une société qui s'adapte aux personnes en situation de handicap et non l'inverse.

J'en ai terminé.

Mr Speaker: I now call Dr. the hon. Mrs Chukowry.

(5.11 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to lend today my unreserved support to the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023).

This transformative and far-reaching legislation represents a watershed moment in our nation's journey towards building a truly inclusive, equitable and rights-based society. I would like to expand further on why this truly history-making Bill represents the crowning moment thus far in our country's winding journey to become a beacon of inclusiveness, equal opportunity and participatory democracy for all.

For too long, the differently abled members of our society though, undoubtedly, possessing the same inner radiance and potential, have been relegated to the shadows, their needs and aspirations consigned by societal indifference to the margins.

Mr Speaker, Sir, generation after generation, persons with disabilities have suffered the corrosive wounds of prejudice, neglect and invisibility, unable to access the level playing field that would allow their talents to blossom and transform not only their own destinies but the collective advancement of our nation. Silence voices longing to soar but with wings clipped by

physical, social and systemic barriers. An inspired national poet with no means to put pen to paper, a budding entrepreneur denied capital to launch her dreams, and a gifted athlete never given supporting equipment adapted to his physiology – the lost promise has been heart-breaking. The waste of human capital is tragic beyond measure but, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, we flip the script decisively through this landmark Bill. We bring the differently abled in from the margins to the mainstream; empowering them to take the rightful place as authors of national development across every sphere of our progressing society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill's comprehensive scope fundamentally re-orientates structural and social mindsets that have long normalised the exclusion of so many. Its robust creation of oversight, advocacy and grievance, redressal bodies promise to keep us continuously accountable for upholding and enabling an environment for equal opportunity. Make no mistake; this Bill is as much a soaring statement of our own maturation as a democracy as it is the crowning achievement, thus far, of the organised Disability Rights movements in Mauritius that dates back over six decades. It affirms that we can legislate seismic changes in public's attitudes, dismantle barriers to access, and guarantee a spectrum of civil liberties, regardless of physical or mental attributes. This is the alchemy of visionary rights-based law-making. It redeems the promise of our highest ideals enshrined in our Constitution that all our citizens, without exception, can aspire to and attain their highest human potential. This law gives us the blueprint to build national environments that unleash the full promise of human diversity across the physical, cognitive and psychological gamut.

Mr Speaker, Sir, educational institutions lacking ramps and assistive technologies, prevented differently-abled students from developing their capabilities and talents at formative stages. Public transport, devoid of accommodations for limited mobility or sensory disabilities further immobilised people's yearning to access livelihood and community life. Workplaces lacking inclusivity policies meant immense talents got left untapped, on account of societal prejudices regarding physical or mental attributes.

This legislation mandates structural changes across all of societies' building blocks: education, health, employment, rehabilitation and more. It creates accountability for public and private institutions to make reasonable accommodations, provide assistive devices and design inclusive policies that dismantle barriers to participation.

This legislation also provides resources and channels for the differently abled to seek timely redress upon facing discrimination. It creates special mechanisms to protect the uniquely vulnerable, differently abled women and children from potential exploitation and abuse. In its scope, force and accountability mechanism, this framework hence, represents an unprecedented charter of fundamental freedoms and public safeguard for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities as equal members of society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot emphasise enough why this calls for unanimous applause in this House and swift implementation nationwide. I sincerely believe that this is undeniably one of the most progressive pieces of Human Rights legislation ever tabled on these floors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to dwell on why this Bill powerfully reaffirms our nation's commitment to upholding international Human Rights Covenants centered on the differently abled. Too frequently, we sign laudable global accords to affirm lofty principles but procrastinate to codify these into actionable domestic laws with punitive teeth. This Bill single-handedly remedies our shortcomings in domesticating and enforcing one such pivotal Human Rights Covenants: the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ratifying the convention was an easy gesture. Putting in place institutions, standards and accountability systems to abide by its letter and spirit is what is needed, and this is what we are pioneering. This Bill sophisticatedly bridges that implementation gap by translating the conventions exacting clauses into legally enforceable mechanisms designed to create discrimination-free as well as barrier-free environments for the differently abled. It is central authority and special investigative bodies have a clear mandate to sniff out threats to equal rights and dignified living for the differently-abled wherever they may emerge. Be they inaccessible infrastructure, discriminatory employers or violence and abuse against uniquely vulnerable segments like, differently-abled women.

What makes this Bill even more ground-breaking is its universal scope spanning both public and private sector obligations across every domain. From reasonable workplace accommodation to ensuring educational inclusion, it establishes clear reciprocal arrangements between rights-bearers and duty-holders. So, all stakeholders have expectations vis-à-vis enabling environments for the differently abled.

In no uncertain terms, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill puts our nation at the vanguard globally for implementing the empowering vision of human diversity and capability and strengths in the UN Disability Rights Convention.

Our lived example can inspire other developing country peers to similarly legislate robust frameworks, upholding the social contract to make rights real in the lives of the differently abled. It renews our national commitment to stay at the cutting edge of rights-based law-making.

At its core, Mr Speaker, Sir, this people-centric legislation establishes various structures and mechanisms to make rights real in the everyday lives of differently-abled persons. The National Disability Authority will drive coordination, monitoring, auditing and advocacy around disability policies and schemes across all arms of Government. The Protection and Promotion Unit will have expansive investigative and enforcement powers to tackle discrimination or abuse, and the panoply of entitlements and safeguards it enumerates on issues from education to disaster response will empower persons with disabilities to seek redress and justice within a clear procedural framework when needed.

I am particularly heartened that this Bill mainstreams employment for differently-abled persons through progressive corporate responsibility provisions while also laying out attractive fiscal incentives for absorbing more diverse talents. Together with its emphasis on skill development and assistive technologies, it sends an unequivocal message that we believe in the immense potential of our differently-abled citizens. We will invest in creating an environment for them to unleash their promise as active economic and social participants.

In closing, the former Vice-President of the USA Humphrey spoke about the treatment of the weakest members of society as a reflection of the government, and I quote –

“The moral test of a government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is translating those words of wisdom into action by taking care of those who need us the most. We reaffirm our stand to uplift and mainline the vulnerable, further engraving into laws the humanism espoused by our past stalwart leadership. Doing so will not

only be a testimony of our collective pledge to broaden participation for all towards reaching developed country status but to also redeem national soul, fuel next-generation aspirations and build national environments where the flame of human potential, creativity and self-determination burn bright regardless of all endowment of the random lottery of life.

Last but not least, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, hon. Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK, for bringing to the House such an important piece of legislation.

I thank you for your attention.

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. SHAKEEL MOHAMED - GN 28 & 29 - MOTION OF DISALLOWANCE

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make.

I have to inform the House that on 15 March 2024, hon. Shakeel Mohamed gave notice of a Motion of Disallowance requiring the Assembly to resolve that Government Notices No. 28 and No. 29 of 2024 be disallowed.

I have perused the said Notices and I have to inform the House that the said Regulations were published in the Government Gazette of 17 February 2024 at a time when the Assembly stood adjourned.

Regulations No. 28 and No. 29 have been laid on the Table of the Assembly at the Sitting of Tuesday last.

Having regard to the provisions of section 20(3) of the Interpretation and General Clauses Act, it is clear that Hon. Shakeel Mohamed gave notice of the Motion of Disallowance in anticipation.

In the circumstances, the present notice cannot be considered.

I thank you for your attention.

I suspend the Sitting for 45 minutes.

At 5.28 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please remain seated and be seated! MP Quirin!

(6.38 p. m.)

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, à l'heure où nous sommes appelés à débattre sur un projet de loi visant à donner plus d'autonomie et de possibilités aux personnes vivant avec un handicap à Maurice. L'histoire retiendra que beaucoup d'entre eux, à travers leur volonté et leurs efforts, ont atteint un niveau supérieur dans de nombreux domaines, qu'ils s'agissent des arts et de la culture, de l'éducation et du sport, entre autres.

À Maurice, comme ailleurs, les personnes vivant avec un handicap n'ont cessé de nous démontrer leur potentiel et leur capacité à s'adapter au monde moderne et d'en tirer profit au maximum. Jane Constance, Noemi Alphonse, Roberto Michel, Anaïs Angeline, Véronique Marisson, Yovanni Philippe, Nalini Ramasamy ou encore Yaseen Edoo, pour ne citer qu'eux, en sont des exemples. Leur handicap, M. le président, n'a jamais été un obstacle pour eux dans leur quête de faire honneur au drapeau et à la nation mauricienne.

En effet, on peut effectivement élaborer longuement sur les droits, la dignité, l'obligation morale qu'une société doit à ses citoyens, de surcroît aux personnes en situation de handicap. Cependant, sans un engagement ferme de l'État, de la société civile et des organisations engagées dans la lutte pour le droit des personnes vivant avec un handicap, parler des droits de ces personnes ne serait alors qu'utopique. Les préjugés et les discriminations envers cette catégorie de la population sont légion. Si une société dans son ensemble ne se lève pas comme un seul homme, cette lutte ne sera que vaine. Ainsi, M. le président, la question de la promotion et la protection des personnes handicapées nécessite plus que jamais une approche globale et inclusive.

En effet, dans son plan stratégique pour les personnes en situation de handicap, les Nations unies soulignent avec force que les droits fondamentaux pour toutes les personnes en situation de handicap forment partie intégrante de façon inaliénable et indivisible de l'ensemble des droits de la personne et des libertés fondamentales.

M. le président, cette nouvelle législation sur laquelle nous sommes appelés à débattre, va-t-elle permettre de jeter les bases d'une société inclusive en faveur des personnes vivant avec

un handicap comme le réclament ces dernières depuis des décennies ? *The Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill* que nous propose l'honorable ministre de la Sécurité sociale ne vient malheureusement pas poser les jalons d'une société mauricienne plus accueillante pour les handicapés. Il est bon de rappeler que selon les chiffres officiels, quelque 84 000 personnes vivent avec un handicap à Maurice et, malheureusement, ce texte de loi est à mon avis tiré par les cheveux et manque surtout de profondeur.

Dans une très large mesure, des doutes subsistent quant à la capacité de ce texte de loi de protéger les personnes vivant avec un handicap contre les stigmatisations et les injustices dont elles sont victimes dans leur vie quotidienne. À titre d'exemple, je m'interroge encore comment et pourquoi presque cinq années après que la question ait été posée dans cette Chambre, le gouvernement n'a pas bougé d'un iota pour que le langage des signes soit utilisé pour les comptes rendus en direct des travaux de l'Assemblée nationale – d'autres avant moi l'ont souligné aussi. Une inaction qui prive une section de la population, surtout les sourds et les malentendants à un accès à la formation. C'est ce qu'on appelle, M. le président, une absence de considération à cette forme de handicap que nos yeux ne voient pas. C'est effectivement là où le bât blesse.

Vu le temps qu'a pris le ministère de la Sécurité sociale avant de venir avec une telle loi, nos amis les handicapés s'attendaient à un texte beaucoup plus explicite, limpide et surtout plus profond dans le fond comme dans la forme. Après plus de 14 années de discussions et de propositions, cette loi dont la mission première *is to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities* aurait dû en fait être une loi qui peut servir d'exemple dans cette région d'Afrique et dans le bassin de l'océan Indien. Ce texte de loi, M. le président, ne vient pas établir de manière ostensible les méthodes qui seront utilisées pour éliminer les discriminations et les stigmatisations dont sont victimes les personnes vivant avec un handicap ni aussi comment leur vie sera améliorée.

Pourtant, en 2015, M. le président, Maurice avait fait l'objet d'un rapport considéré comme accablant des Nations unies sur la situation des personnes vivant avec un handicap à Maurice. Dans ce rapport, M. le président, on peut lire entre autres, et je cite –

« Des informations faisant état d'obstacles physiques, socio-économiques et culturels qui entravent la pleine intégration des enfants dans la société, en particulier ceux qui souffrent de handicaps intellectuels. »

M. le président, pourtant l'honorable ministre était bien présente lorsque le Comité des droits des personnes handicapées des Nations unies avait examiné ce rapport en août 2015. Mais, a-t-elle tiré les leçons qui s'imposaient ? Il faut croire que non. Comme il est expliqué dans l'*Explanatory Memorandum*, avec l'entrée de cette nouvelle loi, *the Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund Act, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act and the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act* sont appelés à disparaître. À la place, la nouvelle loi propose deux superstructures qui sont premièrement *the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit* qui sera désormais connu selon les amendements proposés comme *the Empowerment Unit* et deuxièmement, *the National Disability Authority* qui sera connu comme *the National Empowerment Authority*.

Deux changements de nom pour le moins incongrus et que j'espère la ministre viendra nous expliquer la pertinence subite de ce *change of name*. En effet, M. le président, deux structures qui sont appelées à fonctionner à l'intérieur du ministère de la Sécurité sociale et dont les membres seront essentiellement des représentants de divers ministères. Il est vrai que dans son rapport de 2015 sur le handicap à Maurice, les Nations unies avaient indiqué que les lois mauriciennes sur le handicap sont fragmentées et de ce fait, il y avait une nécessité d'harmonisation. Mais n'empêche, M. le président, que le constat n'a pas changé huit années après. L'harmonisation que nous propose la ministre avec ce texte de loi nous mène directement vers l'institutionnalisation de la politique envers les personnes en situation de handicap.

En effet, par le biais de ces deux structures, nous sentons déjà une volonté de la ministre d'avoir un contrôle absolu sur ces deux entités. M. le président, comme toutes les lois qui ont été votées dans cette Assemblée par ce gouvernement, *the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill* n'échappe pas à cette règle désormais établie qui consiste à mettre en place des *Boards* en tout genre pour placer des proches du pouvoir. Pour preuve, les membres qui composeront le *Board* du *National Empowerment Authority* seront tous nommés par la ministre, comme indiqué dans la section 29 (k) et (l).

Hors, pour le *National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act*, la majorité des membres était élue lors d'une Assemblée générale tandis que, *the Empowerment Unit* elle, M. le président, sera composée essentiellement de personnes issues du ministère de la Sécurité sociale. Visiblement, nous avons affaire à un gouvernement dont l'objectif principal reste le contrôle absolu sans pour autant avoir une politique bien définie et des objectifs précis, notamment envers les personnes vivant avec un handicap.

M. le président, les instances internationales telles que les Nations unies, Handicap international, le Bureau international du travail et même le Parlement panafricain préconisent une approche inclusive dans l'exercice d'élaboration d'une loi aussi sensible. Cette approche inclusive doit aussi prendre en compte plusieurs dimensions et orientations, notamment au niveau social, éducatif, sanitaire et économique entre autres. Ces instances recommandent aussi que les espaces publics, les technologies et les communications soient accessibles aux personnes vivant avec un handicap. Dans *the African Model Law on Disability*, document produit par le Parlement panafricain et dont une copie avait été remise à la ministre, il est expliqué à l'article 7 et je cite –

“3. The State shall take effective and appropriate measures to –

- a. Promote and conduct educative campaigns to raise awareness of the inherent dignity of persons with disabilities;
- b. Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services, facilities and devices to enable them to live with dignity;
- c. Protect and promote respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others.”

M. le président, je reviens donc à ma question posée un peu plus tôt, à savoir si ce texte de loi répond à ces recommandations. Il est vrai que dans leurs attributions, ces deux structures doivent travailler à la conception et la mise en œuvre des politiques, des projets et programmes en matière de handicap. Mais, quelle est la politique de ce gouvernement en matière de protection et de l'émancipation des personnes en situation de handicap? Cette loi, M. le président, ne donne malheureusement pas d'indication, notamment en termes d'accès facile aux services et aux bâtiments publics, à l'éducation et aux technologies, aux logements, à la

formation vocationnelle, à l'emploi et à la promotion d'une carrière professionnelle, aux loisirs, à la culture, au sport, aux soins et à la réhabilitation, aux prestations sociales, à la justice et aux cours de justice.

Cette liste, M. le président, ne s'arrête toutefois pas qu'à ces quelques points que je viens de mentionner. Prenons par exemple la question de l'éducation. La section 8 de ce texte de loi évoque en effet la formation et l'éducation des enfants ayant un handicap. La section 8(3) plus précisément indique et je cite –

“(3) *An admission as a student to a special education needs school shall be for a transitional period except where it is otherwise determined by the Special Education Needs Authority.*”

Il y a, à mon avis, M. le président, une absence de logique dans cette section de la loi qui n'impose aucune *limit of time* concernant cette *transitional period* lorsqu'un enfant handicapé n'est pas admis au départ dans la bonne institution éducative. Si on parle de la dignité et des droits des personnes vivant avec un handicap, il est impératif que dès le départ, un enfant soit placé dans la bonne école et non pas dans une institution où le temps de transfert peut-être interminable.

Mais là encore, le ministère de la Sécurité sociale n'assume pas ses responsabilités puisque c'est une instance, la *Special Education Needs Authority* qui je le rappelle ne tombe pas sous le ministère de la Sécurité sociale mais sous celui de l'Éducation qui prendra les décisions. Est-ce cela une société inclusive que ce gouvernement dit vouloir créer pour les personnes vivant avec un handicap ?

M. le président, l'accès à l'éducation est le pilier de toute action visant à donner une plus grande chance à tous, incluant les personnes vivant avec un handicap. Il s'avère aujourd'hui qu'il existe encore des institutions scolaires qui n'ont aucune, sinon très peu de facilités pour assurer une mobilité facile des étudiants avec un handicap.

M. le président, autre sujet que les instances internationales recommandent fortement est l'accès à l'emploi pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Les sections 41 à 44 offrent des *incentives* aux entreprises qui emploient des personnes avec un handicap, notamment, des *tax deductions* à hauteur de 300 % pour chaque employé handicapé ou des déductions de taxes allant

jusqu'à un million pour les donations aux institutions charitables ou encore la Prime à l'emploi *Scheme*. Très bien ! J'espère, M. le président, que ces mesures incitatives vont vraiment encourager les entreprises à faire l'effort nécessaire pour l'employabilité de personnes avec un handicap et nous savons tous comment dans le passé sous *the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act*, les employeurs ne respectaient pas la section 13 de ce texte de loi. À savoir qu'un *quantum* de 3 % d'employés avec un handicap devait être embauché par toute entreprise ayant plus de 35 employés.

J'ai été cependant, M. le président, consterné de constater dans le texte de loi qui nous est présenté que cette clause avait été biffée complètement. Toutefois, je suis heureux je dirais que la ministre fait amende honorable, sans doute ayant pris conscience de ce manquement. Mais, les propositions d'amendements faites au deuxième *Schedule* de la loi ne vont pas dans le sens d'une amélioration de la situation. La proposition de la ministre passe en effet le quantum de 3 % à 1 à 2 % pour les entreprises employant entre 50 et 200 personnes alors que le quota de 3 % n'est appliqué que pour les entreprises employant plus de 201 personnes.

Toutefois, on est en droit de se demander si effectivement ces mesures incitatives suffiront pour inciter l'embauche de personnes handicapées dans tous les secteurs. Il est primordial, M. le président, que dans le sillage de la présentation de cette loi, les ministères de la Sécurité sociale et du Travail lancent une campagne pour sensibiliser les entreprises aux avantages de la diversité et aux compétences des travailleurs avec un handicap. Il faut que l'État donne véritablement toutes les chances aux personnes vivant avec un handicap. Parlant de la formation, il faut dire que ce gouvernement a failli, à mon avis, dans sa tâche, car le *Board du Training and Employment of Disabled Persons* fait preuve d'une absence de vision et de perspicacité depuis 2015. Je le dis une fois encore, cette loi propose très peu d'éléments pour une intégration inclusive des handicapés par le biais d'une formation adéquate et adaptée à leurs besoins et aux besoins des compagnies privées.

Dans le même temps, M. le président, je ne peux passer sous silence concernant la composition du *Board du National Empowerment Authority* tel qu'il est libellé à la section 29 du texte de loi. La question des droits des personnes en situation de handicap est une question sérieuse et ne doit pas être banalisée et ne doit être en aucun cas placée entre les mains de personnes sans expérience dans ce domaine. Dans la foulée, je trouve cela inexplicable qu'aucun

responsable du sport pour les personnes en situation de handicap ne se retrouve au sein du *National Empowerment Authority*.

Mr Speaker: You have three minutes!

Mr Quirin: À ce niveau, j'ajouterai qu'à Maurice, très peu d'attention est accordée afin que les personnes vivant avec un handicap participent aux activités récréatives, culturelles et de loisirs, qui sont pour autant les ingrédients naturels d'un mode de vie sain.

Autre élément où j'aimerais attirer l'attention, c'est l'absence d'une politique de logement pour les personnes vivant avec un handicap. À titre d'exemple, il serait bon de savoir combien de maisons adaptées pour les personnes handicapées sont en construction. Une question qui reste pour l'heure sans réponse.

M. le président, dans le sillage de la présentation de ce texte de loi, nos amis handicapés espéraient qu'il ouvrirait des portes, comme leur donnant un accès plus facile à la justice et aux services légaux, un emploi équitable, aux soins de santé, des services de réadaptation et des aides techniques aux services publics et à l'éducation entre autres. Ou encore que cette loi favorise la création des espaces inclusifs pour favoriser les interactions sociales et promouvoir le développement et l'utilisation de technologies assistées pour améliorer l'indépendance des personnes handicapées.

Il est temps, par exemple, que cessent les décisions incompréhensibles du *Medical Board* qui a tendance à créer plus de désarroi au sein des familles avec l'application de ses règles. Une personne, M. le président, qui pendant 20 ans a touché une pension d'invalidité ne peut subitement être privée de sa pension alors que son handicap n'a guère changé. C'est incompréhensible ! Il est temps, M. le président, de revoir tout le fonctionnement et les critères utilisés par ce *Board* qui sont dépassés. Ils n'ont jamais été amendés ni n'ont évolué dans la bonne direction en dépit des promesses faites dans cette Chambre par la ministre elle-même.

M. le président, une société inclusive où les personnes handicapées reposent sur la reconnaissance de la diversité humaine et l'engagement en faveur de l'égalité des opportunités. Cette loi, M. le président, aurait dû aussi faire provision pour la mise en place d'une structure de dépistage des handicaps que la société ne voit pas tels que la schizophrénie et les troubles qui y sont liés.

Mr Speaker: Conclude!

Mr Quirin: Une minute, M. le président.

La schizophrénie est en effet un mal qui touche de plus en plus de Mauriciens. Selon les chiffres disponibles, il y aurait à Maurice plus de 7,000 personnes qui sont atteints de cette forme de handicap. Et il serait important, je pense, de développer un programme de dépistage chez les jeunes, d'autant que les causes génétiques de la schizophrénie ne font plus aucun doute. Des études scientifiques ont en effet démontré que les enfants de parents schizophrènes ont, par exemple, 10 % plus de risques de développer eux-mêmes la maladie. Et en tant qu'élu, je ne peux que dénoncer l'absence de considération sur cette question tout comme l'absence de structure d'accueil pour les personnes souffrant de ce handicap.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je dirais que j'ai été personnellement témoin dans ma circonscription comment certaines familles sont victimes de cette maladie et qui souffrent en silence. Et pour conclure, M. le président, à mon avis, cette loi est une mauvaise copie dans la mesure où le monde évolue plus que jamais vers la mondialisation et vers une société inclusive. Car nos amis handicapés, non seulement ont-ils le droit d'avoir des droits, mais ont aussi le droit d'être différents. Je vous remercie.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

(6.58 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président. Il est regrettable de constater que notre collègue, l'honorable Franco Quirin, a encore une fois vu le verre à moitié vide et c'est vraiment dommage.

M. le président, aujourd'hui, c'est avec un sentiment de fierté et d'engagement que je m'adresse à cette auguste Assemblée sur une question cruciale qui concerne les droits fondamentaux de nos concitoyens les plus vulnérables, donc les personnes qui vivent avec un handicap ou alors des personnes en situation de handicap.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, pour commencer faire part de cette réflexion sur notre identité mauricienne dont je suis fière et j'espère que les autres membres de cette Assemblée le sont aussi. Cette terre sur laquelle nous vivons, ce *melting pot* de différentes origines, de cultures, de couleurs par laquelle nous coexistons, cette terre où la diversité est célébrée et où

l'inclusion est valorisée évolue aussi – je dis bien, évolue aussi – avec nos frères et sœurs en situation de handicap.

Je parlais de ce sentiment de fierté. Oui, M. le président, fière d'appartenir à un gouvernement responsable qui a toujours pris à cœur de garantir à chaque individu, quel que soit ses origines, son statut socio-économique ou son état de santé, puisse vivre avec dignité et égalité. Les faits sont là, M. le président. Au risque de me répéter, les faits sont là. Qu'est-ce que ce gouvernement sous le leadership de notre Premier ministre n'a pas fait jusqu'à ce jour pour le bien-être et la protection des personnes en situation de handicap ? Cependant, nous devons reconnaître qu'il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour assurer que les droits des personnes en situation de handicap soient pleinement respectés et protégés.

Dans ce contexte, M. le président, permettez-moi de rappeler les principes énoncés dans la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme qui proclament que tous les êtres humains naissent libres et égaux, en dignité et en droits. Ces principes fondamentaux, considérés également comme le fer de lance de notre Premier ministre, Pravind Jugnauth, ainsi que la ministre de la Sécurité sociale, l'honorable Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, sont aujourd'hui appelés à être appliqués de manière inclusive et décisive, reconnaissant bien sûr la diversité des capacités humaines et garantissant que les personnes en situation de handicap ne soient pas exclues de la pleine jouissance de leurs droits.

Les clauses relatives aux droits des personnes en situation de handicap ont été renforcées par des instruments juridiques internationaux tels que la Convention des Nations unies aux droits des personnes handicapées. Adoptée en 2006, cette convention reconnaît que les personnes en situation de handicap ont le droit à la pleine participation à la vie sociale, économique, politique et culturelle de leur pays sur un pied d'égalité avec les autres. Ces dispositions légales et ces principes fondamentaux nous rappellent l'importance de garantir que nos lois nationales soient conformes aux normes internationales en matière de droits de l'homme. Et c'est dans cet esprit, M. le président, que nous devons aujourd'hui diriger et soutenir ce projet de loi sur la protection et la promotion des droits des personnes en situation de handicap à Maurice.

M. le président, ce projet de loi représente la vision du gouvernement où chaque individu, quelle que soit sa condition, est pleinement respecté dans ses droits et dans sa dignité. Et là, j'aimerais citer le président Roosevelt, je sais que certains de mes collègues l'ont fait avant moi

et bien cet ancien président des États-Unis était lui-même une personnalité en situation de handicap, il fut le premier président de l'histoire à assumer ses fonctions dans un fauteuil roulant et c'est surtout cette citation de Roosevelt que je retiens, je cite –

« Nous mesurerons le progrès d'une société à la manière dont elle prend soin de ses plus vulnérables. »

Cette citation, M. le président, résonne profondément dans nos cœurs en tant que membres du gouvernement, membres de la société mauricienne et gouvernement responsable, fière de ses filles et fils du sol en situation de handicap. Permettez-moi de partager aujourd'hui quelques histoires inspirantes qui illustrent la force et la détermination des personnes en situation de handicap. J'ai entendu l'honorable Franco Quirin et plein d'autres collègues parler de Jane Constance et bien, je voudrais également saluer la force et la détermination de cette artiste que j'ai connue toute petite, une artiste mauricienne exceptionnelle. Elle a su transcender son handicap visuel pour devenir une voix puissante sur la scène internationale. Son parcours remarquable démontre que le handicap effectivement ne devrait pas et ne doit pas être un obstacle à la réalisation de ses rêves, mais plutôt à un défi à surmonter avec courage et résilience.

Je pense aussi à Emilline Law Kwang, diplômée et employée dans la fonction publique, grande militante des droits des personnes en situation de handicap. Je pense également à Stéphane Céline, très connu dans les régions de Cassis, Cité Vallijee et le Ward 4, Stéphane Céline, ex-champion de danse en fauteuil roulant, ambassadeur du *Global Rainbow Foundation* qui travaille depuis plus de 30 ans dans une imprimerie et papeterie commerciale. Et comme ma collègue Kalpana Koonjoo-Shah, je ne peux passer sous silence les performances extraordinaires de nos athlètes paralympiques qui ont démontré au monde entier que le handicap n'est pas un obstacle à l'excellence. Leur détermination, leur force de caractère et leur esprit de compétition ont inspiré des millions de personnes à travers le monde, brisant les stéréotypes et ouvrant la voie à une plus grande inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap dans tous les domaines de la vie. Et bien sûr, il est de mon devoir de saluer Noemi Alphonse, vice-championne du monde devenu une figure incontournable des championnats du monde de paralympiques. Anaïs Angéline, Roberto Michel, Yovanni Philippe et j'en passe, la liste est vraiment longue.

M. le président, ces *success stories* nous rappellent également l'importance du soutien familial dans le parcours des personnes en situation de handicap. Il est clair, M. le président, que

ce projet de loi reconnaît cette dimension essentielle en prévoyant des mesures concrètes pour soutenir les familles dans leur rôle de pourvoyeur de soins et de soutien émotionnel à leurs proches en situation de handicap.

M. le président, sous le leadership éclairé de feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth, notre nation a réalisé des avancées significatives dans la promotion des droits des personnes en situation de handicap. Des mesures importantes avaient été prises pour améliorer l'accessibilité des infrastructures publiques, renforcer les droits et promouvoir l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap dans tous les aspects de la vie mauricienne. Mais aujourd'hui, je tiens également à saluer les efforts de notre actuel Premier ministre, Pravind Jugnauth, qui a poursuivi cette voie d'inclusion et de soutien aux personnes en situation de handicap. Notre gouvernement a mis en œuvre des politiques et des programmes visant à améliorer l'accessibilité des infrastructures publiques et, sur certaines plages, à fournir un soutien financier aux familles et à promouvoir l'emploi des personnes en situation de handicap.

M. le président, aujourd'hui en soutenant ce projet de loi, nous avons l'occasion de réaffirmer notre engagement envers les principes de justice, d'égalité et de respect des droits de l'homme. Ce projet de loi vise à éliminer les obstacles qui entravent la pleine participation des personnes en situation de handicap à la vie sociale, économique et politique de notre pays. Il prévoit des mesures concrètes pour lutter contre la discrimination et les préjugés, renforcer l'accessibilité des services publics et privés et promouvoir une culture d'inclusion dans tous les aspects de la société mauricienne.

M. le président, en adoptant ce projet de loi, nous envoyons un message clair celui d'une île Maurice résolument engagée à construire un avenir plus inclusif et équitable pour tous ses citoyens. Nous nous engageons à garantir que chaque individu, indépendamment de son handicap, ait la possibilité de réaliser son plein potentiel et de contribuer à la prospérité de notre nation. Ensemble, nous pouvons faire de Maurice un exemple de justice, de respect des droits et d'inclusion pour le reste du monde.

Cependant, M. le président, nous savons que dans la réalité, de nombreuses personnes en situation de handicap font face à des défis considérables dans leur vie quotidienne. Ils sont confrontés à des obstacles physiques, socio-économiques au regard de certains qui, malheureusement, limitent leur pleine participation à la société. Alors ce projet de loi prévoit

dans la partie une qui comprend plusieurs volets essentiels qui établissent dans un premier lieu un cadre juridique solide pour la protection des droits fondamentaux des personnes en situation de handicap, elle garantit leur droit à la non-discrimination, à l'égalité des chances et à la pleine participation à la vie sociale, économique et culturelle de notre pays, chose que n'a pas vue notre collègue l'honorable Franco Quirin...

Mr Quirin: *Ayo ankor momem papao!*

Mrs Mayotte: La partie 2 du projet de loi vise à renforcer...

(Interruptions)

...la lutte contre la discrimination...

(Interruptions)

... et les préjugés envers les personnes en situation de handicap. Elle prévoit des mesures spécifiques pour sensibiliser le public, former les professionnels et promouvoir une culture d'inclusion dans tous les secteurs de la société. La partie 3 reconnaît l'importance du soutien familial et le bien-être et l'autonomie des personnes en situation de handicap, des programmes et des services qui seront mis en place pour soutenir les familles dans leur rôle essentiel de fournisseur de soins et de soutien émotionnel à leurs proches handicapés. Bref, chaque clause de ce projet de loi, M. le président, vise à apporter de meilleures conditions de vie pour chaque personne vivant avec un handicap et ce projet de loi reconnaît le rôle crucial des forces de l'ordre dans la protection des droits des personnes en situation de handicap. Les autorités auront pour responsabilité de porter assistance aux personnes handicapées victimes d'abus, de violence ou de discrimination et de veiller à ce que leur plainte soit prise au sérieux et traitée avec diligence.

M. le président, en adoptant ce projet de loi, nous nous engageons à faire de Maurice un modèle d'inclusion où chaque personne, quels que soient ses défis, pourra s'épanouir et contribuer pleinement à la société. Nous nous engageons à construire un avenir où le handicap ne sera plus un obstacle, mais simplement une différence parmi tant d'autres à célébrer et à respecter.

En conclusion, M. le président, permettez-moi de transmettre mes meilleures salutations aux parents des enfants autistes et aux enfants autistes, car nous célébrons aujourd'hui la journée mondiale de l'autisme. J'ai une pensée pour les filles de la Maison d'Entraide, aux résidents du

foyer Vivre Debout, aux enfants et adultes de l'APRIM et de l'APEIM ainsi qu'aux membres de l'*Association of Women with Disabilities* ainsi que toutes les personnes en situation de handicap à Maurice, Rodrigues, Agaléga et ailleurs.

Oui, ensemble nous pouvons créer un avenir plus juste et plus équitable pour tous les Mauriciens. Un avenir où personne n'est laissé-pour-compte, où chacun pourra réaliser son plein potentiel.

Enfin, M. le président, je tiens à assurer mon honorable collègue, Madame Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, de mon soutien total à ce projet de loi, afin que nous puissions continuer à avancer ensemble vers un avenir de justice et d'inclusion pour tous.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: MP Ms Anquetil!

(7.13 p.m.)

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal): M. le président, d'emblée, une question pertinente et cruciale se pose. Quelles mesures ont été prises pour garantir aux personnes en situation de handicap un accès optimal à ce débat parlementaire ? Tout comme mon collègue de ce côté de la Chambre, l'honorable Fabrice David, je suis consternée de constater que la retransmission télévisée de ces débats ne sera pas accompagnée d'une interprétation en langue des signes, limitant ainsi l'accès à l'information pour de nombreuses personnes en situation de handicap.

M. le président, je déplore le délai de 10 ans qu'a nécessité l'élaboration de ce projet de loi. Une ébauche était déjà prête lorsque les élections générales ont été déclarées en 2014, et je suis convaincue que le projet de loi sur le handicap aurait été adopté il y a longtemps sous un gouvernement travailliste. Il est regrettable que nos concitoyennes et nos concitoyens en situation de handicap aient dû attendre une décennie pour que leurs droits et leurs besoins prioritaires soient reconnus et adressés par notre législation.

M. le président, j'ai écouté attentivement le discours de la ministre de la Sécurité sociale. Cependant, je remarque qu'il y a certains faits qu'elle a omis délibérément. Avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, permettez-moi, M. le président, de rappeler à cette Chambre la contribution significative du Parti travailliste à la promotion des personnes en situation de handicap dans

notre pays. Le Parti travailliste a toujours placé le bien-être des personnes en situation de handicap au cœur de ses valeurs. Je m'explique. Avant même l'indépendance, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam et Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo avait mis en œuvre un *Income Support Programme* pour répondre aux besoins des personnes en situation de handicap. C'est toujours sous le régime travailliste que le *National Pensions Act* de 1976 a établi les fondements de l'Etat-providence à Maurice, garantissant une pension d'invalidité de base à toutes les personnes en situation de handicap éligibles, assurant ainsi un revenu mensuel pour répondre à leurs besoins essentiels.

M. le président, l'amélioration du bien-être des personnes en situation de handicap va au-delà des prestations financières. Il est essentiel de les autonomiser en leur offrant des opportunités d'emploi et de formation pour qu'ils contribuent pleinement à la société. Ce n'est nul autre que l'ancien Premier ministre travailliste, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam qui a apporté le *Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act* en 1996, qui imposait aux entreprises de plus de 35 salariés d'inclure au moins 3% des personnes en situation de handicap dans leur effectif.

Cependant, la suppression de cette obligation dans la nouvelle législation suscite des inquiétudes quant aux perspectives professionnelles des personnes en situation de handicap. M. le président, ce projet de loi répond à une obligation internationale établie par l'ONU, notamment la Convention relative aux droits des personnes en situation de handicap signée en 2007 et ratifiée en 2010 par le gouvernement travailliste.

Sous la direction de la ministre de la Sécurité sociale de l'époque - je sais que cela fait mal, mais c'est la stricte vérité -, Madame Sheila Bappoo, le gouvernement mauricien s'est engagé à respecter cette Convention, et c'est Madame Sheila Bappoo qui participait aux réunions préparatives à New York qui a plaidé pour l'inclusion de deux articles spécifiques sur les enfants et les femmes en situation de handicap, malgré les réticences d'autres pays membres. En vertu de l'Article 8, des campagnes de sensibilisation ont été menées pour promouvoir une approche fondée sur les droits de l'homme et créer une base de données exhaustive sur le handicap en collaboration avec l'*UNDP*.

M. le président, il est bon de rappeler que le *Building and Control Act de 2012*, inspiré par la Convention, assure l'accessibilité des bâtiments publics pour tous, y compris aux personnes à mobilité réduite, celles avec des difficultés de communication, les personnes âgées et les femmes enceintes. Les incitations offertes par le ministre des Finances de l'époque, l'honorable Xavier-

Luc Duval, ont encouragé l'acquisition de bus à plancher surbaissé, facilitant la mobilité des personnes en situation de handicap. De plus, la politique de transport gratuit mise en place en 2010 inclut également les personnes en situation de handicap, et les parents accompagnant leurs enfants en situation de handicap à l'école continuent de bénéficier du remboursement des frais de transport.

M. le président, d'autres lois majeures en matière de droits de l'homme ont été adoptées telles que le *Equal Opportunities Act de 2012* et le *Employment Rights Act de 2018*. Des mesures significatives ont été prises pour favoriser l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap dans la vie publique et politique, comme rendre les bureaux de vote accessibles à tous. De plus, un exemple inspirant est celui de M. Coomara Payendee, une personne souffrant de cécité, qui a su briser les barrières en devenant maire d'une ville importante, démontrant ainsi que les capacités des personnes en situation de handicap ne doivent pas être sous-estimées.

M. le président, je souhaiterais à présent formuler quelques propositions. Dans le projet de loi, la définition de l'aménagement raisonnable ne correspond pas à celle de la Convention qui inclut divers aspects de la vie. Par exemple, au tribunal, des facilités comme l'interprétation en langue des signes sont cruciales. Dans la version initiale du projet de loi, c'était prévu dans l'Article sur l'accès à la justice, exigeant des aménagements raisonnables lors des procédures judiciaires pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Lors de l'arrestation d'une personne en situation de handicap, des aménagements raisonnables sont essentiels, comme éviter l'usage d'instruments de contrainte tels que des menottes ou des chaînes, en accord avec le UN Mandela Rules. Dans le projet de loi original et dans le projet de la GRF, il est stipulé que le commissaire de police doit prendre en compte le handicap de la personne et lui fournir des aménagements raisonnables lors de l'interrogatoire, de l'arrestation ou de la détention.

Troisième proposition, lorsqu'une personne en situation de handicap est détenue, elle doit avoir accès aux équipements fonctionnels nécessaires et être hébergée dans une cellule adaptée, avec des toilettes appropriées, comme stipulé dans les règles minimales de Nations unies pour le traitement des prisonniers. Ces règles soulignent également l'importance de fournir des informations de manière adaptée aux besoins des personnes ayant une déficience sensorielle.

Quatrième proposition, l'Article 18 de la Convention relative aux droits des personnes en situation de handicap stipule que personne ne peut être privé de liberté en raison d'un handicap. Ainsi, le handicap en lui-même ne peut justifier une privation de liberté.

Cinquième proposition, l'Article 12 de la Convention stipule l'*Equal recognition before the law*. Les personnes en situation de handicap ne doivent pas faire l'objet de discrimination lors de l'obtention d'une assurance maladie ou d'une assurance vie qui doivent être fournies de manière équitable et raisonnable.

Sixième proposition, dans le projet de loi original, il est stipulé que toutes les personnes en situation de handicap jouissent de la capacité juridique sur un pied d'égalité avec les autres conformément à l'Article 23 du Code civil. Cela garantit leurs droits à une égale reconnaissance devant la loi, ce qui leur permet de conclure des contrats et d'exercer leurs droits comme toute autre personne.

Septième proposition, tous les *websites* gouvernementaux doivent être accessibles et adaptés aux personnes en situation de handicap.

Huitième proposition, les inscriptions en braille et les services en langue des signes doivent être disponibles dans les lieux publics, tels que l'*Aapravasi Ghat* et le Musée de l'Esclavage.

Aussi, autre proposition, chaque chaîne de télévision doit inclure un encart en langue de signes dans les journaux télévisés et les annonces majeures, notamment en cas de catastrophe ou d'épidémie, pour garantir l'accessibilité pour les personnes sourdes ou malentendantes.

Dixième proposition, les informations sur la santé telles que le VIH et les droits sexuels et reproductifs doivent être accessibles via des formats adaptés tels que le braille et les gros caractères.

Onzième proposition, le Comité des Nations Unies sur les droits des personnes en situation de handicap a recommandé fermement que les personnes en situation de handicap ne subissent aucune stérilisation forcée, non thérapeutique, et qu'elles ne soient pas privées de leurs droits sexuels et reproductifs.

Douzième proposition - et c'est la dernière -, en ce qui concerne l'Article 37 qui limite le nombre de personnes en situation de handicap pouvant bénéficier d'un soutien d'une

organisation non enregistrée, je trouve qu'il est rédigé de manière restrictive. De plus, la question de l'instance chargée de traiter les cas de discrimination reste en suspens. La version originale du projet de loi envisageait la création d'un tribunal d'arbitrage pour les questions liées à l'invalidité, mais cela paraît être financièrement contraignant. Il serait peut-être plus approprié d'intégrer cette fonction dans la Commission des droits de la personne.

M. le président, avant de conclure, je tiens à saluer tous ces professionnels et ONG qui quotidiennement travaillent sans relâche pour protéger les personnes en situation de handicap de notre république. Je soutiens pleinement l'ONG Ti-Diams dans son appel à modifier la définition de '*handicap*' dans le projet de loi. L'amendement proposé par Ti-Diams est le suivant –

“Disability means a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, sensory impairment”

et Ti-Diam propose d'inclure -

“Auto-immune disorders of a person which substantially hinders his ability to carry out normal day to day activities.”

Pour conclure, je tiens à rendre hommage à un homme remarquable, Monsieur Loïs Lagesse, dont la générosité a permis de réserver une parcelle de terre pour la construction d'un centre destiné à encadrer et soutenir les personnes touchées par la déficience visuelle et la cécité.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

(7.28 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Jutton!

Ms T. Jutton (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, there are such moments in this august House that warrant undisputable pride, as today as this Bill brought to the House today transcends the mere act of legislating. It represents a pivotal moment to be etched in our history. The very heart of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development revolves around leaving no one behind and Member States have pledged the same.

This landmark legislation, today, demonstrates the unflinching commitment of this Government to inclusiveness, and I have to say this is a cause that I have been holding dear to and it is, today, with a deep sense of purpose that I am adding my voice to support the protection

and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in this august House today, which constitutes what I believe to be the blue print for safeguarding the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities through the establishment of legal protection and mechanisms for redress.

So, at the very outset, I would like to congratulate the hon. Mrs Fazila Daureeawoo GCSK and Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, under the strong leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for all the efforts put for us to have this Bill today. And we know this how long the intent was set. And as we say, '*to set the ball rolling*', it needed inputs from so many stakeholders. Today, the Bill is here and it remains a fact that the Bill brought in the House today is brought by this Government.

M. le président, permettez-moi de reprendre les propos de l'honorable David un peu plus tôt dans cette Chambre, qui disait que l'opposition parlementaire ne va pas surpolitiser. Mais c'est triste de noter les propos de l'honorable Anquetil qui a longuement parlé sur le Parti travailliste et même les propos de l'honorable Quirin un peu plus tôt, qui dit que ce projet de loi manque de profondeur ou que certaines sections sont seulement des *change of name*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since this Government is in power, we have seen how it has relentlessly stood up for the less fortunate and verily encapsulating the definition of a caring and compassionate Government. And here, I would like to quote the words of Mahatma Ghandi –

“The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not enumerate the number of measures adopted by this caring and compassionate Government ever since it is in power and especially during the testing times like COVID. But let me remind the House about two recent measures. The hon. Ms Anquetil was speaking about the Basic Invalidity Pension, but let's be honest. The pension was only at Rs3,000, but, today, this pension is at Rs13,500. And, secondly, the criteria have been reviewed.

She was talking about the rights of children. So, for children who are suffering and who have been suffering and who were deprived of any financial support, today, they are able to get this kind of financial and monetary support as the age criteria has been reviewed for all those less than 15 years old. Should I also remind the House about those who have lost an arm or have been amputated of a leg or hand who will also now be able to benefit from this Basic Invalidity

Pension. These are just a few measures, Mr Speaker, Sir. But the one which really shows the heart of this Government and that of the Prime Minister especially is when we talk about those children who are suffering and where the Government will take charge of all the medical fees when they have to go for treatment abroad.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I call caring and this is what I call daring to care. *Pour pouvoir changer de statu quo et apporter des réformes audacieuses, ce qu'il faut c'est l'audace, le courage, la détermination et dur labeur qui découlent même du DNA de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth. Et, M. le président,* on this side of the House, we took that oath to stand up for justice and the universal human rights for all our citizens thereby aligning seamlessly with the very ethos of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 10 which is to reduce inequalities and SDG 4 which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Indeed, one of the key objectives of this Bill is to foster a culture of inclusivity and accessibility within our educational institutions. By making provision for the accommodation of students with disabilities, this Bill seeks to ensure that no child is left behind and that no child is deprived of the opportunity to fulfil his or her dreams. Thus, standing for and aligning with this globally endorsed objective, this Government is not only responding to a moral imperative, but also fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development. The World Bank in its published report has consistently highlighted that inclusive and equitable societies are vital for poverty reduction and for the success of development outcomes. A nation's progress is not only measured by economic metrics, but also by the inclusiveness and well-being of the people, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Through this legislation today, we are not only operationalising the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, but we are also taking a significant stride towards ensuring that disability rights are integrated into our national legal framework. This Bill stipulates the setting up of an independent monitoring mechanism which shall be responsible to promote and monitor the implementation of the Convention. The clauses of the Bill are really well laid and expensive, but I will just go through a few of them. For instance, Part II has extensive clauses laid to ensure that there is prevention of discrimination and abusive treatment against someone on the basis of his/her disability.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a clear testimony of the political will to protect any person with disabilities from any form of discrimination. What constitutes discrimination? It has been clearly laid out in Part II subsection 6 of the Bill. It is for the very first time, just like the hon. Minister has said in her speech, that discrimination will be criminalised. So, this is a first! Also, any person who commits what constitutes an act of abuse under this Act will be deemed to commit an offence and will on conviction, be liable to a fine of up to Rs200,000 and even to imprisonment of up to 5 years.

This Bill provides mechanisms for reporting and addressing instances of discrimination and human rights violation. By providing persons with disabilities with access to legal remedies and recourse, the Bill empowers them to assert their rights and seek justice in cases of discrimination and abuse.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are protected and promoted, Part III of this Bill entails a series of clauses, one of them being training and education whereby it is legislated that any educational and training institution when admitting a person with disability has the duty of care to ensure that it be equipped with adequate facilities. Mr Speaker, Sir, Part IV of this Bill comes up with the setting up of a special unit for the establishment of protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities which will oversee that the persons with disabilities are entitled without discrimination to equal protection and benefits under the Act and be protected against discrimination on all grounds.

This new body will also oversee the coordination of all activities revolving around the implementation of the Convention and other international instruments to which Mauritius is a party. The new units will also be looking after conceptualisation and implementation of disability policies, projects and other such programmes to be able to coordinate government's activities and strategies at the national level.

Now, I come to Part V of the Bill which provides for the setting up of a National Empowerment Authority. Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, for the amendment brought to the name of this authority. And here, I would like to tell hon. Quirin that no, it does not merely constitute a change of name because the focus here is clearly on empowerment instead of disability. Earlier, as I said, discrimination was defined as per this Bill,

but like my colleague hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry mentioned earlier and even hon. David mentioned, that the real discrimination relates to the inbuilt stereotypes. *Comme l'a si bien dit l'honorable David, les regards sur les personnes en situation de handicap, c'est cela qui constitue le vrai défi, M. le président.*

So, changing the name here and, for instance, saying special-abled instead of disabled, differently gifted instead of disabled and just like the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi *ji*, who recently urged to even change the Hindi word '*vikalaang*' which means problematic organ to what you call '*divyaang*' meaning divine organ. So, these are not just changes of names or changes of words or taking one word here to replace another. The aim behind is what needs to be looked at, hon. Quirin. So, it is about having the stepping stones to help change the inbuilt bias of society towards those who have been historically marginalised on account of their disabilities. I wish here to pay respect to all of them, to all those children of the Mauritian soil, just like hon. Mrs Mayotte said earlier, there are so many names to mention, but amongst the few that she said, Noemi Alphonse, Yaaseen Edoo, Jane Constance *parmi tant d'autres* whom I would like to commend the courage and also not just them, but their families and the support system they had throughout to make them refuse to be defeated by defeat, due to their physical differences and to rise above being victims of their situations to being victors of their situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Empowerment Authority will have as the main aim to empower persons with disabilities to help them to achieve optimal human potential while striving to shatter the barriers and inherent bias and stereotypes that have hindered the full participation and inclusion till now. It will advocate for improved collaboration between service providers and people with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is tangible evidence of our firm resolve to place disability rights at the centre of our governance structures.

I will end by just taking a last clause of this Bill which is about employment of persons with disabilities where the Bill has so many provisions to ensure that employers do employ people with disabilities. For instance, as the hon. Minister, Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, had explained really well earlier in her speech, those employers having between one to 100 employees, should recruit at least one employee with disability and for those having between 101

to 200, they should have at least two and for those having greater than 200 employees, the quota will be 3%. Well, this Government has always been leading by example and we can say that today, it has even taken the bold steps of applying the very same provisions to both the public and the private sector.

So, this Bill also provides that an employer recruiting a person with disabilities has the duty of care to ensure that that employee not be required to do any work which, with respect to the nature of his disability, will not be suitable. The Bill also has fiscal incentives and *Prime à l'Emploi* to encourage employers to recruit people with disabilities, thereby denoting not only the moral obligation but also economic pragmatism and this is clearly articulated by the International Labour Organisation that people with disabilities bring additional skills to the workplace that can actually enhance productivity and increase diversity. For instance, the *Prime à l'Emploi* of a maximum of Rs15,000 to employers recruiting a person with disabilities which will be equivalent to the basic wage of salary of that employee for the month and for the next 60 consecutive months, immediately following the month of employment, are such measures which lay the strong foundation for constructing what I call 'an authentically inclusive society'.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will say that by championing this Bill, we are not merely contemplating a future in which our citizens, our individuals who have disabilities are empowered to contribute fully to the societal fabric but we are actually creating the historical pathways to achieve same. In the stride towards ensuring that each and every citizen of Mauritius lives a truly dignified life, I believe that the name of hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, will forever be embossed as I call it, in the golden letters of history. Be it for the fight of employees to have their due, *le salaire minimum*, Negative Income Tax, pension for old age, basic invalidity pension, the Children's Bill and today, this monumental piece of legislation brought in the House which represents yet another stepping stone towards consistently building a society that is inclusive, accessible and equitable for all individuals, regardless of their abilities or limitations, thereby giving each individual the necessary support and protection to thrive in all dignity.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Ms Joanna Bérenger!

(7.46 p.m.)

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Ce projet de loi a pris beaucoup trop de temps à être présenté au Parlement. En 2016, l'honorable Paul Raymond Bérenger, leader de l'opposition avait posé une *PNQ* sur le sujet et la ministre avait informé à la Chambre que le premier *draft* avait déjà été approuvé par le bureau de l'*Attorney General*. En 2016 ! Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ensuite pendant huit ans ? Rien ! Les droits des personnes en situation de handicap ont continué à être bafoués et méprisés.

Hier, sur le plateau de Radio Plus, l'ancien député, Étienne Sinatambou est venu lui aussi dire que depuis 2019, ce projet de loi avait été présenté au *Cabinet*. Alors oui, la ministre peut venir nous dire dans son discours que pendant quatre ans elle a fait des consultations, mais je crois qu'ici Étienne Sinatambou l'a démasquée.

(Interruptions)

Oui, oui, oui. Bien sûr, il est bon que ce projet de loi soit présenté devant la Chambre aujourd'hui et c'est tant mieux, mais personne n'est dupe. Il a dormi dans un tiroir pendant tout ce temps pour être présenté à la veille des élections et avec beaucoup de lacunes. De manière générale, je rejoins mes collègues parlementaires avant moi qui jugent que ce projet de loi ne va pas suffisamment loin et ne donne pas effet entièrement à l'esprit de la Convention des Nations Unies pour les droits des personnes en situation de handicap que Maurice a donc ratifié.

C'est une loi qui est présentée juste pour que le gouvernement puisse s'en vanter de l'avoir fait, mais dans la réalité elle ne protégera pas davantage les droits des personnes en situation de handicap, malheureusement, dans la situation actuelle. Je ne reviendrai pas sur les lacunes déjà mentionnées, mais je vais quand même développer quelques-unes en commençant par celles concernant l'indépendance puis les lacunes concernant la formation. Ensuite, celle dans la composition de l'Unité pour la protection des personnes en situation de handicap et je finirai par la question de l'accessibilité qu'il s'agisse de l'accès à l'éducation, à la pension ou à l'information.

La section 4 crée un *Independent Monitoring Mechanism* qui n'a d'indépendant que son nom lorsqu'on regarde sa composition et c'est le cas malheureusement pour toutes les autres entités créées par ce projet de loi où le pouvoir de nomination du ministre et son pouvoir de donner des directives sont omniprésents, y compris en ce qu'il s'agit du *National Empowerment Board*.

La section 11 (c) fait la promotion de la formation pour les professionnels travaillant dans le secteur de l'habilitation et de la réhabilitation. Mais, pourquoi se limiter à ce secteur ? Pas de mention nulle part de la formation dans le *Bill* mis à part ici. Pourtant, la formation est plus que nécessaire pour d'autres professionnels, qu'il s'agisse des pédiatres, des médecins, des magistrats, et des policiers.

Formation aussi, par exemple, pour la détection précoce des handicaps. Les professionnels en psychologie témoignent des cas où les parents vont consulter à l'hôpital parce que leurs enfants ne parlent toujours pas à l'âge de cinq ans et où on leur dit que ce n'est pas grave. Formation pour les professionnels de la petite enfance, également pour ceux de l'éducation, hormis l'éducation spécialisée.

Formation des policiers et policières qui est mentionnée à la section 20(2). Formation des policiers et policières, primordiale pour gérer et interagir avec les personnes déficientes intellectuellement, autistes verbales et non-verbales. Ces policiers et policières formés pourraient se regrouper en une brigade de la famille, similaire à la Brigade des mineurs, mais pour les adultes en déficience intellectuelle et autiste.

Formation des employeurs. Il faut absolument légiférer sur la formation des employeurs, spécifiquement au handicap intellectuel et à l'autisme parce que ce sont deux conditions particulières. Ce n'est pas moi qui le dis, mais les experts dans le secteur, notamment les professionnels en psychologie. Il est important de bien comprendre ces deux conditions pour prévoir les aménagements nécessaires et savoir comment faire face à leur manière de comprendre et d'interagir avec le monde. Et, je profite de cette occasion pour les saluer parce que c'est la Journée internationale pour la sensibilisation de l'autisme.

La section 18 prévoit la création d'une unité pour la protection des personnes en situation de handicap. Je suggère qu'il y ait une équipe paramédicale au sein de l'unité pour la protection des personnes en situation de handicap. Les cas sont actuellement référés au ministère de la Santé comme on le sait, mais qui est déjà surchargé et n'est pas spécifiquement formé au handicap, notamment à la déficience intellectuelle, à la trisomie et à l'autisme et il y a une différence à faire entre maladie et handicap comme on le sait. L'existence d'une équipe paramédicale faciliterait aussi la mise en application de la section 19 (e) qui fait provision pour un support psychologique offert par la *Disability Rights Watch* aux victimes d'abus. Cette équipe

paramédicale serait également utile pour épauler le *Board* qui, selon la section 46(3), est amené à décider si quelqu'un ou quelqu'une est en situation de handicap ou pas et si elle mérite ou pas une pension. Il faut que cette décision soit bien inspirée par des professionnels qui comprennent le handicap intellectuel et l'autisme.

Plus généralement, la question de l'accessibilité aux personnes en situation de handicap a été complètement mise de côté. Cela fait pour autant partie d'un des points les plus importants de la Convention des Nations unies sur les personnes en situation de handicap. Et bien sûr, l'accessibilité n'est pas seulement infrastructurelle, il s'agit d'abord de l'accès à l'éducation. Les étudiants en situation de handicap ne sont toujours pas équipés pour accéder aux plates-formes en ligne, mais surtout, il existe une discrimination flagrante qui doit cesser.

L'honorable Maneesh Gobin, lors de son discours aux Nations unies en janvier de cette année, a dit que tous les secteurs de l'éducation sont maintenant gratuits à l'île Maurice. Mais ce n'est pas vrai ! L'éducation spécialisée n'est pas gratuite à Maurice. Il y a des aides, mais elle n'est pas gratuite. C'est d'ailleurs une grande injustice envers les personnes en situation de handicap. Et c'est la preuve concrète du mépris de ce gouvernement pour les principes d'inclusion et les droits des personnes en situation de handicap. C'est une énorme discrimination qui doit cesser.

Ensuite, vient l'accès à la pension. Cette question aussi est totalement mise de côté. Il y a d'abord le fait qu'à l'âge de 60 ans, bien que le handicap de la personne ne disparaisse pas, sa pension, elle, disparaît. Ce qui est également une grande injustice et la présentation de ce projet de loi est l'occasion de rectifier cela. Le handicap intellectuel, par exemple, est aussi un handicap à vie et il doit être reconnu comme tel. La pension doit être donnée à vie dans ce cas.

Le responsable du pôle adulte et famille de l'APEIM, dont je me fais ici le porte-voix, nous apprend que beaucoup de bénéficiaires de l'APEIM se retrouvent à un moment privé de leur pension. Beaucoup d'enfants autistes, également, n'ont pas de pension simplement parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas parler. Mais le handicap, comme on le sait, n'est pas toujours visible. Il est donc absolument nécessaire de revoir les critères d'éligibilité pour la pension et le *Carer's Allowance*, en tenant compte de l'augmentation depuis quelques années du nombre d'enfants autistes, et en instaurant une approche humaine. Le *Medical Board* prend sa décision en se basant sur une approche médicale et non pas sur les droits humains comme le voudrait la

Convention des Nations unies. Comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, il y a une différence à faire entre maladies et handicaps et je pense que la présence d'une équipe paramédicale pourrait résoudre ce problème.

Et finalement, l'accès à l'information. Qu'en est-il des appareils auditifs, du braille dans les espaces publics et les corps paraétatiques ? Qu'en est-il des traductions en langage des signes ? Pour rappel, le 25 mai 2020, j'avais adressé une lettre au Président de la Chambre demandant la représentation d'une ou d'un interprète lors des travaux parlementaires pour permettre l'inclusion et la compréhension des échanges parlementaires en direct et pour permettre la compréhension de ce qui est en train d'être décidé pour le pays. J'ai compris que cela demandait beaucoup de ressources matérielles et humaines et que ce ne serait pas possible pour les prochaines séances. J'ai donc réitéré ma demande par écrit en décembre 2021.

Mais comme mes lettres sont restées lettres mortes, je me suis tournée vers le *Leader of the House*. Plusieurs questions ont été posées au Premier ministre en 2020, en 2022, sur la diffusion des travaux parlementaires et les bulletins télévisés en direct avec un ou une interprète en langage des signes pour rendre donc accessible l'information aux sourds et malentendants. En réponse à ma question B/387 en 2021, le Premier ministre avait promis que le bulletin télévisé en langage des signes passerait de un à deux par semaine et qu'un bulletin en direct serait instauré. Nous attendons encore ! Ou bien, peut-être, considère-t-il que deux bulletins en langage des signes, mais le même bulletin est suffisant ! Dans les réponses à mes questions parlementaires, le Premier ministre a systématiquement mis en avant le manque de ressources techniques et humaines, mais surtout, le coût onéreux que demande la mise en place des facilités permettant aux sourds et malentendants de suivre les bulletins télévisés en direct.

Donc, le gouvernement peut investir des millions dans des travaux routiers, dans des infrastructures, dans du béton, dans des *per diem*, mais ne peut pas et ne veut pas mettre l'argent qui est nécessaire pour permettre l'inclusion de tout un chacun. Il est primordial de revoir les priorités, car il s'agit d'inclusivité, il s'agit du respect des droits humains et il s'agit du respect de la Convention des Nations unies concernant les droits des personnes en situation de handicap dont Maurice est signataire.

Oui, l'île Maurice est signataire de cette Convention et l'article 21 de cette Convention dit que nous devons allouer les fonds nécessaires et les ressources nécessaires pour nous assurer

que la transmission des programmes télévisés soit accessible à la communauté des sourds et des malentendants. Le gouvernement est même supposé prendre des *awareness actions* par rapport à cela, mais rien du tout. Donc, en 2024, à l'heure de la technologie de pointe, il n'existe qu'un seul journal télévisé par semaine en langage des signes et l'information n'est, malheureusement, déjà plus d'actualité quand les personnes sourdes et malentendantes y ont accès.

L'Inde, que beaucoup dans la majorité aiment prendre en exemple, a adopté des standards pour permettre l'accessibilité aux programmes télévisés des personnes en situation de handicap en septembre 2019. Pourquoi ne pas leur demander une assistance s'il le faut ? Le gouvernement peut demander une assistance à l'Inde pour le tram, pour une jetée et une piste d'atterrissage à Agaléga, pour envoyer un satellite dans l'espace, mais ne peut pas leur demander une assistance pour implémenter des standards et permettre aux sourds et aux malentendants de ne pas être discriminés et de comprendre quelles décisions sont en train d'être prises pour le pays. Et de le comprendre en direct, pas quand l'information n'est pas d'actualité ni sans que l'information soit filtrée par la MBC ! Les sourds et malentendants, eux aussi, font partie de notre pays ; eux aussi ont droit à l'information. La vraie information, pas celle de la MBC !

Aujourd'hui, nous débattons précisément le projet de loi qui concerne spécifiquement les droits des personnes en situation de handicap. Mais cet aspect de l'accès aux programmes télévisés et à l'information en direct pour les sourds et malentendants est totalement méprisé. Pourtant, en sus des promesses du Premier ministre, le budget 2022-2023, lui aussi, annonçait deux bulletins télévisés en langage des signes et la formation de, tenez-vous bien, 60 officiers. Ils sont où les 60 officiers formés aujourd'hui ? Et ensuite, la ministre vient nous dire dans son discours que le gouvernement dirige en donnant l'exemple. J'aimerais bien savoir où est l'exemple ici ! Où sont les interprètes en langage des signes ? J'insiste, donc, cela devrait être possible d'investir ce qui est nécessaire pour que personne ne soit discriminé et pour permettre l'inclusion de tous.

Et je profite de l'occasion pour réitérer notre soutien indéfectible à la communauté des personnes en situation de handicap. Nous continuerons à militer pour que les droits des personnes en situation de handicap ne soient pas méprisés et aussi pour combattre l'indifférence. Une fois au gouvernement, nous apporterons les amendements nécessaires pour combler les lacunes de ce projet de loi et dans notre Constitution. Parce que nous croyons que nous ne

pouvons pas inspirer à une société juste et équitable tant que les droits des personnes en situation de handicap ne seront pas entièrement reconnus et respectés et tant que nous ne prendrons pas conscience en tant que nation que la différence est une richesse. Je vous remercie.

Mr Speaker: I will just add my voice. Referring to one sentence, MP Ms J. Bérenger stated in her speech when she said, referring to the Chair, that she wrote to the Chair about x, y and z. So, admit your own mistake. The Chair is not involved in policy matters. You should learn that. I am contributing in your experience.

Now, I call the next orator, hon. Abbas Mamode!

(8.02 p.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, first of all, to thank the hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for having brought to the House this Bill which will aim at safeguarding and advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities in Mauritius.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, de mentionner à priori Mohammad Yaaseen Edoo, il y a tant d'autres encore mais Yaaseen Edoo, un handicapé de naissance et qui est devenu une figure incontournable dans le paysage mauricien mais aussi au niveau international avec sa persévérance. M. le président, cela me fait rappeler la citation de Stephen Hawking –

« Aussi mauvaises que puisse paraître la vie, il y a toujours quelque chose que vous pourrez faire et réussir. Quand il y a de la vie, il y a l'espoir. »

Quelle volonté de Yaaseen Edoo ! Au fil des ans, il a réussi à être à la hauteur, je vous salue, M. Edoo.

J'ai aussi écouté avec attention le discours de l'honorable Joanna Bérenger, de la démagogie bien sûr, mais est-ce qu'on a oublié, M. le président, qu'aujourd'hui, même un enfant avec une situation de handicap, il a sa pension – *full pension* ? Donc, si vous ne voulez pas voir la volonté de ce gouvernement, moi qui croyais écouter quelqu'un qui aspire à être dirigeant de notre pays, de la démagogie comme toujours, je m'arrête là, M. le président.

I will here shed light on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its potential impact on the lives of Mauritian citizens with disabilities. This Bill,

Mr Speaker, Sir, is a significant step towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with disabilities in Mauritius, ensuring their rights are protected and promoting equal opportunities for their participation in society.

Let's delve, Mr Speaker, Sir, into the details of this Bill and how each section aims to improve the livelihood of Mauritian citizens with disabilities.

Part I of the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, known as the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, includes the title and interpretation of the Bill. It defines important terms such as "abuse", "act of abuse", "authority", "benefit", "board", "Chairperson" and "Chief Executive Officer" to ensure clarity and understanding throughout the document. These definitions can be found in Section 2 of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part II of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill focuses on prohibiting discrimination and abusive treatment against individuals with disabilities. Let us break down these sections of the Bill –

- Prohibition from discrimination

This part of the Bill found in section 5 – prohibits any form of discrimination against individuals on the basis of their disability. It ensures that individuals with disabilities are treated equally and fairly. Anyone who would discriminate against a person with a disability will be subject to penalties, as outlined in section 5 of the Bill.

- Prohibition from abusive treatment

Section 6, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the Bill, addresses various forms of abusive treatment towards persons with disabilities. This includes degrading treatment, prolonged mental or emotional harassment, intentional pecuniary loss, violent treatment, failure to provide adequate care, exploitation and neglect. The Bill outlines the offences and corresponding penalties for such acts in section 6(2), aiming to protect individuals with disabilities from abuse.

These provisions, Mr Speaker, Sir, are crucial in safeguarding the right and well-being of individuals with disabilities, ensuring that they are protected from discriminatory practices and abusive treatment.

Part III of the Bill focuses on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. Let's simplify the section related to training and education and reference the specific section of the Bill –

- Training and Education

This section, Mr Speaker, Sir, found in Section 8 of the Bill, addresses the need for training and education opportunities for persons with disabilities. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to educational resources and support. The provision aims to cater to the special education needs of persons with disabilities and ensure that educational and training institutions provide adequate facilities for this purpose. Additionally, it outlines that admission to a Special Education Needs School should be for a transitional period except where determined, otherwise by the Special Education Needs Authority (Section 8).

This provision, Mr Speaker, Sir, is essential for enhancing the skills and knowledge of individual with disabilities thereby improving their prospect for employment and social integration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part IV of the Bill – Protection and Promotion of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit, plays a crucial role in establishing the Protection and Promotion of Rights of Person with Disabilities Unit within the Ministry. This Unit starts with ensuring that all persons with disabilities are entitled to equal protection and benefits under the Act without facing discrimination. The Unit's functions are comprehensive and include promoting public awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, developing and implementing measures for equal opportunities and monitoring administrative arrangements to support the coordination of the Government's activities related to persons with disabilities. These details can be found in Sections 15 to 21 of the Bill. The establishment of this Unit, Mr Speaker, Sir, signifies a dedicated effort to address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities, aiming to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for the wellbeing and participation in society.

By promoting public awareness and implementing measures for equal opportunities, the unit seeks to ensure that individual with disabilities have access to the necessary support and resources to thrive and contribute to society. Additionally, the monitoring of administrative arrangement underscores the commitment to effective governance and co-ordination in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities.

Part V: National Disability Authority. Part V, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the Bill establishes the National Disability Authority which plays a vital role in supporting persons with disabilities. The authority is responsible for various functions, as outlined in section 25 to 28 of the Bill. Establishment of the authority: this section found in section 25, Mr Speaker, Sir, establishes the National Disability Authority. The authority starts with assisting and supporting person with disabilities to reach and maintain the optimal human potential, ensuring that the environment is barrier-free to enable independent and meaningful lives for person with disabilities, promoting effective service delivery and advocating for collaboration between service providers and person with disabilities.

Additionally, the authority advises the Ministry on national policies and other matters related to persons with disabilities as detailed in section 26 to 28 of the Bill. The establishment of the National Disability Authority signifies a dedicated effort to address the needs and rights of person with disabilities aiming to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for their well-being and participation in the society.

Part VI: employment of person with disabilities. Part VI, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the Bill addresses the employment of persons with disabilities, emphasising the duty of employers to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to join the work force and outlining fiscal incentive for employing person with disabilities

Duty to employ person these disabilities. Section VII of the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, outlines the duty of every employer to endeavour to employ persons with disabilities promoting opportunities for their inclusion in the work force. This duty is detailed in section 39 of the Bill which emphasises that every employer should make effort to employ person with disabilities and the Board may summon – the Board may summon – Mr Speaker, Sir, an employer to show cause if they are not complying with this duty.

Fiscal incentives for employing person with disabilities. Section VIII of the Bill provides for fiscal incentive to be given to employers who employ persons with disabilities aiming to encourage employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This section, Mr Speaker, Sir, is designed to support and incentivise employers to create suitable employment opportunities for person with disabilities as detailed in section 41 to 43 of the Bill. These provisions are crucial in promoting the inclusion of person with disabilities in the workforce and encouraging

employers to provide suitable employment opportunities while also providing them with the incentive to do so.

Inspection of registered organisation. This section, Mr Speaker, Sir, detailed in section 47 of the Bill outlines the inspection of registered organisations to ensure that the services offered to persons with disabilities comply with the provision of the Act. The purpose of these inspections is to verify that the services provided are of high quality and are suitable for individual with disabilities, as mandated by the Act.

The inclusion of the provision reflects the commitment to upholding the right and well-being of persons with disabilities by ensuring that the services they receive meet the necessary standards and are in line with the requirement of the legislation. This oversight is essential for safeguarding the rights and ensuring the appropriate care and support for individual with disabilities.

In summary, Mr Speaker, Sir, the promotion and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities encompass the provisions aimed at eliminating discrimination, establishing the National Disability Authority, providing fiscal incentive for employees hiring person with disabilities and creating mechanisms for monitoring and reporting acts of abuse. By addressing these critical aspects, the Bill seeks to ensure equal protection and benefit for individuals with disabilities, promote their inclusion in the workforce and provide support for the overall well-being.

This Bill represents a significant stride towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for individual with disabilities in Mauritius, ultimately aiming to improve their life hood and ensure their rights are protected.

I would like, again, to thank hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo for having, at least, brought this Bill to this House for the benefit of people with disabilities in Mauritius. With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you and I thank everybody for having listening to me.

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

At 8.20 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.45 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated. MP Osman Mahomed!

(9.45 p.m.)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill. PWDs, in short for persons with disabilities, I shall henceforth refer to.

Many of the opposition MPs before me have canvassed very important issues in connection with this Bill. I shall certainly not repeat them, but I shall stick to issues I am familiar with, either professionally or at Constituency level or, issues friends or people whom I know have discussed with me in particular.

At professional level, let me mention that I worked as Engineering Advisor at the Ministry of Social Security between January 2001 and December 2002, a post which I left in December 2002, in order to move on in a career in the Civil Services as a Civil Engineer. At the Ministry of Social Security, my main duty was to advise on the management and maintenance of the nine NPF buildings around Mauritius but on request of Mr Azize Bankur, ex-head of the Disability Unit of the Ministry, who has now retired, I was called upon to assist in order to make certain building accessible to persons with disabilities; which I did. A few examples are: retrofitting works at Hindu Girls College in Curepipe and Keats College at Chemin Grenier, to name but a few. But here itself the National Assembly precinct, after several meetings with the then Clerk, Mr André Pompon, we decided to settle for the ramps, some of which are still here. After 20 years, I visited them this afternoon in order to confirm.

Petite anecdote, since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in short CRPD, is referred to, time and again in this debate; the New Government House and the National Assembly's site especially, became accessible to PWDs in 2002, 20 years ago, way before the Office of the National Nations Resident Coordinator which is located at Anglo Mauritius building became accessible. I am given to understand that it became only so some 8-10 years ago when a UN Consultant with a physical disability came for his work at the building. So, a movable ramp has since been provided for and used as and when required.

So much show for the rehabilitation of existing buildings which, if done, will go a long way to promote accessibility and therefore enhance the rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore, Section 4 of Schedule 14 of the Bill, which stipulates that only the owner of a new

building to which public has access, has by law, to ensure that the building is accessible to any person with disability, is not in line with Article 9, on the accessibility of the UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the CRPD, which states that –

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas.”

These measures which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility shall apply to, *inter alia*, buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housings, medical facilities and workplaces.

The hon. Mrs Minister Jeewa-Daureeawoo has recognised in her speech that it has not been possible to impose that all buildings should be made accessible as it is something that cannot be achieved overnight but then, where there is a will, there is a way. The hon. Minister will surely concur.

The Disability Unit has been doing this for decades with its own funds; when I was there at least, I can speak for that. Then why can't buildings owners be compelled to do so? Why can't existing buildings be renovated? Would the local authorities, when issuing permits for renovation of existing buildings, compel the owners to render their buildings accessible? Will all legislations on buildings be compliant with the notion of accessibility as advocated by the UN CRPD? How about accessibility to leisure?

I was talking to Mrs Danielle Wong, former Director of NEXA. She uses a wheelchair and she explained to me the difficulties she has encountered with the so-called facilities provided by the Beach Authority at Pointe-aux-Roches Beach which are not appropriate at all. She has also sent a video to me showing how much difficulties she has encountered in accessing a movie theatre in the Plaine Wilhems recently.

Another issue which I consider of utmost importance is educational institutions including vocational ones. As I mentioned earlier, I have been doing retrofitting works in colleges more

than 20 years ago. I wonder how the situation is today. Are they all accessible to learners and staff with disabilities? I look forward to listening to Minister Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun who is speaking later on.

Although the CRPD does not mention it, places of worship are to be looked into as well, given that worshipping is a fundamental right. Petite anecdote – during the passage of cyclone Belal, one mosque in Vallée Pitot, Sayyedena Abu Bakr Siddique was completely inundated and major renovation works are still ongoing, till today. Notwithstanding this fact, the management team of the mosque led by, Mr Barahim, in consultation with Mr Ali Jookun, a well-known activist in the domain, also a resident of Vallée Pitot, and myself as an Engineer, have had a discussion and a board decision has been taken to make the mosque fully accessible to wheelchair-users and persons with other mobility problems, right from the entrance and to the place where prayers are held. I do believe this is a laudable initiative that could be replicated to other places of worship of my Constituency and elsewhere and for my Constituency, I am most willing to assist.

Before moving on to other forms of disabilities, let me raise two practical issues that people have shared with me and which I would like to raise tonight. The first one has to do with parking facilities for persons with disabilities. This has been brought to my attention by Mr Bruno E.S.C., a new constituent of mine, residing at Pailles following the revision of electoral boundaries. The message reads as follows, it is in Creole, but it is a very short message –

“Bonjour Osman. Ena enn parking andikape lopital Jeetoo. Eski enn, kapav pintir parking la ble kuma sur la route. Et deux, kapav fer redres so pano. Li tombe parfwa, banla tir li. Mo enn andikape ki fer dializ trwa fwa par semenn, mo gagn extra problem parking. Tou dimounn valid servi sa parking ki rezerve pou andikape la.”

I wrote to the administration of Dr. Jeetoo Hospital more than a week ago, on 25 March 2024, but until now, I have not had a response. The problem is still the same. Since the Minister of Health is here tonight, I call on him to kindly look into the issue. Otherwise, I will have to raise it at adjournment time. To make matters worse, I am even informed that there are people, not only at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital, but other public departments who use coupons and cards that are meant for the disabled for parking purposes and in the process, they abuse the system.

Let me now bring another problem that has been referred to me last week by Mr François I. of Roche Bois, and I quote the short message –

“Good morning, hon. Osman Mahomed. I am a resident in Constituency No. 3 and I have a mother who is wheelchair ridden. This week, I noticed that the exit on the underground pedestrian exit has been blocked with a vertical concrete pole in Trianon. It is near the bus stop towards Curepipe. This blockage will not allow a disabled person to move from one exit to another exit with a wheelchair. Grateful if you could kindly intervene so that the block could be removed for ease of movement. Thank you, François,”

I have a question at this stage: do we need new laws to help PWDs in circumstances like the above? All that is required is seriousness and diligence from the authorities; custodian of public places. The saddest part is that it is not done and this is very unfortunate.

I was in Dubai last month where I took cognizance, from taxi drivers and hotel porters, how strict the authorities are on illegal parking on these reserved parking facilities for the PWDs. Even if you want to stop at such parking facilities to unload your luggage, you can be fined with high penalties. In such matter, Dubai has actually taken the international lead.

Moving on, Mr Speaker, Sir, Article 9 of the CRPD also seeks to promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information. In this respect, I do believe due consideration could have been given to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. For example, there are new audio descriptions or captions every day on national TV channels. We all know how much inconvenience this has caused during COVID-19 time when no facilities were provided at all.

As a food for thought, the National Assembly Parliamentary TV could have led by example by making this facility available for parliamentary debates. I am given to understand that all that is required is an audio translator software; it is an app actually. As a matter of fact, these apps are commonly available nowadays and are very affordable. I am not asking for a sign language translator which can be more costly and complicated. The more so, there are no fully recognised qualified sign language interpreters in Mauritius, I am told.

Much has been said about the Training and Employment of the Disabled Persons Board. I know the building in Calebasses very well. It is a bookcase of Murphy's Law for the

construction industry, that is, anything that can go wrong will go wrong. I was the Engineering Advisor of the Ministry in 2000 and 2002 when the Ministry decided to initiate legal action against those who were involved in this construction. I understand that the only decision that remains now is a total pull-down of the building. I hope that the plot of land can someday be used to provide facilities for the community of PWDs before something else is done with that plot of land. The days for special training centres for learners with disabilities are over, in as much as today, inclusion is being favoured. For it not to remain an empty slogan, the Ministry of Education will have to invest so that all buildings, all existing educational institutions and training centres like the MITD should be able to accommodate learners with disabilities.

The last point that I would like to canvass tonight is clause 22 of this Bill on Police assistance. It is provided that –

“(1) Where a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person with disability –

- (a) has been, is being, or is likely to be, the victim of an act of abuse, he shall forthwith intervene to assist in preventing the person from being abused;”

The question is: is the Mauritius Police ready to face these situations? Should it be the duty of the Police Officer to come up with a conclusion of ‘reasonable grounds’ or should it be the duty of the Judiciary after due enquiry has been conducted by the Police?

Petite anecdote – the case of Facebook videos of 2021 of Mrs Rubina Seetharamdoo that created havoc in the community of PWDs and all stakeholders in Mauritius and abroad. The very first police report on this case was actually filed at the Vallée Pitôt Police Station in my Constituency by activist Mr Ali Jookun, then a constituent of mine. I have to mention here that he had faced numerous obstacles because the Police did not want to take the statement simply because they were not prepared to face such a situation. I am told by Mr Jookun that it was only after the intervention of the then Senior Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Security, Mr Shekar Boyramboli, that the Vallée Pitôt Police Station took the statement bearing OB No. 1520/2021.

That being said, I am proposing that an amendment be brought to section 21(1) to state that Police should conduct enquiry and thus leave the Judiciary the elements of ‘reasonable grounds.’ I leave the proper wordings to our expert legal officers from the State Law Office who have done a remarkable job in drafting this Bill at long last.

Notwithstanding this fact, I have to mention here two protagonists: Mr Coomara Payendee, Specialist in International Disability Law and Mr Etienne Sinatambou, former Minister of Social Security until the 2019 general elections, who have touched on the need to amend the Constitution to better protect and avoid discrimination against PWDs. This has been reported in this morning’s Le Défi newspaper and I quote Mr Sinatambou –

« Le projet de loi et l’amendement à la Constitution étaient prêts en 2019. »

Reading this makes it sound that as if the Government has waited for the eve of the general elections to bring this Bill to Parliament!

Now, I look forward to hearing the reaction of the Minister of Social Security on this. I am done. I thank you for your attention.

(10.01 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me at the very beginning of my intervention to show my sincere respect and appreciation to my colleague, the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for bringing this Bill.

At least, she had the courage to do so, Mr Speaker, Sir, compared to the former Minister, Mrs Sheila Bappoo, whom hon. Ms Anquetil mentioned. I think she must have forgotten the Draft Bill in the drawer!

Mr Speaker, Sir, so far the Minister – and I can vouch for it – has ensured that the rights of disabled persons are protected and included in all policies implemented by the Government. Credit goes to her.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you know, Mauritius signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. In 2010, the Convention was ratified with reservations, notably on Article 9 owing to financial implications, on Article 11 concerning situations of risk and

humanitarian emergencies, and on Article 24 pertaining to accessibility to free and quality education at primary and secondary levels.

Our Government has been addressing these issues and this Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill aims at remedying these reservations so as to continue to support our inclusive society. Actually, it has been a keystone of this Government, since 2015, to develop policies and take actions to foster an accessible Mauritius. An inclusive society, Mr Speaker, Sir, is one which promotes integration, diversity and makes equal opportunities accessible to all its citizens. This Government recognises and values the rights of everyone, whatever their abilities and this Bill is yet another example of our commitment to protecting those rights. This Bill acknowledges that, with the right frameworks and support, those who are differently abled can and should enjoy equally enriched lives and make their contribution to our society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in terms of frameworks, in addition to the Equal Opportunities Act, the Mental Health Care Act, the Data Protection Act, the Workers Rights' Act, effective since 24 October 2019, has made stricter provisions in favour of vulnerable workers who are at risk of being victims of discrimination due to their disabilities.

In order to treat all workers equally as well as indiscriminately, the Workers Rights' Act provides that all workers, including those with disabilities, are provided with equal treatment in the course of their employment.

The issues are addressed in a number of sections under the Workers Rights' Act, namely at –

- a) Section 5 which deals with discrimination in employment and occupation;
- b) Section 26 which caters for equal remuneration for work of equal value;
- c) Section 64 – protection against termination of employment, and
- d) Section 114 –violence at work.

These sections of the Workers Rights' Act, Mr Speaker Sir, offer safety nets to all workers. The term “impairment” has been included in these sections with a view to ensuring that differently abled persons enjoy parallel rights and protection. This gives them equal treatment to any other worker concerning labour protection and access to employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, better diagnostic tools now available in Mauritius are enabling us to identify more easily children who are afflicted by cognitive disabilities and provide support to them into adulthood. Today, as we celebrate World Autism Awareness Day, estimates indicate that approximately one in 93 Mauritians suffer some form of autism. We have actually 220 children under the age of 16 who are receiving support therapies. In fact, the first Autism Day Care Centre was inaugurated in April 2022 in my Constituency and I had the opportunity to be there at that particular time. It provides psychological support to children and adults living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Moreover, I am informed that an Autistic Unit is being set up at Bois Cheri and will be inaugurated tomorrow itself.

Mr Speaker Sir, autism is a solid example where the impact of a disability can range from minor to major on a day-to-day life. The message today is clear, this Government will step up to provide the best resources available to it in order to ensure those diagnosed are able to meet their full potential.

Mr Speaker, Sir, disability does not mean inability. I am sure we all know who Elon Musk is; a multi-billionaire. Actually he was the world's first richest person until recently, with interests across multiple sectors from electric cars to space exploration but how many of us know that he had Asperger syndrome? He has publicly shared the challenges it posed him but this hidden disability has not inhibited him from fulfilling an ambition and an incredible career.

Mr Speaker, Sir, early in my intervention, I mentioned of a component in addressing and alleviating some of the challenges caused by a disability. It is also directly linked to educational outcomes for those afflicted by mental and cognitive impairment. The hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, has conceptualised through statute and operationalised the Special Education Needs Authority to ensure equitable access to education and holistic development through adapted pedagogies, assistive technologies and support systems for learners with diverse disabilities and special educational needs. Complementary to this, I made a Special Education Needs Institution Regulation last month to ensure that NGO-run SEN schools have fairly paid teachers. The SENA has addressed the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework and issues pertaining to standards, efficiency and accountability in the special education sector.

As previously mentioned, having a disability does not necessarily preclude having an academic success. For example, recently, I think it was mentioned by hon. Abbas Mamode, a blind student made the headlines for his outstanding performance at the HSC exams. He was ranked 15th in the Arts side and let me quote what he said when interviewed by the media –

“Peu importe les difficultés, il faut persévérer. Ce n’est pas parce que nous avons un handicap que nous avons moins de potentiel. Il faut se donner les moyens pour réussir et la réussite passe par l’éducation”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Members, this young man is an inspiration and he should be an example to us all!

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the World Bank, one billion people, roughly around 15% of the world’s population, experience some form of disability and disability prevalence is higher for developing countries.

However, determination and mind-set can overcome adverse situations. Take for example the highly regarded lawyer, Coomara Payendee, who has been advocating for equitable rights for differently abled persons and who deservedly was nominated au *Comité des droits des handicapés de l’Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU)*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amongst the main objectives of this Bill, we have –

- The protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities,
- The setting up of the National Disability Authority;
- The encouragement of the employment of persons with disabilities, and most importantly,
- Ensuring a safe and inclusive workspace for persons with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we are very proud to say that ever since the beginning of our mandate in 2014, our Government made it a must to better consider people with disabilities. Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that an invalid person draws a pension of Rs13,500, compared to a meagre figure of Rs3,267 in 2014 when the Labour Party was in power. This is a staggering increase of 413% from the amount that the Labour Party used to give. This

Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, has provided financial support required for persons affected with disability to be financially independent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, intentions may be noble, but actions speak louder. One meaningful measure of this Bill is at Section 43 and concerns the “*Prime à l’Emploi*” Scheme. You will surely remember that in the last budget, the scheme had been extended to persons with disabilities so as to boost their chances of being employed.

Under the scheme, Government provides a monthly stipend of Rs15,000 for the first two years of employment. I am glad to see that this Bill goes further by extending allocation of that same “*Prime à l’Emploi*” Scheme for an additional 3 years, that is, 60 months in total, to an employer who recruits a person having a disability.

In our Republic, the number of persons with disabilities stands approximately at 84,500 (6.8% of the total population) and the number of beneficiaries of social aid as at date is around 28,086, out of which, 25,554 are severely handicapped.

Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the fiscal incentives being introduced to enhance employment of disabled persons, at Part VI of the Bill, there are other sections which concern mainly the duty to employ persons with disabilities. Employers who will not comply shall be summoned by the National Disability Authority to show cause as to why they could not employ.

Moreover, a proper monitoring and traceability of recruitment will be possible with the introduction of the obligation for every employer to submit an annual report on employment of persons with disabilities to the authority.

So as to increase the number of differently abled persons working, I do welcome the announcement made by hon. Minister about the creation of a register of disabled persons. It will be very helpful indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir. It could be paired with the list of jobs available at the Employment Division of my Ministry and allow these differently abled jobseekers to search for a whole array of opportunities.

My Ministry has also developed Employment Outreach campaigns at community level together with the Citizens Support Unit (CSU) to disseminate information on labour market prospects and its service delivery. The jobseekers with disabilities are taken into consideration as well.

Moreover, the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), which operates under the aegis my Ministry, has been mandated to give a special attention towards the training and placement of persons with disabilities under the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP).

We firmly believe in the proper assessment of each type of disability and pairing it with the most ideal job available so as to boost their employability in the labour market.

Moreover, persons with disabilities are also considered for training and placement by the Mauritius Institute for Training and Development (MITD) under the National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP) to increase their access to technical, vocational education and training in various trades, as mentioned by hon. Osman Mahomed who spoke before me.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly states that disability cannot be a reason or criteria for lack of access to development programming and the realisation of human rights.

In line with that, my Ministry has been focusing on ways and means to improve service delivery towards jobseekers with disabilities. I am proud to inform the House that my Ministry is presently implementing a new training Programme, the Training and Placement of Persons with Disabilities (TPPD). We are working in collaboration with the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Board in this context. Hence, persons registered with this institution will have enhanced employment opportunities within the public sector.

The training period and placement is for six months during which the trainees receive a stipend of Rs10,000 and a travelling allowance of Rs1,000 monthly. My Ministry welcomed almost 40 persons registered with the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Board for interviews in February of this year. 22 candidates have now been selected and placed across different public institutions. We shall do more with the coming of this new legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir. We will work with the authority that is being set up for that purpose.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the duty of a government to lay out measures and programmes that add benefit to all segments of its population. The new Bill goes in that direction and it will see the creation of the National Disability Authority (NDA), which shall take over the functions and powers of –

- The Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund,
- The National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, and
- The Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board.

The creation of such an authority is most welcomed as it shall guarantee proper funding because organisations, like the Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund (which introduced the use of “Braille” to students in Mauritius in the 1970’s), actually depend on private donations and sponsorship to run their activities. So, it is good that the authority take over the functions and powers of these institutions to be in a better position to deliver.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleague Ministers and I are here to serve and our greatest duty is to protect our nation’s most vulnerable. That is exactly what the MSM Government of Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth has been doing since 2017.

This Bill is, without question, a necessary evolution to our legislative framework that will enable and enshrine the spirit of our Government’s values. It is another step towards an inclusive Mauritius, one that puts persons with disabilities on the same level-playing field as any other citizen of our rainbow nation.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am done.

Mr Speaker: MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

(10.21 p.m.)

Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, le handicap, c’est l’affaire de tous. Qu’il soit présent dès la naissance, qu’il survienne à la suite d’une maladie, d’un accident ou d’un accident du travail, le handicap fait partie de la vie. À Maurice, une personne sur 15 a un handicap. Une personne sur 15. Le handicap concerne 84 500 de nos concitoyens et sans oublier leurs parents et leurs proches. Nous sommes tous ensemble et tous concernés.

M. le président, j’accueille que ce projet de loi a pour objectif de protéger et promouvoir les droits des personnes handicapées à Maurice et de les protéger contre la discrimination. Donc, je ne serais point tentée d’intervenir sur cette loi de manière partisane, mais uniquement d’effectuer mon rôle en tant que parlementaire de l’opposition et d’apporter des critiques constructives et des suggestions dans l’intérêt des personnes en situation de handicap.

Néanmoins, M. le président, nos concitoyens qui vivent avec un handicap sont dans l'attente de ce projet de loi depuis plus d'une décennie. Malgré que Maurice a participé activement en 2005 et 2006 à la rédaction de la Convention relative aux droits des personnes handicapées des Nations unies, l'a signée en 2007 et l'a ratifiée en 2010, c'est triste de noter que ce n'est que 14 années plus tard que la loi est introduite à la veille de la dissolution de cette Assemblée et des élections générales, qui pourrait être perçue comme faisant partie de l'agenda électoral de ce gouvernement. Ces personnes, M. le président, ont enduré un long et pénible combat pour trouver leur juste place au sein de notre république. D'ailleurs, je salue le dévouement et l'engagement de toutes ces organisations, ONG, hommes et femmes qui sont à l'avant-plan de cette lutte.

M. le président, un handicap n'est pas une déficience, mais est équivalent à des obstacles rencontrés dans la vie quotidienne et dans la participation à la vie sociale ; des obstacles douloureux pour ceux et celles qui les vivent tous les jours et pour leurs proches, mais ces obstacles peuvent être surmontés si l'on s'en donne les moyens. C'est dans cette optique que le but fondamental de cette loi est d'améliorer et de simplifier le quotidien des personnes handicapées. Ce projet de loi est certes un bon début, mais n'est pas entièrement conforme à la Convention des Nations unies comme il est prétendu dans l'*Explanatory Memorandum*. Est-ce que ce projet de loi vient soulager les difficultés éprouvées au quotidien, surtout concernant l'accessibilité ? La réponse est non. Est-ce que ce projet de loi est à la hauteur des attentes des personnes handicapées et de leurs proches ? La réponse est malheureusement une fois de plus non.

M. le président, l'Article 9 de la Convention des Nations unies stipule que –

« Afin de permettre aux personnes handicapées de vivre de façon indépendante et de participer pleinement à tous les aspects de la vie, les États Parties prennent des mesures appropriées pour leur assurer, sur la base de l'égalité avec les autres, l'accès à l'environnement physique, aux transports, à l'information et à la communication (...) et aux autres équipements et services ouverts ou fournis au public (...) »

Mais d'après l'annexe 1, paragraphe 4 de ce projet de loi, uniquement les nouveaux établissements recevant du public auront l'obligation de prendre en compte tous les aspects de l'accessibilité par les personnes handicapées. En d'autres mots, l'accès à ces nombreux bâtiments

existants qui reçoivent le public restera comme un vrai parcours du combattant pour ces 84 500 citoyens. Certes, la mise aux normes de l'ensemble des bâtiments recevant du public ne sera pas chose facile et tout ne pourra se faire en un jour, mais je déplore que ce gouvernement a tout bonnement choisi la facilité et a failli à sa tâche sous le couvert du terme *Mauritius context*, terme prononcé par la ministre lors de son intervention pour donner des justifications à l'annexe 1, paragraphe 4.

M. le président, il est de notre devoir de nous battre contre tout ce qui rend difficile la vie de bien des personnes handicapées. Le *Mauritius context* n'est pas une excuse valable pour ne pas appliquer la Convention des Nations unies dans son intégralité. Il faut une vraie volonté. Vouloir c'est pouvoir. Pourquoi ne pas donner un délai maximum d'une dizaine d'années ou plus pour la mise aux normes de ces bâtiments ? Pourquoi ne pas mettre un fonds à disposition et accorder des subventions pour les travaux de mise en accessibilité ?

D'après l'Article 9 de la Convention des Nations unies, l'accessibilité doit être rendue possible dans tous les aspects de la vie ; un accès pour tous dans les bâtiments, les espaces publics, le transport, le numérique, les moyens de communication digitale et téléphonique. C'est de permettre aux personnes sourdes de téléphoner à la *hotline* d'urgence et aux services d'information. C'est de rendre possible à une personne à mobilité réduite de se rendre chez le boulanger par ses propres moyens. Ce sont ces pictogrammes adaptés pour les personnes handicapées mentales. Ce sont ces annonces sonores dans le bus, les ascenseurs, aux feux de signalisation. C'est de permettre que les services publics numériques soient accessibles et permettre la navigation sur les sites web gouvernementaux à l'aide d'une synthèse vocale ou d'une plage braille en utilisant uniquement son clavier ou sa voix pour, par exemple, permettre une personne aveugle de remplir sa déclaration d'impôts en ligne de manière autonome.

Malheureusement, ce projet de loi ne fait pas provision pour que les sites web du gouvernement soient accessibles aux personnes handicapées. D'ailleurs le rapport 2022 des États-Unis sur les droits humains à Maurice avait fait mention de ce manquement. Ce projet de loi ne corrige point ces lacunes déjà mises en lumière et, encore une fois, démontre qu'il n'est pas totalement conforme à la Convention des Nations unies. Je demande que des amendements à ce projet de loi soient apportés, car de nombreuses personnes en situation de handicap restent

exclues de la société par manque d'accessibilité, que celle-ci soit numérique ou physique. Pourtant, il s'agit d'un droit fondamental, et il nous convient de le faire respecter.

M. le président, un autre aspect que j'aimerais aborder sont les préjugés envers les personnes handicapées et la nécessité de les combattre. Améliorer le quotidien des personnes handicapées veut aussi dire éliminer les discriminations envers cette personne. J'accueille qu'à la section 5, la discrimination envers les personnes handicapées constitue désormais une offense, mais criminaliser doit marcher de pair avec une lutte acharnée contre les préjugés liés au handicap. Faire évoluer les mentalités est primordiale dans l'objectif de construction d'une société inclusive, plus juste, plus équitable et plus solidaire. Il est temps de valoriser les compétences des personnes en situation de handicap en se focalisant sur ce qu'elles font et sur ce qu'elles sont et non pas sur ce qu'elles ne font pas et ne sont pas, car les idées reçues et les préjugés restent importants dans notre société.

Il existe plusieurs sortes de handicaps : handicap moteur, sensoriel, mental, cognitif et psychique. Mais l'image prédominante de la personne handicapée reste la personne handicapée en fauteuil, alors même que d'après les dernières statistiques à Maurice, 65 % du handicap est invisible. Le handicap est encore essentiellement perçu comme synonyme de difficulté et très largement associé à l'idée de souffrance et de malheur. Consciemment ou inconsciemment, la société peut exclure ce qu'elle ne comprend pas, renforçant l'isolement social des personnes en situation de handicap, et cela appartient aux autorités de briser ce filtre qui déforme cette représentation du handicap en rendant visible ces personnes pour la société, en valorisant leurs compétences plutôt que leur incapacité et en améliorant la connaissance générale du public sur le sujet. Que ce soit à travers une campagne nationale de communication et de sensibilisation d'envergure pour lutter contre les préjugés ou de s'assurer, par exemple, qu'une représentation suffisante de personnes en situation de handicap dans nos médias, tout cela pour faire de sorte de voir les personnes avant le handicap.

Et, M. le président, changer les mentalités cela commence à l'école. C'est là où tout se construit : la personnalité, le sentiment d'appartenance et le regard sur les autres parce que, c'est en apprenant ensemble sur les mêmes bancs d'écoles qu'on apprend à se connaître quelles que soient les différences et qu'on apprend à accepter les différences dès le plus jeune âge. Pour

essayer de corriger cette profonde inégalité à la racine, l'inclusion scolaire est donc essentielle. C'est pour cela que j'accueille la section 8(1) de ce projet de loi qui prévoit que –

“(1) Every manager or owner of an educational or a training institution shall take into account the special education needs of a person with disability when admitting that person as a student in his institution.”

Et la section 8(3) – l'admission de l'élève dans une *special education need school* sera uniquement pour une période de transition sauf si le *Special Education Needs Authority* décide autrement.

Cependant, M. le président, avant même l'introduction de ce projet de loi, les enfants handicapés avaient déjà le droit d'être scolarisés dans les écoles *mainstream* mais le rapport 2022 des États-Unis sur les droits humains à Maurice mentionne que les écoles *mainstream* ne sont souvent pas en mesure d'accueillir les enfants handicapés. Il faudra que les instances régulatrices s'assurent désormais que ces enfants trouvent leur juste place dans les mêmes écoles que leurs générations. M. le président, le même rapport des États-Unis sur les droits humains critique que les écoles spécialisées qui accueillent les enfants avec un handicap mental reçoivent en comparaison des fonds restreints et minime de la part du gouvernement. Pourquoi ces inégalités? Au nom de ces enfants, je demande que cette injustice soit corrigée.

Avant de conclure, M. le président, je voudrais faire ressortir le soutien essentiel des proches ou membres de la famille qui apportent cette aide si indispensable à une personne de leur entourage qui présente une incapacité que ce soit un enfant handicapé, une personne âgée en perte d'autonomie ou une personne handicapée à la suite d'une maladie ou d'un accident. Pour nombreux de personnes et proches aidantes les vacances sont rares et les contraintes nombreuses. Parmi ces contraintes, c'est la nécessité d'être constamment disponible et les répercussions financières.

Malgré qu'il existe déjà une *Carers Allowance* mensuelle, je suis d'avis qu'il est nécessaire de mieux reconnaître la valeur des *carers*, de ces proches qui aident, de mettre à leur disposition des services psychosociaux, de leur offrir des formations pour mieux accompagner leurs proches et mieux se positionner dans ce rôle d'aidants pour préserver la qualité de la relation avec le proche et connaître la maladie affectant ce proche, ses conséquences sur la vie quotidienne et de pouvoir s'y adapter. Et afin de mieux soutenir ces aidants, ces *carers*, pour

qu'en retour ils puissent mieux aider leurs proches, je suggère la création d'un congé de quelques semaines pour les proches aidants, pour permettre aux personnes qui accompagnent un proche en perte d'autonomie de concilier vie personnelle et vie professionnelle.

Pour conclure, M. le président, ce projet de loi tel qu'il est n'est pas à la hauteur de nos engagements envers les conventions internationales dont nous sommes signataires. Mais surtout ce projet de loi a failli à sa tâche de réellement améliorer et simplifier la vie de nos concitoyens en situation de handicap et de leurs proches qui rencontrent et qui affrontent des obstacles tous les jours. Ces citoyens méritent ce petit mieux pour leur condition de vie difficile et ce petit mieux est de la possibilité de cette Assemblée. Je fais donc appel pour que des amendements soient apportés. Si tel n'est pas le cas, le prochain gouvernement trouvera la volonté nécessaire pour combler les lacunes de ce projet de loi et trouvera la volonté nécessaire d'apporter ce mieux. Je vous remercie.

(Interruptions)

Mr Callichurn: *2010 ki convention...*

An hon. Member: *Projet la dan tirwar!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold.

(10.37 p.m.)

Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to comment on this important Bill which concerns human rights, in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. This law, Mr Speaker, Sir, so far as I understand, will not limit in dealing with discrimination but through the establishment of the National Disability Authority, I hope that this Authority will help in creating positive entitlements to necessary services and support with regard to the people with disabilities.

With regard to the Lois Lagesse Trust Fund, I strongly believe that it has shown its importance in maintaining the dignity of the disabled in fighting against discrimination. One can say that we are not doing too well and others may say that we are not doing too bad in regard to the support given to people with disabilities in the Republic of Mauritius.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius, we have a rather good track record in the protection of human rights compared to so many countries in the world. People with disabilities in the

Republic of Mauritius, although we still need to make further improvement in physical and communication, access to public transport and building for example, but our disabled persons have always been an inherent part of our society with the right to live as anyone else guarded by our constitutive Act.

As I said earlier, we still have a lot to do towards our people with disabilities. The income support through the social security system is of great importance when we are talking about giving support to people with disabilities and I welcome the provision of this Bill in giving people with disabilities the right to work. I am only hoping that with the establishment of National Disability Authority that will help in creating good employment services for those people with disabilities, Mr Speaker, Sir, employers must not recruit disabled persons for work just to meet the set government quotas; they must be recruited to do what they are able to do otherwise it will become another form of discrimination.

In the same line, Mr Speaker, Sir, efforts are needed to fully integrate people with disabilities into normal life. Tonight I am using my position as parliamentarian, people's representative, to push the Government further – on behalf of people with disabilities; I have met so many of them as I am a Health Care Worker – to urge the National Disability Authority to use these Acts to set standards and regulatory framework to guide the necessary services for people with disabilities and to give proper guidelines on how specific services should operate. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government alone will not be able to provide all the services that need to be put in place for the welfare and social development of people with disabilities.

Some of the services will need to be provided through NGOs. NGOs have an important role in providing the government, through the National Disability Authority, evidence based on the unmet needs of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Mauritius.

In order for people with disabilities to be fully integrated into the workplace, employers will also need to work with NGOs to meet specific needs of employees with disabilities. This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very important as it will definitely allow a more holistic approach towards the care of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are able to do so many things, but we must not forget that because of some conditions, they will need support and assistance to participate fully in employment.

I will talk about another aspect which is again very important Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities and to never forget the support of family carers. What does this Bill provide to support family carers?

The National Disability Authority will need to look into ways in which to give caregivers respite support to family carers. Up to now, there are not enough respite care facilities in the Republic of Mauritius to support family carers. I have been made to understand that there is only one respite care facility in the Republic of Mauritius and this is found in Rodrigues.

It is good to note that the government recognises family caregivers through the Social Security system by giving them allowance. And, caring for loved ones, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very rewarding. Despite that, respite care needs to be made available throughout the Republic of Mauritius as family carers need rest. They do have personal needs as well and social isolation can be a factor for mental ailment if this condition or situation is not addressed. And all I want to say by adding my voice to the debate is that this Bill will enable persons with disabilities to have the rights of protection in keeping with their physical and mental needs, their freedom to do whatever they want and their dignity to be maintained.

I also welcome this Bill in this House, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it comes at a very important moment when we are facing the phenomenon of an ageing population where we will have an increasing amount of people with reduced mobility as a result of ageing population.

I thank the hon. Minister for bringing such an important piece of legislation to the House and I fully support this Bill. I thank you Mr Speaker, Sir, for your attention. I am done.

Mr Speaker: MP Bodha!

(10.47 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci M. le président. Il semblerait que le projet de loi a été bien accueilli avec des réserves. Moi, je dis que c'est dommage que le projet de loi ne vienne pas avec un amendement de la Constitution pour une raison très simple ; je suis convaincu que dans les rangs de l'opposition, tout le monde aurait voté pour et on aurait eu les trois-quarts pour amender la Constitution une fois pour toutes. Je suis sûr moi que dans les rangs de l'opposition, on aurait eu le trois-quarts.

M. le président, lors d'une fonction il y a quelque temps avec Jane Constance, elle nous avait fait vivre une expérience assez étonnante. Elle nous a demandé, ce soir-là, je ne sais pas si quelques-uns de mes anciens collègues étaient là, de porter une bande sur les yeux comme si on était un non-voyant pour réaliser l'univers de son monde et pour réaliser combien c'était difficile pour elle et tous les non-voyants de s'adapter à notre monde à nous, parce que notre monde à nous, nous sommes habitués à tout ça. Et, elle voulait à ce moment-là nous faire comprendre ses contraintes, les difficultés, mais aussi nous convaincre de sa capacité de transcender son handicap. Et nous connaissons l'histoire de Jane Constance, elle est devenue un *role model*. Elle est en train, je crois, de faire des études de droit et de criminologie en Angleterre grâce à une bourse si je comprends bien. Et après avoir été '*The Voice*' et un parcours exceptionnel, nous avons là donc un cas où on peut dépasser, on peut transcender un handicap.

Tout à l'heure, on a parlé de Premier ministre de chez nous, de Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, du Président de l'USA, laissez-moi dire un mot de Lord David Blunkett. Lord David Blunkett a été le *Home Minister*, était un *Education Reformer* en Angleterre et il était non-voyant. Et voilà, ce qu'on écrit sur lui –

“Blunkket was blind from birth, was brought up in poverty because handicap compounded with poverty is another huge obstacle. He was brought up in poverty after his father died in an industrial accident at work. He was educated at school for the blind, but, he turned down a course in training to be a piano-tuner and insisted on a wider education.”

Donc il voulait avoir une éducation comme tout le monde parce que le maître mot de ce projet de loi, c'est l'inclusion et l'inclusion de 84 000 personnes citée par l'honorable ministre est un énorme chantier si on veut le réussir.

To continue with Lord Blunkett, let me say that he studied part-time at a Technical College and did well enough on his exam to win a place at the University of Sheffield where he studied Politics. Le reste on le sait, il a été le *Chairperson* du Parti Travailliste en Angleterre. Il a été un *Education Reformer* et il était le *Home Office Minister*, un post extraordinaire dans une société britannique.

Laissez-moi dire un mot aussi de maître Coomara Payendee. Il est non-voyant et il a réussi au barreau en Angleterre. Il était conseiller et maire de Curepipe. Il a œuvré au niveau des

institutions responsables de l'application de la politique gouvernementale à Maurice et par la suite il est devenu le vice-président du Comité de Nations unies sur les droits de personnes handicapées.

Et je voudrais ici justement rendre hommage à cette volonté, à ce feu qui habite beaucoup de gens qui ont un handicap, surprenant, je devrais donc leur rendre un hommage à ceux que j'ai nommés mais aussi les artistes internationaux, locaux, les sportifs qui, en dépit de leur handicap, ont réussi à faire exploser leurs talents comme on le sait et comme on le voit souvent.

Alors, le maître mot, c'est l'inclusion et toute la société moderne doit réussir ce pari de l'inclusion qui n'est pas une mince affaire parce que l'inclusion demande l'intégration, l'ouverture et aujourd'hui tout comme qu'auparavant, les personnes autrement capables étaient des parias dans des sociétés.

Il y avait des préjugés. Souvent, on les cantonnait à faire des choses simples et ordinaires. Le panier en osier, par exemple, pendant des années et des décennies, on a fait cela. Mais aujourd'hui, ce qui est extrêmement intéressant, c'est qu'il y a une ingéniosité pour développer des outils pour assurer l'indépendance de la personne autrement capable parce qu'il faut absolument assurer son indépendance et son autonomie dans le quotidien. C'est cela l'inclusion. Cela rejoint la Convention des Nations unies, citée par l'honorable David, dans laquelle l'on parle de la pleine et égale jouissance de tous les droits, de toutes les libertés avec le souci de promouvoir le respect et leur dignité intrinsèque. C'est cela le défi de l'inclusion aujourd'hui.

Il y a une ingéniosité pour aider la personne avec un handicap à vivre sa vie, à être autonome, à être indépendante. Il y a des nouveaux systèmes d'alarme, il y a des ordinateurs adaptés, il y a des télécommandes adaptées, il y a dans le transport en commun des installations adaptées parce que le handicapé ne mendie pas. Il a droit à une parité et cette parité doit être assurée par l'État.

Alors, il y a bien sûr l'allocation personnalisée. Le ministre a donné le nombre de personnes qui obtiennent une pension, mais il y en a ceux qui n'ont pas de pension. Il y a l'allocation personnalisée parce qu'il y a les besoins essentiels pour que le handicapé puisse vivre de manière autonome, au même titre de tout le monde, dans une intégration sociale parfaite. C'est un droit universel et c'est un droit aussi à l'assistance personnelle.

On a parlé des *carers*. Alors là, parce que cela a été mentionné, je voudrais dire qu'il y a un besoin, notamment avec le vieillissement de la population, à des *carers* professionnels. Il est grand temps qu'on puisse les former parce que ce n'est pas *carer* qui veut, n'est pas *carer* quelqu'un qui a du temps ou qui veut quelque part se faire un peu d'argent en aidant une personne autrement capable. Il faut donc de plus en plus aller vers un *caring* professionnel. Un soutien individualisé pour que le handicapé, la personne autrement capable, puisse être autonome. Il y a les besoins essentiels : l'hygiène personnelle, les repas, l'habillement, la communication. Et là, il y a un grand chantier quand on voit le nombre. Si on parle de 84 000 personnes autrement capables sur 350 000 foyers, cela veut dire qu'il y a sûrement une personne autrement capable dans chaque quatre ou cinq foyer. C'est cela le défi aujourd'hui. C'est que pour cette personne, quel que soit son âge, qu'elle puisse avoir accès et la facilitation de ses besoins essentiels et qu'elle puisse avoir aussi accès à l'éducation, à la formation et la possibilité – je vais y venir tout à l'heure – à trouver un emploi.

Laissez-moi faire deux propositions. Le droit à la mobilité. C'est vrai que le projet de loi ne parle pas des bâtiments existants. C'est vrai que demander la rénovation des bâtiments existants pour faciliter la mobilité des personnes autrement capables est un chantier énorme. Cela va prendre du temps architecturalement. Alors, moi, ce que je propose, c'est pour qu'il y ait une mobilité dans les villes – je parle en tant qu'urbaniste –, c'est-à-dire d'aligner les trottoirs dans les rues principales de nos villes. Comment peut-on faire cela ? On peut venir avec un *scheme* pour inciter chaque magasin de rénover les quelques mètres de trottoir devant lui, selon un plan d'ensemble approuvé par la municipalité. C'est à ce moment qu'on pourrait aligner embellissement et élément pratique pour que la personne en fauteuil roulant puisse bouger dans l'ensemble des rues principales de nos villes.

Quand vous regardez, par exemple, la Rue Desforges, vous allez voir que même pour le commun des mortels, les trottoirs ne sont pas pratiques. Il y a des dénivelés, il y a des endroits à risque. Alors, si on a un *scheme* de ce genre avec des incitations fiscales, on pourrait demander à chaque magasin, selon un plan unique, c'est-à-dire le plan serait le même. Cela a été fait dans beaucoup de villes en Scandinavie et cela aide beaucoup à la mobilité parce que la mobilité est extrêmement importante pour les personnes autrement capables.

Deuxième chose que je propose, c'est dans les nouveaux complexes résidentiels, dans les *social housing*, dans les logements sociaux, comme cela se fait en Scandinavie ou ailleurs, d'allouer le rez-de-chaussée aux familles ayant à charge des personnes autrement capables. C'est-à-dire développer des ensembles de logements où les personnes autrement capables peuvent vivre en société avec les autres familles. Mais là aussi, la priorité, c'est de faire de sorte qu'il y a l'inclusion de tout un chacun dans la même société.

Laissez-moi revenir maintenant sur la question de l'emploi. J'étais très content, il n'y a pas longtemps, j'étais dans un bureau et j'ai vu qu'il y avait un standardiste qui était non-voyant, et j'ai félicité le directeur de la compagnie pour lui dire que c'était un exemple, un modèle. J'apprends qu'il y aura un registre. La question est : comment régulariser l'offre et la demande ? Et quand il y a l'offre, comment former des gens ? L'honorable ministre a parlé de 3 000 à 4 000 emplois, de 3 %. La question est : quel emploi ? Ce ne sont plus les paniers d'osier comme auparavant. C'est non plus d'être standardiste parce qu'aujourd'hui avec l'informatique, avec la tertiarisation de notre système, de notre société, il faut qu'il y ait un système scolaire et universitaire qui permettra de développer l'intelligence de la personne autrement capable, développer son savoir être, développer sa capacité à s'intégrer dans une entreprise parce qu'il y a la culture de l'entreprise. À ce moment-là, ce serait un *win-win situation* à la fois pour la personne et pour la famille.

Chacun d'entre vous, vous connaissez les mères courageuses qui vivent avec un enfant parfois 17 ans ou 18 ans, qui est autrement capable. Moi, j'en connais, et c'est terrible ! Vous connaissez tous des familles martyrs et quand c'est doublé par la pauvreté, par un environnement difficile, combien c'est difficile d'élever des enfants et de leur donner les éléments essentiels. Alors, sur le système scolaire mis en place, j'espère que l'honorable vice-Première ministre nous en parlera des résultats du *SENA* ; sommes-nous satisfaits des résultats, avons-nous les moyens pédagogiques pour faire de sorte que ces personnes puissent justement développer leur potentiel de scolarité ou de formation ?

Il faut absolument trouver l'interface entre l'offre et la demande pour qu'il y ait une culture de l'emploi au niveau des personnes autrement capables. Maintenant, on peut parler de 1 %, 2 % ou 3 %. Le problème n'est pas le nombre, même si c'est dans la loi. Le problème, c'est *l'enforcement*. ; c'est de demander et de vérifier que les compagnies qui ont plus de 200

employés, ont effectivement placé des bandes annonces pour recruter des personnes autrement capables. C'est *l'enforcement* et il faut aller avec *l'enforcement*. Et là, il faut absolument que la plateforme qu'on veut mettre en place puisse justement régler et être l'interface efficace et the *enforcement mechanism* entre l'offre et la demande.

Alors, moi je pense qu'au niveau de l'emploi, il faut qu'on aille de plus en plus vers les emplois de demain, notamment avec la digitalisation, avec l'informatique. Il faut aussi développer le talent en l'artiste, il y a beaucoup d'artistes, il y a beaucoup de gens, des sportifs. Il faut une grande campagne de communication avec les *role models*, une campagne de *billboard* pour montrer aux gens qu'ils sont capables, que Jane Constance peut être *The Voice*, que Blunkett peut être *Home Minister*, qu'à Maurice, on pourrait demain avoir un député, un Premier ministre, un Président qui a un handicap, mais qui ne l'empêche pas de servir son pays comme cela se doit.

Et là, je voudrais saluer et rendre un hommage à tous les experts. Il y en a de plus en plus maintenant. J'ai moi-même rencontré il y a pas longtemps quelqu'un qui fait de la *speech therapy* pour les enfants et il faut saluer le travail, la passion de ces experts et il y a une chose importante. Il faut de plus en plus faire un *listing* des métiers, des besoins de formation, de l'expertise pour s'adapter au besoin des personnes qui sont autrement capables. Alors, il y a les experts qui sont en train de faire leur travail, il y a les ONG. Quand on regarde l'inclusion dans les pays où cela a été réussi, c'est lié à quelque chose de très simple où l'État joue son rôle. Quel est le rôle de l'État ? Les institutions jouent leurs rôles ; quel est le rôle des institutions ? Et les ONG apportent leur contribution qui est déterminante pour réussir cette inclusion. Et au niveau des ONG, nous savons tous combien travaillent avec beaucoup de passion, combien travaillent avec courage, qui ont travaillé pendant longtemps quand il n'y avait même pas de législation, quand il n'y avait même pas d'aide de l'État.

Et là, j'ai appris moi qu'il y a eu des consultations entre le ministre et les ONG. Alors la question qui m'a été posée est : est-ce que les propositions des ONG ont été intégrées dans ce projet de loi ? Quel sera le rôle des ONG ? Pourquoi ne pas créer – voilà la question qui m'a été posée – une vraie plate-forme valable pour faire changer les choses, c'est-à-dire une plate-forme où les ONG pourraient venir et avec toutes les ONG, avec l'institution, *the Authority that you*

want to create et l'aide, les prestations de l'État, créer une réelle synergie pour qu'on puisse gagner la bataille de l'inclusion ?

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Bodha: Et la bataille de l'inclusion...

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Bodha: *Thank you.* Et la bataille de l'inclusion, c'est justement l'allocation. L'État est en train de donner des fonds, mais il faut établir les priorités. Est-ce qu'on va donner à certains handicaps plus de facilités que d'autres? L'allocation des fonds, bien sûr et c'est là que moi je pense qu'étant donné que la prise en charge totale est faite dans beaucoup de cas par les experts et par les ONG, que ce soit médical, paramédical, la petite enfance, la formation, la scolarisation ou au niveau de l'aide à la famille, il faudra tenir en compte justement créer cette interface entre les ONG, les experts et l'État.

Si on est en train d'étatiser l'ensemble des opérations, je me demande si ce sera une réussite. Alors je pose aussi la question à l'honorable ministre : comment seront choisies les quatre personnes, les quatre représentants parce que les autres seront des représentants de la fonction publique ? Les quatre représentants, comment cela va se faire parce qu'il y a énormément de différents types de catégories de personnes autrement capables? Alors aujourd'hui, il y a une partie qui est gérée par le ministère de la Femme, une autre partie gérée par le ministère de la Sécurité sociale, une autre partie gérée par le ministère des Sports et il nous faut justement cette plateforme, cette synergie pour que l'inclusion soit possible.

Je termine en disant que nous avons bien sûr des réserves. Le chantier est énorme parce que c'est une question d'humanisme, c'est une question de société civilisée, c'est une question de chaleur humaine, c'est une question de faire que tous les Mauriciens, quels qu'ils soient, puissent se sentir qu'ils appartiennent à ce pays.

Alors voilà ce que j'avais à dire, M. le président. Je vous remercie.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Dr. Jagutpal!

(11.08 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, never before has a Government done so much for the rights of people with disabilities.

Our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has the same consideration for all segments of the population, especially for the vulnerable group. He is not only determined to improve their financial status but also to provide for their security, health and wellbeing.

Never before has a Government invested so much in the development and well-being of its population and the result is visible. Be it on the happiness index; be it the richest country in Africa according to the IMF; be it the Ease of Doing Business Report, this is what we call “*ensam nou avanse*”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no society is spared when it comes to disability. Whether a country is rich, developing or developed, disability can happen anytime; at birth, during the course of life or due to diseases. Disability can be temporary, progressive or permanent and exists in variable degrees.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the most common types of disability reported in the 2022 Census are –

- mobility – 36.8 %;
- vision – 17.9 %;
- self-care – 10.2 % , and
- behaviour – 8.1 %.

The Bill aims to protect these Mauritian citizens and to ensure that they are not deprived of their rights and that they have equal access to training and employment. The Government does not only want to protect people with disability but also to reduce the prevalence of disability in our country and to prevent people from becoming disabled and on a disability scale, gives the chance to disabled people to move positively on this scale, that is, the disability scale, thus protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the timing of this Bill has been pointed out. It is high time to amend the legislation now and provide new structural frameworks for persons with disabilities based on recent demographics and statistics of persons with disabilities, thus, justifying the setting up of a Board.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, bear with me. I will 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. Please continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government is not only engaged in giving assistance to people with disabilities but is also, more than ever, committed to prevent disabilities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my speech will be mainly on clause 11, that is, habilitation and rehabilitation. For example, a person with uncontrolled diabetes has a higher risk to develop peripheral nerves damage and can have unhealed wound in the foot which later may require amputation.

In 2023, there have been 423 new amputations linked with diabetes and 32 not linked to diabetes. Additionally, there were 268 Re-Amputations.

To cater for prosthetics and orthotics for patients, a collaboration with Mobility India, a centre of excellence in Mangalore, India has been established for new adapted assistive devices for the disabled.

In 2023, 22,660 patients have attended the Orthopaedic Appliances Workshop Consultation and 19,149 Orthopaedic Appliances have been delivered to patients. This is how to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, as in clause 11 (b).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since 20% of the population is diabetic and 15% is pre-diabetic, the vision of the diabetic person can be affected and that again resulting in disability. This is why it is very much important to have a preventive programme.

In 2023, 35,000 Retinal Screenings were performed, especially to detect ophthalmological diseases. The number of cataract surgeries, for example, in our hospitals has increased from 7,248 in 2019 to 8,844 in 2023. Hence, many disabilities which are acquired due to health issues can be prevented to a certain degree with proper screening.

There are several other factors which may lead to disabilities besides diabetes. For example, Non-Communicable Diseases, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, stroke and also ante-natal and neo-natal care.

What the Ministry is doing is in line with clause 11. In 2023, attendance at Footcare Clinics amounted to 40,714, Podiatry Clinics: 1,687, Audiology:

16,202 and Speech Therapy: 10,679, while attendance for physiotherapy was 126,018 as a consequence of longevity of life and an ageing population.

In Mauritius, we have 10 cases of stroke daily, which amount to nearly 1/3 of these patients result in death, 1/3 with severe disabilities and 1/3 with minor sequels. That is why, in December 2023, we have launched a National Action Plan on Stroke and also a dedicated Stroke Unit at Victoria Hospital. Yearly, around 4,000 cases of stroke are recorded in Mauritius.

Rehabilitation is also an important part of the Government's strategy to decrease the prevalence of disabilities. Professor Rajiv Reebye, from the Mauritian Diaspora in Canada, Specialist in Stroke and Neuro Rehabilitation is helping my Ministry to formulate a better pathway to recovery through rehabilitation for stroke victims.

In 2023, 944 neurosurgeries were performed in regional hospitals while in 2019, 544 were performed. A Spine Unit has also been created at Victoria Hospital in 2021 for complex spinal surgeries often resulting from road accidents.

During the last budget, the Government came up with another measure concerning all children who cannot be treated locally. The Government is financing the total cost of treatment without any limit of Mauritian children. This is an unprecedented measure thus decreasing disabilities which may have worse outcome. Last year, 101 children benefited from this scheme for a total of Rs60 m. These measures have greatly helped to reduce disability and morbidity among the population and also to alleviate many families of the burden of having to support financially the cost of overseas treatment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are several factors which lead to increased NCDs and disabilities in the population, one of them being tobacco-use. This Government has been the most proactive against tobacco-use. Concerning alcohol-abuse, the Ministry has set up a special ward for de-addiction.

In regard to disabilities as early as birth, some disabling conditions pose unique problems during or after pregnancy. We have noted a substantial increase in late maternity, meaning advanced aged pregnancies, that is, over the age of 35 years. One of the main many reasons for the number of people with disabilities as per the register is advanced aged pregnancies, representing an increased risk for babies born with disabilities, premature birth and miscarriage. Hence, early screening and continued follow-up in these cases are primordial. Complications associated with specific conditions such as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and multiple sclerosis can affect pregnancy and should be evaluated prior to conception. Regular Antenatal care follow-up contributes in the early detection of any health issue that can affect the health of the foetus.

Preconception care, introduced in 2021, for women planning for pregnancy can also reduce the risk of developing congenital anomalies in their foetus during pregnancy. Thus, this reduces the disability that is associated with babies born with major congenital cardiac anomalies.

Vaccination campaign, for example, has been reinforced so as there is a full compliance that infants and children are being vaccinated, as per the list of vaccinations recommended by the World Health Organization. Polio immunisation is one of the efficient measures in preventing disability related to Polio disease.

Training of doctors in the field of Neonatal Ventilation and Advanced Life Support and nurses in the field of neonatal critical care nursing, led to a significant reduction in brain injury due to oxygenation issue or reduction in chronic lung disease that all can contribute in acquiring certain degree of disability from mild to severe form as from birth. This has contributed to decrease the number of cerebral palsies that may be acquired from perinatal asphyxia.

New treatment such as Therapeutic Hypothermia, commonly known as cooling therapy has been introduced in all the Neonatal Intensive Care Units that are provided to new-born babies who have perinatal asphyxia.

Nutritional management for new-born has considerably improved which also contributes in the reduction of severe complications that can lead to death or significant disability.

My Ministry is providing essential, comprehensive and inclusive services to people living with disability, and that too, irrespective of the degree of disability. But we recognise the need to improve further.

I would like to emphasise on the connection between having a Disability Bill and prevention of disabilities, especially congenital malformations. Yet, we must work towards the prevention of disabilities in the first place. The Bill will definitely prioritise access to health, and more importantly, early intervention.

In year 2022, there were 102 neonatal deaths, out of which, 22.4% were due to congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities.

If we look at the statistics, from the year 2005 to 2014, there were 1,430 neonatal deaths while from 2015 to 2023, there were 1,014 cases, which clearly indicate a significant decrease.

This is only possible because this Government has put in place several measures or services which aim to improve maternal, neonatal and child health and consequently decreasing congenital malformations.

By ensuring that everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, has access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare, we can reduce the occurrence of preventable disabilities.

With regards to mental health, a Day Care Centre for children suffering from autism spectrum disorder was inaugurated in 2022 at Triolet, as earlier stated, and attached to SSRN Hospital. One new Day Care Centre for autism in Beau Bassin was inaugurated last year and tomorrow another one will be inaugurated in the south, that is, at Bois Chéri.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like once more to congratulate my colleague for bringing up this Bill to the House as I am convinced that it will give people with disabilities more scope for training employment and hence increase their well-being. I thank you for your attention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister! Hon. Kushal Lobine!

(11.23 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This Bill, very important Bill, has been amply canvassed by hon. Members from both sides of the House and I would not repeat what have already been debated or canvassed in this House but I would put this Bill in its right perspective.

First and foremost, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a person with disability is a person with a lot of abilities. Various hon. Members have cited various people who have been successful in life despite having disabilities but they have a lot of abilities that made them successful in whatever field. Hon. David cited our first Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam; he was a person with disability. He lost his left eye at the age of 12. We have had the example of David Blunkett as rightly pointed by hon. Bodha. He became a Lord in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom and we have Jane Constance. She is an example of perseverance, just to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that somebody with a disability is somebody with a lot of ability and loads of artists that we have been listening to their songs Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, they were people with disabilities and we have got great scientists, Stephen Hawking. So, having a Bill of such a nature that would safeguard and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on this side of the House, we also welcome same.

However, we need to put in the right perspective what has brought this Bill to this House now. First and foremost, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to lay emphasis on the fact that this Bill is the emanation of the Convention that we signed in 2007 and later on, it was ratified in 2010. Subsequently, we have had various consultations, various discussions amongst stakeholders and various governments have been giving their input as to the drafting of a Disability Bill. And it has been the subject matter of various Parliamentary Questions as well in this House throughout the years and I would briefly go through some of the Parliamentary Questions that will lay emphasis as to why this Bill is now before Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, way back in 2012, there was the former Minister Bappoo, they started working on the Disability Bill and they had a very eminent lawyer who was a specialist in disability law, our learned colleague, Coomara Payendee. So, there was a first draft of this Disability Bill that was being drafted at that time way back in 2012 and these debates with regard to what would be included in this Disability Bill were passed on to the next Government. So, way back in 2016, in a Private Notice Question asked by the then Leader of the Opposition, hon.

Paul Bérenger, the hon. Minister now – she was Minister also at that time – said that the Government is actively working on the draft Disability Bill and then on 28 March 2017, there was a new Minister, former Minister Étienne Sinatambou who took over the file and to a question from the then MP, now hon. Minister Ganoo who was at that time the First Member for Savanne and Black River, there was a question as to where matters stand with regard to the drafting of this particular Bill, the then Minister Sinatambou said the Attorney General's Office gave the unfinalised preliminary draft for official consultations.

It went on like that and in 2017, the then Minister Sinatambou to a question from, again, hon. Alan Ganoo, said it is expected that the draft Disability Bill will be introduced in the National Assembly around the end of 2018. On 04 December 2018, there was a question from former Member of Parliament Veda Baloomoody on where matters stand with this Bill and the then Minister again said the Bill would be introduced before the House next year and it went on like that and we came in 2020. On 28 July 2020 to a question from hon. David, First Member for Grand River North West and Port Louis West, to the hon. Minister and I will quote what the hon. Minister said as to where matters stand with regard to this Bill being presented before this House, I quote hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daareeawoo –

“... there are still a number of issues to be addressed to ensure that we introduce a proper Bill.

Following several consultations with the State Law Office, it was found that we may need to amend sections 3 and 16 of the Constitution so that the fundamental rights and freedom of disabled people are fully respected. (...) It is also worth highlighting that the Bill can only be effective when the necessary preconditions and environment are created for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.”

These are the facts that have been going through this House for a number of years and now we are in 2024, we have got this Bill and we are debating on it. We welcome this Bill but the public, this House should know how we went through all these steps and why now we are in the presence of only the Bill, not an amendment to the Constitution because it was one of the prerequisites to fight and protect and bring on the rights of protecting persons with disability through an amendment to our Constitution and it is the hon. Minister herself who explained, stated in a question put to her by hon. Uteem at that time, way back in 2016, with regard to why

is it that we are not extending that 3% quota that now we have included in this Bill to the Public Service and this is what hon. Minister Jeewa-Daareewoo said –

“As you know, recruitment of officers in the Civil Service is done through the PSC, the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Disciplined Forces Commission. So, introducing the 3% quota in the Civil Service will (...) inevitably entail constitutional amendments.”

This is precisely the point that was taken up by the hon. Leader of the Opposition in his speech. How will this House, how will the Government, how will the Ministry, how will any stakeholder in this particular field implement this particular act if we do not bring an amendment to section 118(4) of our Constitution. It is said in our Constitution and I quote –

“Subject to section 91A in the exercise of its functions under this Constitution, no such Commission shall be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.”

So, how will we impose, oblige an employer, be it in the public service to enforce this particular legislation with regard to this 3% quota? How will we do it? I would humbly request the hon. Minister in her summing up to explain to us how we will be proceeding. In the past, we were made to understand that we need a constitutional amendment for us to proceed.

So, in that respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would also urge the hon. Minister to explain to us why we do not bring before this House constitutional amendments with regard to section 3 and section 16 of our Constitution. I think, I believe and I feel that both sides of this House would halve favourably welcome any constitutional amendments to enhance the rights of persons with disabilities in our law. So, I do not understand why we have not yet brought this piece of constitutional amendment to enhance and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in our law.

I would also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, give my opinion with regard to clause 4 of this Bill. Clause 4 of this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerns the Independent Monitoring Mechanism and it says as follows –

“(1) That there shall be, within the Ministry, an Independent Monitoring Mechanism which shall be responsible to promote and monitor the implementation of the Convention.”

When you look at the composition of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will see that there will be a representative of the Ministry as Chairperson, a representative of the Human Rights Division of the Ministry responsible for the subject of foreign affairs, a representative of the authority, four representatives of organisations providing support to persons with disabilities, each having a different type of disability, to be appointed by the Minister. The independent monitoring mechanism may co-opt any person who may be of assistance in relation to the promotion and monitoring of the implementation of the Convention.

I would humbly make a suggestion to the hon. Minister. If we go by the spirit of the Convention, when we speak about an Independent Monitoring Mechanism, it should be truly independent. Here, we are having only public servants that will be appointed by the Ministry, by the Minister. So, instead of those four representatives of the organisations being appointed by the Minister, why don't we have an elected body of all the NGOs and they will choose those four persons that they will send on this Independent Monitoring Mechanism. This Independent Monitoring Mechanism has a very important role to make sure that the Convention that we have signed, ratified and now we will have the enacted in our laws, functions as to the true spirit of this Convention. So, I would urge the hon. Minister to consider the issue of giving the independence to that Independent Monitoring Mechanism.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to pay tribute to all the relentless efforts being made by several NGOs fighting throughout the years to safeguard the rights and protect our persons with disabilities because it is very stressful when you live in that situation. I have faced that situation with a very close family of mine and I salute the parents and families who in their day-to-day life, every day, cater for someone who suffers from a disability in the family. I have visited a son who is now 47 years old; the mother has been staying with his son for 47 years! This person has been bedridden for 47 years! So, just imagine the life of that mother, the life of that family! So, we salute and we pay big respect to all those families and parents who are facing such difficulties in their day-to-day life.

We also salute our athletes. My good friend, hon. Mr Toussaint will take this matter. We salute our athletes with disabilities who have made us proud on the international scene. We encourage people with disabilities to believe in their potential and their capacity. This Bill is a

step in the right direction. I believe and I urge the hon. Minister, before the dissolution of this Parliament, that she will be welcome if she comes with constitutional amendments before this House, to have her good intention promoted through constitutional amendments in this Bill.

So, this is my request: I am humbly requesting the hon. Minister to consider same because on this side of the House, we are awaiting at least three constitutional amendments to section 118, section 3 and section 16 of our Constitution. I thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I salute everyone that will take part in this debate because this is a very important aspect of human life and human right. Thank you.

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

(11.40 p.m.)

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): Merci, M. le président. À l'heure et au jour que nous débattons ce projet de loi très important pour notre société et surtout pour l'inclusion de nos concitoyens les plus fragiles, malheureusement, le leader du MMM a décidé de s'absenter de l'hémicycle. Bon, je ne sais pas s'il a des problèmes personnels, mais ce que j'ai lu dans la presse, c'est qu'il est en train de régler ses problèmes de tickets. Quelle honte, M. le président !

Les députés du MMM qui ont intervenu sur ce projet de loi, nous ont tous fait comprendre qu'eux seulement, eux du MMM, ont à cœur nos amis porteurs d'un handicap. *Selma, apre zot tou disparet!* Personne n'est là ! Zéro membre du MMM n'est présent à l'heure que je parle ! Je pense que le décorum de l'Assemblée veut qu'après-avoir intervenu, tout comme moi, j'interviens, je crois que c'est l'honorable Mohamed qui va intervenir après moi, nous sommes là, on va rester et on va écouter. Il y aura des critiques, il y aura des propositions, etc. Nous sommes là et nous écoutons !

À plusieurs reprises, les députés du MMM ont dit dans un 'prochain gouvernement qu'ils vont faire.' Est-ce que c'est de cette façon qu'ils pensent dans leurs rêves les plus fous diriger notre pays ? J'en doute, M. le président !

Mrs Mayotte: *Pou fer work from home! Pou fer work from home!*

Mr Toussaint: *Tiket la fatig zot !*

(Interruptions)

Je salue quand même, amoindris, mais je salue car quand même les membres du Parti Travailliste qui sont là et qui sont restés, l'honorable David, et je déplore aussi les absents – ceux et celles du Parti travailliste qui ont intervenus mais qui ont disparu. Aussi, je salue l'honorable Bodha qui est resté. Mais c'est vrai on a sommeil un peu mais physiquement, il est là et aussi l'honorable Lobine.

(Interruptions)

Un projet de loi très important M. le président. Bravo Madame, la Ministre ! Je ne suis pas légiste et nos amis qui sont dans le domaine vont comprendre à quel point il est compliqué de préparer une loi et de venir de l'avant avec un projet de loi.

L'honorable Lobine a fait une chronologie, très intéressante ; donc juste après la ratification de la Convention en 2010, et puis il y a eu les élections en 2014. Cela fait quand même 4 ans que nous, on peut dire que le Parti Travailliste et le PMSD n'ont rien fait mais on ne va pas aller dans ce sens-là. Le débat est correct pour le moment. Ensuite, il y a eu l'ex-ministre, Étienne Sinatambou, qui, comme l'honorable Lobine a dit, vous avez éclairé la Chambre cher ami, parce que plusieurs membres de l'opposition ont cité l'ancien ministre Sinatambou, comme si c'était parole d'évangile. Mais vous avez bien donné la chronologie par rapport aux différentes questions posées ici même dans cette Chambre.

Ce projet de loi est là aujourd'hui pour que nous puissions avoir un cadre pour la protection et la valorisation des personnes vivant avec un handicap. M. le Président, l'année dernière dans le cadre de Jeux des Îles de l'Océan Indiens à Madagascar 2023. Dans le Jeux des Îles, il y a la partie sportive et il y a aussi la partie Volet Jeunesse, qui comprend des activités artistiques des assemblées de jeunes. Dans la partie théâtre, il y avait un jeune homme qui souffre d'autisme. Il faisait partie de la délégation. Il a passé, comme on dit, l'entrevue, il a été accepté. Il est venu régulièrement aux répétitions et il a fait sa performance à Madagascar. Il a été dans la délégation et il a fait partie de cette belle équipe de Jeux des Îles. Tout s'est très bien passé. Il a été bien encadré par ses amis d'abord et aussi par les officiers du ministère. Pourquoi je dis cela, parce que d'après certains membres de l'opposition, cette loi n'est pas assez pour protéger ou pour valoriser nos amis en situation de handicap. Je ne suis pas d'accord. Je ne suis pas d'accord avec ce qui est dit parce qu'il y a beaucoup qui est fait déjà, M. le Président. Énormément ! Le

système de pension, le système de santé, le ministre, Dr. Jagutpal vient d'expliquer et moi je vais essayer de rester sur mon ministère, sur ce qui est fait et ce qui a été fait pendant très longtemps.

Ceci dit M. le président, je suis entièrement d'accord avec le député, l'honorable David, qui, je crois, a terminé son discours avec, je cite, si j'ai raté un mot vous m'excuserez –

« Une société qui s'adapte aux personnes en situation de handicap et non l'inverse ».

Je le redis, M. le président, c'est ce que nous faisons déjà. Certainement, un projet il y aura certaines choses à dire, à corriger sur la partie légale, mais je le redis, ce que l'honorable David a dit, nous le faisons déjà.

Au sein de mon ministère, tout est fait pour mettre en avant nos amis vivant avec un handicap. J'ai donné l'exemple de ce jeune garçon autiste qui a fait le déplacement avec nous. Plusieurs d'entre nous de ce côté de la Chambre, de l'opposition, ont cité nos athlètes en exemple. A deux reprises de mémoire, nos athlètes de handisport ont été aussi le porte-drapeau de la délégation de Maurice. En 2019, Jeux des Iles à la maison chez nous, c'était Noemi Alphonse qui était la porte-drapeau de la délégation de Maurice. En 2023, l'année dernière, à Madagascar, c'était Andora Asaun, *visually handicaped* qui était la porte-drapeau de la délégation de Maurice. Ceci pour vous dire que nous faisons déjà et nous faisons tout ce qu'il faut pour valoriser et mettre de l'avant nos amis porteur d'un handicap. Et que dire des résultats et des performances de nos handisports, M. le président. Nous parlons souvent de toutes ces belles médailles rapportées par nos athlètes handisports et ceci n'est pas le fruit du hasard. C'est tout un écosystème qui est mis à la disposition de nos athlètes pour qu'ils puissent bien faire.

Parlons chiffres, M. le président. En 2019 ou plutôt en 2023, commençons par 2023, le handisport avait rapporté au Jeux des Îles de L'Océan Indien à Madagascar, 16 médailles d'or. En 2019, à la maison, la délégation handisport avait rapporté 17 médailles d'or. En 2015, à La Réunion, 14 médailles d'or. En 2011, ce n'était pas le gouvernement MSM en 2011, c'était le parti Travailliste et le PMSD, notre délégation, malheureusement, avait ramené que 4 médailles d'or depuis les Seychelles. Et aujourd'hui, on vient nous dire que nous ne faisons pas assez pour nos amis handicapés. Je le redis ces résultats que nous voyons aujourd'hui dépend de l'effort du gouvernement en place et nous, nous avons de la chance d'avoir un Premier ministre qui a à cœur toute sa population mais aussi surtout nos handisportifs et qui me donne au niveau de mon ministère, les moyens de donner cet écosystème à nos amis handisportifs.

Quelques chiffres encore, M. le président. Nous avons mis sur pied depuis quelque temps HOPE – *pa espoir sipa ki laba ein, sa pe maye sa* – HOPE – Horizon Olympique Paralympique de l'Élite, pour la première fois ; encore une fois dans son histoire du sport – il est dommage que l'honorable Quirin n'est pas là, parce que souvent il nous dit que le sport est mort à Maurice. C'est la même rengaine à chaque budget : « Le sport est mort ! Le sport est mort ! Le sport est mort ! » Dommage qu'il n'est pas là. Je le dis pour qu'il puisse aller lire ça dans *Hansard*.

Pour la première fois dans histoire sportive du pays, nous avons mis sur pied un projet visant à encadrer nos athlètes en général, par apport aux Jeux Olympiques et aux Jeux Paralympiques et HOPE, M. le président, a investi sur 3 ans, 7.5 millions de roupies sur les athlètes handisport et c'est cet investissement qui, en retour, ramène des médailles- des médailles pour la République de Maurice. Grâce à nos handisports, Maurice est reconnue sur la carte mondiale mais aussi pour que nos jeunes, vivant avec un handicap, aient comme on a dit, des *role models*. Et encore une fois je le dis, M. le président, c'est pour montrer que loi ou pas loi, projet de loi ou pas projet de loi, beaucoup est fait.

Un autre exemple, M. le président, comme on le sait tous, le programme Duke of Edinburgh. Le *Programme Duke of Edinburgh, Constitution of the International Award Foundation, Article 4 of the Code of Practice*, je cite –

“To ensure that the award is freely available to young people [c'est ce qu'on fait à Maurice, c'est le ministère qui investit dans le programme] of the appropriate ages regardless of their gender, race, religion, political affiliation or any other personal circumstances.”

Ceci pour dire que le programme doit être adapté, doit être présenté aussi à nos jeunes vivant avec un handicap. Donc, qu'est-ce que nous avons fait ? L'année dernière en août 2023, il y a eu une présentation du programme à 124 *SENA School Managers and Educators*. En 2023 et récemment, 60 *award leaders* et 25 *adventurous journey assessors* ont été formés par les *SENA institutions*, et j'en passe. Un autre chiffre en mars 2024, 99 garçons et 86 filles des *SENA Schools* ont participé aux *awards* et ont eu leur *bronze level*. Ceci pour vous dire que les jeunes vivant avec un handicap ont aussi la possibilité, M. le président, de participer à nos différents programmes.

Beaucoup aussi a été dit par rapport aux infrastructures, que cette loi n'est pas assez audacieuse, ne vient pas dire qu'il faut tout changer, etc. Quelques exemples, M. le président, toujours par rapport à mon ministère, *ramps available* pour faciliter la mobilité, le stade Anjalay Coopen, le stade Auguste Volaire, le stade Germain Comarmond, le stade St François Xavier, le gymnase de Phoenix, le gymnase Pandit Sahadeo à Vacoas, le gymnase de Bon Accueil, le *National Table Tennis Centre* à Beau Bassin, le *National Judo Centre* à Beau Bassin, le *National Boxing Centre* à Vacoas, le *National Weight Lifting Centre* à Vacoas, le *National Wrestling Centre* à Vacoas, le *National Badminton Centre* à Rose Hill, le Grand Dojo à Grande Rivière, le *Rose Hill Multisports Complex* à Rose Hill, le *Glen Park Multiple Sports Complex*, la piscine de Mare d'Albert, la piscine de Rivière du Rempart, la piscine de Serge Alfred, les *Outdoor Centres* de Anse la Raie pour ne citer que. Évidemment, il y a quelques-uns où nous avons encore un peu de travail à faire. Il ne faut pas venir dire qu'il n'y a aucune infrastructure qui est accessible à des personnes porteuses d'un handicap. Sûrement pas ! Là, ce n'est pas voir le verre à demi vide, c'est voir le verre complètement vide ! Ce n'est pas normal, M. le président. Ce n'est pas normal de venir faire de la démagogie et venir dire de façon générale : 'il n'y a pas cela, il n'y a pas ceci.'

Ce matin, le *Speaker* a demandé '*can you substantiate?*' C'est trop facile de venir et de faire des beaux discours et de faire de la démagogie ! Nous, nous sommes dans les faits, nous sommes dans les chiffres.

Rapidement, M. le président, sur le *Board du Mauritius Recreation Council*, nous avons un membre du *Board* qui est porteur d'un handicap. C'est un enseignant qui est très connu dans le monde du handisport et elle a bien voulu accepter de faire partie de notre *Board*. Au *National Youth Council*, il y a un jeune homme porteur d'un handicap très sévère qui travaille dans l'administration et qui fait excellemment bien.

Beaucoup ont parlé qu'il y a un manque de loisirs pour les personnes porteuses d'un handicap. Laissez-moi vous dire que le *Recreation Council* a organisé à plusieurs reprises des journées de loisirs pour les personnes porteurs d'un handicap, spécialement pour les jeunes des *SENA Schools*. En 2022, il y avait à peu près 500 jeunes porteurs d'un handicap que nous avons réunis à notre *Outdoor Centre* à Pointe Jérôme où ces enfants, ces jeunes ont pu faire du kayak, du pédalo, ont pu jouer à des jeux sociaux, ont pu conduire un *quad*, et ont pu faire un tour à

cheval, M. le président ! Nous parlons de plus de 500 jeunes. L'année dernière, en 2023, pareil. Et l'année dernière, nous avons aussi introduit – je ne sais pas qui a parlé de Madame Danielle et de sa difficulté d'avoir accès à la plage – alors, laissez-moi dire à toute la population, la *Mauritius Recreation Council*, je vais le lire comme c'est –

« *had procured two amphibian wheelchairs* ».

Donc, si je traduis littéralement, deux fauteuils roulants amphibies qui permettraient à n'importe quelle personne porteuse d'un handicap, même sévère, de se mettre sur ce fauteuil et de rentrer dans la mer aisément. Et bientôt, le *Recreation Council* va préparer un *time table*/un programme et on va *market* cela pour dire de telle heure à telle heure, sur telle plage publique, venez utiliser ces fauteuils roulants amphibies.

Rodrigues n'est pas en reste. Récemment, la *Mauritius Recreation Council*, le 23 mars, a organisé sur la plage publique de Mourouk une journée d'activité pour les Rodriguais porteurs d'un handicap.

Je m'arrête ici, M. le président. Il se fait très tard, mais il y a beaucoup de choses à dire. Pourquoi je dis qu'il y a beaucoup de choses à dire ? Je le redis, malgré qu'on nous dise que la loi a tel manquement ou tel manquement, nous sommes en train de travailler depuis x-temps déjà pour nos amis porteurs d'un handicap. Je dis à la population de continuer à nous faire confiance, à faire confiance Premier ministre parce que nous avons à cœur leur bien-être. Je vous remercie pour votre attention, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed!

(12.00 a.m.)

Mr. S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I must from the very outset state that I have listened with a lot of interest to the orators, but I must stress that I listened to the speech of the hon. Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation and I found his speech very interesting. I may not agree with everything he says, just like I am sure he will not necessarily agree with all I say. The tone and tenor, even though there were certain little *piques ici et là*, which is quite normal, I must say that it was quite interesting.

Where I would also join a lot of my friends in this House today on both sides – when I say friends, it is not only on one side – is that this whole debate on this particular project today clearly has and should not have any political connotation. But then again, aren't we all human? We try to say that it has no political connotation, but at the same time, we try to portray that we are doing the good thing and the right thing for the disabled. Sometimes, we even say that we are doing things better than the other. So, even though we intentionally do not try to make politics the subject, we all have our weaknesses. Then again, the reality is that those in power should try to sell their goods and market the work they have done and try to show to the people that what they have done is good. Our role is to show that: 'listen, you may have done things with good intentions, but then again, there may be some lacunas somewhere. Let us try to help identify those lacunas and come up with solutions.'

So, this is basically what democracy is all about anyway. Now, it does not mean that we are enemies, but it just means that we are adversaries and nothing more than that. But I say again, friends on both sides of the House have made speeches where all of us clearly understand what is in the Convention. Everyone has clearly read the Convention, most probably available to Ministers either because your Permanent Secretaries or your Advisors have given it to you, or basically you have seen it on the Internet. Fair enough. I have been a Minister, I know how it works. Fair enough we have done our reading but then there is one thing that is common between the Party in power and the Labour Party.

Even though my friends on the other side may not be very happy when I say that we do share a commonality, there is a similar element between you and I. MSM on one side, Labour on the other, both of us have taken a hell of a long time to come up with a piece of legislation. Both of us! I was conversing with my good friend, hon. Lobine a few minutes ago and I was asking him why is that because then again, this is a quite legitimate question that we should ask ourselves – wherever we come from, whichever Party we come from, there is no excuse even though we try to give excuses. There is none. In actual fact, we are all responsible for any delay and we cannot limit it to the Minister concerned. We cannot, for example, throw all the blame at the feet of the Minister of Social Security.

Yes, we like to say that the hon. Prime Minister of the Government we belong to is the one who leads everything by example. When we are in power, we say 'it is our Prime Minister',

when you are in power, ‘you say it is your Prime Minister’. My God! I mean, people listen to us sometimes and they get used to this *rengaine* where we all say the same things. But then, if we are to analyse, would we say the same thing that the delay is because of the Prime Ministers who were leading at the time? I mean why would we not say so? Because then, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Obviously, if the Prime Minister is the one that leads by example and brings changes, if there are no changes brought, we have to say he is liable somewhere but we would not say that because we are not being honest and I am saying “we” are not being honest *dans nos propos*.

So, let us try to analyse this law for a minute and see not what the Convention says. Conventions can say a lot of things. Let us analyse the law and not what the clauses say because clauses can say a lot of things. It is not with the words that we give a better life to disabled. It is in the implementation of the words and are we today, really doing something good for the disabled simply by bringing a piece of legislation? The answer is ‘no, we are not’! We are coming up with a beautiful piece of legislation. Fair enough! But the question is, look at the previous legislations. Was it necessary to come up with new legislations in order to ensure – let us take for example – that people who are disabled had access to public transport – access to buses, taxis, access to pavements?

Let us be honest, friends on both of the House. Let us be honest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. With people listening to us today, let us be honest. Are there proper pavements in our country, be it towns and villages for people who are disabled to be able to reach places as those who are abled? The answer is no! So, is it that it is the MSM which is responsible or is it the Labour Party which is responsible or would it not be fair to say that we are all responsible? We are all responsible today if we do not have proper pavements in our towns. We do not have proper pavements; let alone for disabled people, we do not have proper pavements for abled people! We do not have proper pavements for people to push around a baby in a pram, let alone a wheelchair! We do not have the proper pavements for people to go with crutches. We do not have proper pavements for people who use *protheses* after having lost a limb. We do not! We do not have proper buses for people to go from one town to the other. We talk a lot of talk, we are so good at talking in this country but in implementation, we are a failure.

I am trying to be very fair by saying “we” because it is not the time and place for us to try to score political points but to at least come and tell people we have failed because we are so good at writing speeches and reading those written speeches but at implementation, if only we could come a bit close to what we are good at reading. So, had we been good, explain to me why is it that under the old law and maybe the hon. Minister of Education could help, maybe the hon. Minister of Social Security could help – why is it under the old law, even though there were under the Schedule, the number of people who should be employed, why is it that no one was ever prosecuted and fined for not having complied with the law?

Personne n’a été poursuivi sous l’ancienne loi pour ne pas avoir suivi à la lettre ce qu’il y avait dans la loi, précisément, la nécessité d’employer ceux qui souffraient d’un handicap. Pourquoi alors personne n’a été poursuivi ? Aucune société, aucune compagnie, aucun individu n’a été poursuivi et personne n’a été condamné à payer une amende. Cela me donne raison ! C’est qu’on vient de l’avant avec des lois qui sont vraiment bien pour lire et présenter à l’Assemblée nationale mais en ce qu’il s’agit de l’implémentation de la loi, on a un problème en tant que République. Après 56 ans d’indépendance, on n’arrive même pas à *implement* ce qu’il y a dans la loi. Est-ce qu’il était nécessaire d’avoir une loi pour dire que la section 16 de notre Constitution dit quoi ?

“There shall be no discriminatory laws to people with disabilities.”

That is what section 16 of the Supreme Law of this country says, the Constitution.

Before this one comes into force, don’t the old laws also provide that “no one shall be put in a situation of discrimination”? It is not the first time that there is a law now in this Bill that talks of discrimination. This is why I disagree with the hon. Minister when she presented the Bill. The old law also says that but has anyone been prosecuted? And I come here to reality. Let us take an example of Mr X or Miss Y. They are disabled. *Allons prendre un exemple* and let us do it together, as brothers and sisters. Let us not judge one another. Let us say that we are all good-intentioned. We may be successful, we may be not but that is not the point, our intention is noble. We want to help the disabled. Let us all analyse it first.

Let us analyse for a minute that a disabled person should be able to leave his home and go to attend the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Municipal Council of Port Louis or any District Council, the Post Office, a Court, a Police Station, he should be able to go there. The

logical thing for him to do if he lives close to, let us say, a Court, a market or a shop is to use the pavement. Who is responsible for building a pavement? It is the District Council or the Municipal Council. On a classified road, it is the Central Government. If they are not in order, is it not, in fact, creating a situation where under this clause, hon. Minister, clause 5 of this Bill today –

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

And, Prohibition from abusive treatment, clause 6 –

“(1) Any person who –

- (a) subjects a person with disability to degrading treatment or illtreatment, whether physical or verbal; [...]
- (c) intentionally causes pecuniary loss or material prejudice to a person with disability;
- (d) subjects a person with disability to violent treatment;

shall commit an act of abuse.”

I can go on and on. Is it not an offence, an abuse, a violent treatment not to give someone with disabilities a proper pavement to go somewhere? Is it not abuse or violence on a person with disabilities not to give him a proper means of transport for him to be able to access, *accéder à ce moyen de transport public pour pouvoir y aller comme une autre personne* who is abled? Is it not discriminatory? So, in the example I have just described, the Municipal Council, the District Council or Central Government would be responsible for having committed an offence.

So, under this scenario, friends on both sides of the House, who would take action in order to implement the law? Let us say, for example, we are to leave this august Assembly, we are to come here today. How can a disabled person enter this Assembly today? Show me. Are we not sending the message outside that ‘listen, if you have the intention of coming to this Parliament and you are disabled, access is an issue. Your iPad is an issue. The documents you are given are an issue’. There are many issues. How do you move around? There are steps here. If you are disabled, how do you move around in this Chamber? Are we not discriminating against those who are disabled to come to the temple of democracy? Are we not? All of us, are we not responsible?

But how does this law come and change anything? Who would take action against the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive, *les conseillers*? Who would take action against the Minister of Local Government for having failed in providing proper means of access? Who would take action against the State for having failed to ensure that public buildings are in order? Who would take action against the Supreme Court? Who would take action against the District Courts? Who would take action against Minister Balgobin, sitting in front of me, when his post offices are not accessible? Who? Who would take action? Be it under the Labour Government, be it under the MSM Government, the PMSD Government, the MMM Government or whatever, who would take action? This is what I am saying friends: implementation.

So, today, we have failed because, you see, it is all well and good, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make beautiful speeches. But, first and foremost, I humbly ask my friends on all sides that we stand and rise above the occasion. Let us not think about the elections that are coming or maybe we should because it is an opportunity to change the system of Government. We cannot continue filling up those places, those bodies with public officers. And the hon. Minister, she knows better; she is also a member of the legal profession. If there is anything wrong that goes on - Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you are also a lawyer by profession - for someone who is disabled - *écoutez bien les amis des deux côtés des la Chambre* - there is something called if someone does anything wrong, there is no liability; they are not held liable in this law. Why are they not held liable? Because they are public officers.

So, basically, a disabled person who normally would have more difficulty to go to see a lawyer, more difficulty to go to complain to Court, more difficulty to go to an institution to obtain redress, the Public Officers' Protection Act, section 4 says that you have only two years to institute proceedings, civil or criminal; tort or contract, you have only two years against Government. Wasn't this an opportunity to make a difference, to show that we recognise that for disabled people, it is more complicated - that is a reality - and, therefore, the limitation of two years should not apply? Should we not be more flexible in our approach? It does not show that we are trying to *soi-disant être moderne dans notre approche, mais dans la réalité, on présente tout le temps des difficultés aux personnes autrement capables*.

So, friends, we will come again maybe in 10 years' time and then we will see this law better. And in the meantime, the pavements will still be in a despicable state; the buses will still

not be accessible; the post offices, maybe my friend Balgobin will say: 'Well, I'll try to digitalise it, so, there is no need to go there, use your internet.' Maybe the MBC – still, we do not have anyone who explains or does sign language, there is no teletext for those who are deaf. It does not exist, not even My.T as actual fact.

So, in other countries that have laws of this nature, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they walk the talk, in fact. This is the way we put it. They walk the talk. And here, we just talk the talk, but we are not walking the talk. And I am saying it again. I am not blaming anyone of you on the side of Government. Your intentions may be noble, just like the intentions of Members of the Opposition. Clearly, we are all in this work. Clearly, you all want to be elected again. Fair enough! But it does not mean that you will necessarily or it does not mean that we will necessarily. The Almighty knows. But, what I am saying, in the meantime, we have a common responsibility. The common responsibility is to ensure that whatever laws we bring forward, we can implement them.

So, I invite the hon. Minister to, first and foremost, explain in her summing-up, if it is the Municipal Council of Port Louis, for example, that cannot even provide proper pavements to the disabled, which would take action against which person representing the Municipal Council? And would there, therefore, be only two years for someone who is disabled to act against a public officer who has been negligent? Isn't this unfair? So, what I am trying to say is, let us break down all the technical terms. Let us break down all the legal language and jargon because all of us are here to do good. Let us break it down. Let us do away with those technicalities. Let us try to speak the language of the common man: how do we help? Helping them means being less technical. Helping them means trying to be realistic. It does not mean that because the Labour Party is in Government, the Municipal Council does a perfect job. It does not mean that because the MSM is in Government, the Municipal Council does a perfect job. No! If there are lacunas, we have to sort it out. So, what I am saying is, it is not in your law hon. Minister. It is not in your law.

You see, as we finish this debate today, and then next week, the Members of Government will have the privilege of speaking on their own without Members of the Opposition responding. This is also a right that you can use - I won't say abuse. It is a right to use, fair enough. I may not agree, but it is what it is. But when we finish with this Bill, the pavements will still be in a

despicable state. There was a project. I remember hon. Bodha was in Government in those days and was saying that there is now a project to do up all pavements. I remember he said that. He said that many, many years ago when he was in Government. Pavements are still in a mess. What has happened? It does not mean that because he is now in the Opposition he is the bad person. It is the Central Government, he belonged to that – they did not do things right. So, there is a shared responsibility. I remember such beautiful speeches that we would have low-floor buses. We still have lorries, chassis of lorries being used as buses, that are banned in certain African and Asian countries. In Mauritius, we are still using it.

Can you swear to us and the disabled out there that when this law is passed, they will have access to transport faster? Can you tell me that when they call the CWA or when they want to watch TV, they will have someone with sign language? Or when they go to Courts, let us say the District Court of Pamplemousses or the District Court of Curepipe, do they have access to go upstairs? The answer is no. Or are we going to use the same excuse that we all use when we are in Government: ‘We have to start somewhere and then, we will build on it. At least, *on commence quelque part.*’ *Mais on commence et c’est un éternel commencement. On dit la même chose et on doit arrêter quelque part. Alors, si j’ai offensé qui que ce soit dans mes propos de ce soir, je m’en excuse.* That was never my intention. My intention is to say that we all have a common goal. I am not judging anyone, we have our good intentions. Let us try to be less political about it, even though we are politicians, and try to really be honest, at least, to the disabled. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Ganoo, please.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 16 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned! There is no specific matter on the Order Paper today. Have a safe trip back home! And may I take this opportunity to wish you Eid Mubarak next week.

At 00.22 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 16 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

AIR MAURITIUS LTD. – AIRPLANE FLEET

(No. B/83) 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 Air Mauritius planes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to the current number thereof in the fleet of the Company, indicating –

- (a) the types and seating capacity thereof, and
- (b) if any plane is presently grounded.

Reply: The information sought by the hon. Member is already available on the website of Air Mauritius Ltd., except for the information pertaining to part (b) of the question.

Regarding part (b) of the question, as the House is aware, Air Mauritius Ltd., being a public company with limited liability, is governed by the provisions of the Companies Act, its own Memorandum and Articles of Association and is managed by a Board of Directors.

The Memorandum and Articles of Association of Air Mauritius Ltd., provides for a Confidentiality Clause which prohibits disclosure of any information concerning the company's business, trading or customers, except those relating to the company's accounts which are required to be laid at the general meeting of the company.

Moreover, except for any specific matter falling under the purview of Government, information relating to the internal affairs of a company is, as a matter of principle, not disclosed

in the National Assembly, as all such matters fall under the responsibility of the Board of Directors and Management of the company.

Therefore, the information requested by the hon. Member cannot be disclosed.

AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHTS – FREQUENT CANCELLATION & POSTPONEMENTS – REASONS

(No. B/84) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the frequent cancellation and postponements of Air Mauritius flights over the last few months, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to –

- (a) the reasons therefor, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for a full-fledged audit of the viability of the planes owned and/or leased by the company to be carried out by a reputable firm.

Reply: The information sought by the hon. Member pertains to issues which do not fall under the purview of Airports of Mauritius Ltd. Therefore, the question of asking Airports of Mauritius Ltd. to provide the information does not arise.

The information sought by the hon. Member pertains to Air Mauritius and as the House is aware, except for any specific matter falling under the purview of Government, information relating to the internal affairs of a company is, as a matter of principle, not disclosed in the National Assembly, as all such matters fall under the responsibility of the Board of Directors and Management of the company.

The House will appreciate that Air Mauritius Ltd., being a public company with limited liability, is governed by the provisions of the Companies Act, its own Memorandum and Articles of Association and is managed by a Board of Directors. As such, the company has its own disclosure and reporting mechanism.

Furthermore, the Memorandum and Articles of Association of Air Mauritius Ltd., provides for a Confidentiality Clause which prohibits disclosure of any information concerning the company's business, trading or customers, except those relating to the company's accounts which are required to be laid at the general meeting of the company.

The information requested by the hon. Member cannot therefore be disclosed.

ROCHE BOIS – DAMAGED OVERHEAD PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE – INQUIRY

(No. B/85) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)

asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the overhead pedestrian bridge in Roche Bois which was damaged following a road accident, involving a lorry on 24 February 2024, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto, and
- (b) state the measures taken to ensure the security and safety of the inhabitants when crossing the motorway thereat.

Reply: On Saturday 24 February 2024 at 14 17 hours, a road accident occurred along the motorway at Roche Bois involving a lorry which was carrying a concrete pump.

The lorry was proceeding towards Terre Rouge along the north-bound carriageway on the slow lane of the motorway when the upper part of the concrete pump knocked against the bed of the overhead pedestrian bridge at Roche Bois.

As a result of the impact, part of the overhead pedestrian bridge across the north-bound carriageway collapsed and fell down on the trailer. The lorry helper was slightly injured but declined medical examination.

On the same day, the driver one Mr D. R. was arrested and detained for the offence of “Damaging Government Property”. On 28 February 2024, he was released on bail after furnishing a surety of Rs5,000/- and a recognizance of Rs25,000/-.

On 06 March 2024, Mr T. Y. W. H. K., owner of the lorry involved in the accident, was provisionally charged for the offence of “Culpable Omission” before the District Court of Port Louis. He was subsequently released on bail after furnishing a surety of Rs5,000/- and a recognizance of Rs25,000/-.

Enquiry into the case is proceeding.

Following the accident, the Police together with the Road Development Authority and the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit were mobilised on site to assess the situation and the following immediate actions were taken –

- a) the stretch of the motorway from Roche Bois roundabout up to Cocoterie roundabout was closed to vehicular traffic and a diversion scheme was implemented to ensure smooth flow of vehicles;
- b) part of the footbridge from the north-bound carriageway together with the debris and damaged lorry and trailer were removed, and
- c) removable speed bumpers were installed.

The structural integrity of the south-bound portion of the footbridge was found to have been compromised as a result of the accident and posed a potential risk for road users. Hence, the south-bound portion was also removed and access to the ramps of the footbridge on both sides of the motorway were blocked.

The road was re-opened to traffic on Sunday 25 March 2024 at 16 00 hours.

Furthermore, in consultation with the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail and the Road Development Authority, a series of measures has been taken to ensure the security and safety of the inhabitants and other users crossing the motorway thereat, as follows –

- a) Provision has been made for a pedestrian crossing;
- b) Traffic lights have been installed for the control of vehicular traffic;
- c) Police Officers are being deployed on a daily basis to regulate traffic;
- d) Police patrols are being maintained along the motorway at Roche Bois;
- e) The stretch of the motorway at Roche Bois has been designated as a speed zone of 60 km/h;
- f) A central refuge island has been constructed and handrails along both sides of the refuge island have been installed to channel pedestrians to use the crossing, and
- g) Sensitization campaigns are being carried out by the Police on road safety and precautions to be taken whilst crossing the motorway on foot.

ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE CASE – FOREIGN CITIZEN – INQUIRY

(No. B/86) Mr R. Duval (Fourth 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 an alleged case of child abuse of a little girl of 4 years old, involving a foreign citizen, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand, indicating –

- (a) since when the accused is working in Mauritius, and
- (b) if there has been any similar case reported against him and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police has informed that on Saturday 23 March 2024 at 18 30 hours at the Petite Rivière Police Station, the personnel of the *Brigade pour la Protection de La Famille* reported a case of alleged “Causing Child to be Sexually Abused” following a video which was broadcast on social media. The video showed an unknown male person engaging in an indecent act upon Minor A.A.C.R., aged 4, student at Richelieu Government School and residing at No. 24, Beethoven Street, Richelieu. Minor A.A.C.R. is the daughter of Mrs Q. L. R. aged 33 years.

On the same day, one Mr J. L. M., aged 48 years of Nepali nationality was arrested. He is employed as Mason Grade 2 in Mauritius by China Jiangsu Construction Group Corporation since 18 August 2023.

The Commissioner of Police has also informed that the accused has, in the presence of his Barrister and Interpreter, confessed the act. Furthermore, he incriminated the mother of the victim Mrs Q. L. R., who was allegedly present at the time of the occurrence. Mrs Q. L. R. was arrested on 23 March 2024.

On Sunday 24 March 2024, both Mr J. L. M. and Mrs Q. L. R. were brought before Bail and Remand Court. Provisional complaints were lodged against them for “Causing Child to be Sexually Abused”.

On Monday 25 March 2024, both accused parties reappeared before the District Magistrate Court of Black River in connection with the case. Provisional charges were lodged against them. Police objected for their release on bail. They have been remanded to Police cell up to 01 April 2024.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has informed that Mr J. L. M. arrived in Mauritius on 06 December 2023 on a two-year contract with China Jiangsu Construction Group Corporation and his contract will expire on 30 June 2024.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that Mr J. L. M. is not borne on record and no similar case has been reported against him.

Additionally, the Commissioner of Police has informed that enquiry into the case is proceeding.

THEFT WITH ASSAULT – REPORTED CASES & ARRESTS

(No. B/87) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to thefts with assault, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of –

- (a) reported cases thereof since January 2022 to date, indicating the number thereof perpetrated on –
 - (i) foreigners, and
 - (ii) elderly persons; and
- (b) arrests effected in relation thereto.

Reply: The term ‘Theft with assault’ referred to by the hon. Third Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central is not per se defined in our law. However, the nature of such act is captured under sections 303, 304, 305 and 310 of the Criminal Code Act as Larceny with wounding, Larceny with violence by night breaking, Larceny with other aggravating circumstances and Larceny with violence respectively.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from January 2022 to date, 871 cases of larceny have been reported to Police wherein 41 cases involved foreigners and 196 cases involved elderly persons.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that –

- (i) for the year 2022, a total of 382 cases were reported, amongst which –

- a) 20 cases involving foreigners were reported whereby 16 persons were arrested, 8 were sentenced for imprisonment, 1 was fined, 9 cases are pending prosecution and 3 cases were filed, and
 - b) 84 cases involving elderly persons were reported whereby 47 persons were arrested, 13 were sentenced for imprisonment, 11 were fined, 25 cases are under enquiry, 17 are pending prosecution and 18 cases were filed.
- (ii) for the year 2023 a total of 377 cases were reported amongst which –
- a) 16 cases involving foreigners were reported whereby 18 persons were arrested, 4 were fined, 7 cases are under enquiry, 2 cases are pending prosecution and 3 cases were filed, and
 - b) 94 cases involving elderly persons were reported whereby 69 persons were arrested, 12 were sentenced for imprisonment, 9 were fined, 54 cases are under enquiry, 16 are pending prosecution and 3 cases were filed.
- (iii) for this year to date a total of 112 cases were reported amongst which –
- a) 5 cases involving foreigners were reported whereby 5 persons were arrested, 1 person was sentenced for imprisonment and 4 cases are under enquiry, and
 - b) 18 cases involving elderly persons were reported whereby 7 persons were arrested, 2 persons were fined, 15 cases are under enquiry, and 1 is pending prosecution.

RODRIGUES – NEW RUNWAY CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/88) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) 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 construction of a new runway in Rodrigues Island, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: On 01 March 2024, Government had agreed, to the signing of a Loan Agreement of USD184 million (approximately Rs8.2 billion) with the World Bank/International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to finance the Rodrigues Airport Project.

Government is now engaging with the World Bank on the way forward to sign the Loan Agreement. Once the Agreement is signed, actions will have to be taken, in line with World Bank requirements.

The critical milestone dates for the project implementation which may be subject to further changes are as follows –

- submission of Final Detailed Design Report in April 2024;
- submission of Final Tender Document in May 2024;
- floating of Tenders for works in June 2024;
- start of Construction works in January 2025, and
- completion of Construction works in January 2028.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2024 – COUNTING OF VOTES ON POLLING DAY

(No. B/89) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the next National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to if arrangements will be made for the counting of votes to be effected on the polling day and, if not, why not.

Reply: As it stands, Regulation 39 of the National Assembly Elections Regulations 2014 provides that counting of votes for the general elections shall be effected on the day following the polling day.

However, the exercise of counting of votes on polling day itself has in the past been conducted twice, namely for the Village Council Elections held in November 2020 and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections held in February 2022.

In my reply to a Private Notice Question on 21 July 2023, I acknowledged that counting of votes immediately after the close of polls, that is, on the polling day, would eliminate several hassles, mostly in terms of security measures, transport arrangements, and deployment of a large

number of Police/Special Mobile Force officers involved with the transfer of ballot boxes from polling stations to counting centres after close of poll.

However, I had also pointed out that in view of the larger scale of the National Assembly Elections, a myriad of issues would have to be carefully considered and addressed. In fact, I am informed by the Electoral Commissioner that transitioning to same day counting for the National Assembly Elections will present several challenges, namely –

- (a) the increase in the number of voting rooms to be converted into counting rooms from 1,365 for the Village Council Elections and 89 for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections to around 2,160 for the National Assembly Elections, poses logistical difficulties;
- (b) associated with the aforementioned issue, is the number of officers required for the voting and counting processes. For the next National Assembly Elections, there will be around 338 polling stations and around 15,000 election officers will be required, all categories of officers combined. The biggest challenge would be to recruit that number of public officers for the voting and counting processes. According to the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, only 12,848 applications from public officers to work for elections have been received as at date. Based on the number of candidates in 2019, it is estimated that apart from the 15,000 officers mentioned, an additional number of around 6,900 officers would be required for the counting process;
- (c) as far as the counting/scrutiny of “doubtful” ballot papers is concerned, it is the Returning Officer who has the sole prerogative to decide on the validity of a ballot paper in the presence of candidates, and an election agent. However, the Returning Officer and the candidates cannot be present in all the polling stations at the same time, therefore, the issue as to who will decide on the validity of “doubtful” ballot papers would have to be determined. This will require broad consensus from stakeholders being a major departure from current practice.

Moreover, if counting is carried out on the same day, it goes without saying that the Returning Officer, and the candidate or his election agent cannot be in all

counting stations at the same time, bearing in mind that, there can be more than 15 counting centres and voting room varying from 48 to 131 in a constituency.

Moreover, since a candidate or his election agent cannot be present in all counting centres, especially during the scrutiny of ballot papers, consideration may be given as to whether a “special election agent” may be appointed by a candidate to represent him in each counting station of the Constituency;

- (d) the hours of poll may also need to be revisited, which would require broad consensus. The close of poll for the National Assembly Elections is 18 00 hours compared to 16 00 hours for the Village Council Elections. For the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections, the hours of poll were amended so that polling started at 06 00 hours to end at 15 00 hours, as a result of consensus reached across the political spectrum;
- (e) the presence of counting agents during the counting process is fundamental to ensure transparency and the integrity of the process. The National Assembly Elections Regulations provide that each party or party alliance may appoint two counting agents in each counting room. It is expected that there will be around 2,160 voting rooms in operation. If counting will be carried out immediately after the close of poll, the 2,160 voting rooms will be converted into 2,160 counting rooms. Since the National Assembly Elections Regulations provide that for each party, a candidate may appoint two counting agents per counting rooms, each party will need at least 4,320 agents country-wise. Consequently, each party or party alliance would need to appoint around 4,320 counting agents. All political parties fielding candidates in all constituencies will have to appoint around 4,320 counting agents to witness the counting process. If this is not the case, there may be allegations of fraud and irregularities in the counting process.

I am informed that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has since 2023, embarked on a consultation process mainly with all political parties for the introduction of counting on the same day. However, this requires cross-party consensus and it would appear that there is still no consensus among some stakeholders/opposition parties about the mechanism to be put in place for this exercise. While a majority is in favour of a system where there is no movement of ballot

boxes, and the voting room is converted in a counting room after the close of poll, as was the case for the Village Council Elections 2020 and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections 2022, others even within the opposition are proposing a system where counting is carried out on the same day, but at a centralised counting centre.

A decision as to whether an amendment would be brought to the National Assembly Regulations 2014, so as to provide for the counting exercise to be effected on the polling day, would depend on the outcome of the consultation exercise and would require broad consensus.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2024 – ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – MISUSE

(No. B/90) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the forthcoming National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the measures being envisaged to protect the public against threats arising from the misuse of Artificial Intelligence in the circulation of deepfake videos and disinformation.

Reply (The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation):
In the present dynamic digital era, the potential for technology to enhance democracy is immense as everyone can be digitally connected and acquire all sorts of data. Unfortunately, some ill-intentioned people or group of people can use modern technologies to cause harm to our democracy and the public at large. We are very much aware of the challenges posed by the malicious use of AI technologies like deepfakes, which can undermine public trust and the integrity of our electoral processes. To address the threat posed by the misuse of Artificial Intelligence, particularly deepfake technology and disinformation, our strategy is comprehensive and multidimensional, encompassing legal measures as well as technological solutions.

Our first line of defence lies in our robust legal framework. The Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021, the Data Protection Act 2017 and the Information and Communication Technologies Act 2001 form the backbone of our legal arsenal to combat cyber threats and cybercrimes. These Acts ensure that any misuse of personal data and technology for creating or disseminating false content, including the use of sophisticated tools like deepfake AI, is a

punishable offence. This is particularly relevant in the context of deepfake technology and disinformation campaigns.

Deepfakes, which are generated by AI algorithms, rely on personal data and images to create convincingly false videos or audio recordings. As such, any production and distribution of deepfakes is clearly the misuse of personal data and technology under these Acts. Furthermore, the spreading of disinformation, whether through deepfakes or other means, often involves the creation and sharing of content that is knowingly false, thereby falling under the prohibitions against the dissemination of false information outlined in these laws. Therefore, the various legal provisions in these Acts are directly applicable and essential in addressing the challenges posed by AI-generated disinformation and deepfake content.

In addition to our robust legal framework, our strategy to combat AI-generated disinformation and deepfake content is reinforced by the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System (MAUCORS), managed by the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-MU) falling under the aegis of my Ministry. This department handles incident irrespective of the technology being used to create any content such as disinformation and deepfake videos. The MAUCORS is a platform which allows our citizens to report instances of cybercrime, including the malicious use of AI for deepfake creation and dissemination, thus playing a critical role in our fight against digital misinformation irrespective of any forthcoming elections. This innovative platform stands as a pivotal force in our relentless fight against digital misinformation and other cybercrimes.

This government has also forged formidable alliances with major technology giants like Meta and TikTok. This is not merely a diplomatic gesture, but a strategic partnership to safeguard our digital space. Through rigorous engagement and continuous dialogue, we have ensured that these platforms continuously make use of advanced tools and robust policies to identify and counteract the spread of deepfakes and digital misinformation. Our partnership with technology companies also helps to ensure the integrity of online content, supporting the already robust and fair electoral process by protecting against digital misinformation.

Our resolve in maintaining a secure cyber environment amidst the rapid advancement of technology is firm and focused at all times, whether there are any elections or not.

Our efforts in this endeavour are dynamic and ongoing. The relationships we have nurtured with tech giants underscore our commitment to a fair and transparent electoral process. We are in fact not just setting standards for the present; we are laying the groundwork for an ever-evolving digital landscape. In that regard, the revamped Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act which was enacted in 2021 include a number of new offences which did not exist in our previous legislation.

As we move forward, we remain vigilant, adapting our strategies to new challenges and opportunities in the very dynamic cyber space. Our objective is to always ensure that every citizen can exercise their democratic rights confidently, in a digital environment that is secure, reliable, and free from manipulation.

**MR R. K. B. AGAINST THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE,
ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS – ALLEGED CASE OF
ASSAULT – INQUIRY**

(No. B/91) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to an alleged case of assault reported to the Police by one Mr R. K. B. against Dr. the Honourable Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms on 10 February 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Friday 09 February 2024 at 23 04 hours, Dr. the hon. A. R. accompanied by his bodyguard, Mr R. posted at the VIPSU, called at Goodlands Police Station and informed that one Mr R. K. B also known as S., aged 39, residing at Bois Rouge, Goodlands was harassing him through mobile phone messages. He requested the Police to give a warning to Mr R. K. B.

Police Officers Mr J. and Mr G. of Goodlands Police Station thereafter attended to the request and went to speak to Mr R. K. B who promised to be of good behaviour and also apologised.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Saturday 10 February 2024 at 19 27 hours, the same Mr R. K. B reported an alleged case of assault at the Goodlands Police Station. The latter stated that on the eve, that is on Friday 09 February 2024 at around 23 00 hours, he was allegedly assaulted by two Police Officers and Dr. the hon. A. R. The incident allegedly occurred at Mr R. K. B's residence at Goodlands.

However, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Monday 12 February 2024 at 09 45 hours, the aforesaid Mr R. K. B again called at Goodlands Police Station and expressed his wish not to proceed further with the matter and thus withdrew his complaint.

The case has been referred to the Central CID and the enquiry is proceeding.

MV WAKASHIO GROUNDING – INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE – FINDINGS & IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/92) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Report of the Court of Investigation set up to look into the grounding of the MV Wakashio, he will state the findings of the Inter-Ministerial Committee set up to examine the implementation contained therein, indicating –

- (a) where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, and
- (b) if he will now table copy thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHTS – FREQUENT CANCELLATION & POSTPONEMENTS – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/93) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether he will state if he has been made aware of the difficulties faced by incoming and outgoing passengers as a result of the recent frequent cancellation and postponements of Air Mauritius flights and, if so, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to the remedial

measures that have been initiated with the Airport Terminal Operation Ltd., Air Mauritius, Health services and Police to address same.

Reply: As the House is aware, except for any specific matter falling under the purview of Government, information relating to the internal affairs of a company is, as a matter of principle, not disclosed in the National Assembly, as all such matters fall under the responsibility of the Board of Directors and Management of the company.

The House will appreciate that Air Mauritius Ltd., being a public company with limited liabilities, is governed by the provisions of the Companies Act, its own Memorandum and Articles of Association and is managed by a Board of Directors. As such, the company has its own disclosure and reporting mechanism.

Furthermore, the Memorandum and Articles of Association of Air Mauritius Ltd., provides for a Confidentiality Clause which prohibits disclosure of any information concerning the company's business, trading or customers, except those relating to the company's accounts which are required to be laid at the general meeting of the company.

The information requested by the hon. Member cannot therefore be disclosed.

POLICE OFFICERS – RECRUITMENT & PROMOTION – 2015 TO APRIL 2024

(No. B/94) 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 Police Officers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof on a yearly basis since 2015 to 2023 and from January 2024 to date –

- (a) recruited, and
- (b) promoted gradewise.

(Withdrawn)

DIEGO GARCIA – SRI LANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES DETENTION – ACTION TAKEN

(No. B/95) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for

Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees intercepted and reported to be detained in an inhuman condition on Diego Garcia since 2021, he will state the diplomatic and/or other follow up action taken, if any, by Government thereon to date.

Reply: Following news reports in May 2022 that the United Kingdom had intercepted at least two vessels in the territorial sea and/or the exclusive economic zone of Mauritius and detained in Diego Garcia persons of Tamil origin from Sri Lanka who were on board those vessels in inhumane conditions, Government, by way of a Note Verbale issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade on 13 June 2022 to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, expressed its deep concern at the alleged interception by the United Kingdom of vessels within the maritime zones of Mauritius and the reported detention of those persons in Diego Garcia.

Since Mauritius is the one and only coastal State in relation to the Chagos Archipelago within the meaning of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the sole State lawfully entitled to exercise sovereignty and sovereign rights over the Chagos Archipelago and its maritime zones, including the territorial sea, Government also conveyed to the United Kingdom that the alleged interception of vessels within the territorial sea and/or exclusive economic zone of Mauritius around the Chagos Archipelago constituted a manifest violation of UNCLOS.

Government further indicated to the United Kingdom that if the veracity of the news reports were to be established, Mauritius would condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the United Kingdom's treatment of detained persons in Diego Garcia. Government pointed out that prolonged detention under the reported conditions would likely fall within the definition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment within the meaning of Articles 1 and 16 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Moreover, Government called upon the UK Government to provide by 04 July 2022, a detailed report on the precise circumstances of the vessel interceptions; the number and identity of the detained persons and circumstances and conditions of their detention; the course of action that the United Kingdom would take to ensure that the detained persons are afforded all the rights and protections to which they are entitled to under Mauritian law and international law as

applicable on the territory of Mauritius; and the course of action the United Kingdom would take to ensure that it complies with its obligations under international law, including under UNCLOS and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In its reply of 29 June 2022 to the Note Verbale from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office contended that none of the persons from Sri Lanka was being detained in the Chagos Archipelago. It claimed that the UK Government had rescued a number of persons in damaged fishing boats since October 2021 and escorted them to the Chagos Archipelago in accordance with its international obligation to rescue those at sea whose vessels are unseaworthy and whose lives are at immediate risk. The United Kingdom also claimed that it had been working tirelessly to find a long-term solution to their current situation and that it had at all times maintained their welfare and safety as its top priority.

On 21 July 2023, Government, by way of another Note Verbale addressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, expressed its deep concern that approximately 70-80 Tamil asylum seekers were still being held in a fenced compound in Diego Garcia and in difficult conditions, more than 18 months since the first asylum seekers were brought to the island.

With regard to litigation in the domestic courts of the United Kingdom and also in the “Supreme Court” of the so-called “British Indian Ocean Territory” concerning the welfare and status of the asylum seekers in Diego Garcia, Government recalled that the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 25 February 2019, UN General Assembly Resolution 73/295, together with the binding Judgments of the Special Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea of 28 January 2021 and 28 April 2023, have confirmed that under international law, the Chagos Archipelago forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius. Government stated that accordingly, Mauritius is the only State which is lawfully entitled to exercise sovereignty and sovereign rights over the Chagos Archipelago, including its maritime zones. Mauritius reiterated that it does not recognize the so-called “British Indian Ocean Territory” nor any of its purported institutions or authorities, whether judicial or otherwise.

In view of the United Kingdom's de facto control of Diego Garcia, as an unlawful occupying power, Government also reminded the United Kingdom of its obligations and duties under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to –

- (i) promote and protect the physical and mental well-being of all the asylum seekers under its illegal occupation;
- (ii) respect the principle of non-refoulement, and
- (iii) bring to an end the detention of refugees on the territory of Mauritius as swiftly as possible.

Government further recalled that prolonged detention under the conditions which had been widely reported could fall within the definitions of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment within the meaning of Articles 1 and 16 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Moreover, Government called upon the UK Government to confirm that it would ensure, as a matter of urgency, that a durable and fair solution would be reached for all of the asylum seekers on Diego Garcia in accordance with its obligations under international law, including the principle of non-refoulement.

Government has subsequently reiterated during bilateral discussions between Mauritius and the United Kingdom its concerns about the situation of the asylum seekers in Diego Garcia.

Having regard to the dictates of humanitarian considerations, and given that the United Kingdom is exercising de facto control over the individuals concerned, and without prejudice to the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago and the appurtenant waters, Government has made it clear to the United Kingdom that it must comply with its international obligations with regard to the asylum seekers, including under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE – LEGAL REPRESENTATION – PRIVATE LAW PRACTITIONERS FEES

(No. B/96) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External

Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to legal representation of the Commissioner of Police in legal proceedings by private law practitioners for appearance in Court cases since April 2023 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the list thereof and the associated fees claimed and disbursed therefor.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police has informed that, since April 2023 until 28 March 2024, the Commissioner of Police has in nine cases been a party in legal proceedings wherein he has retained the services of private Barristers and Attorneys as follows –

- (i) Counsel Oozeer Amar;
- (ii) Mr Paul David Ozin, KC;
- (iii) Senior Counsel Desire Basset, and
- (iv) Attorney Shamila Sonah-Ori.

In this regard, a sum of Rs8,321,322.06 has been disbursed accordingly.

The Commissioner of Police has further informed that, in the past (2015 to 2017), the then Commissioners of Police had on three (03) instances, sought the services of private Barristers and Attorneys in legal proceedings to which Police was a party.

MAURITIUS POLICE FORCE – WOMEN POLICE OFFICERS – PROMOTION EXERCISE

(No. B/97) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the recent promotion exercise in the Police Force, he will state if he has been made aware of the dissatisfaction expressed by Women Police Officers for not having been promoted during the said exercise and, if so, indicate the remedial measures taken or envisaged in relation thereto.

Reply: Following approval from the Disciplinary Forces Service Commission, a promotion exercise was carried out on 13 March 2024 with a view to fill in the existing vacancies in the different grades in Mauritius Police Force. Out of the 2,000 Police officers promoted on that day, 43 Women Police officers were promoted as hereunder –

- (a) 2 Women Police Sergeant have been promoted to the rank of Woman Police Inspector, and
- (b) 41 Women Police Corporal have been promoted to the rank of Women Police Sergeant.

On the same day, the President of the Police Fighters Union remitted a representation to the Office of the Commissioner of Police wherein Women Police Officers who joined the force in 1993 and thus reckoning more than 30 years of service have not been promoted.

Moreover, the President of the Women Police Officers Network has reported to the Commissioner of Police that she has received verbal representations from 2 Women Police Officers as to their dissatisfaction for not having been promoted during the said promotion exercise.

The Commissioner of Police has informed that the grievances of these Women Police Officers are being looked into and consideration will be given for their promotion, as and when vacancies arise.

RIVIÈRE DU REMPART – 17 MARCH 2024 INCIDENT – ACTIVISTS OF TWO POLITICAL PARTIES

(No. B/98) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the incidents which occurred at Rivière du Rempart on 17 March 2024 involving activists of two political parties, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an enquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Police Officers of the Rivière du Rempart attended the Rivière du Rempart Market following a request received by Mr C. on 17 March 2024 at 09 15 hours, whereby a discussion was taking place among members of the public in the parking area thereat. Upon arrival, the Police officers found that members of L'Union Moris Political Party were engaged in a canvassing exercise and were distributing pamphlets to the public in the market parking area.

The exercise ended at around 09 45 hours. All those present left the spot. None of the members of L'Union Moris reported any incident or irregularity to the Police on that date.

However, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 18 March 2024, Mrs P.D.M.U., a member of L'Union Moris entered a precautionary measure whereby she stated that on 17 March 2024, at around 08 30 hours, she and other members of L'Union Moris were canvassing people at the Rivière du Rempart Market Fair parking area. At a particular moment, a group of people comprising both men and women approached them, including Mr S.K.S., who protested against the canvassing exercise. Shortly after, the canvassing exercise ended, and everyone dispersed.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that Mr S.K.S. was interviewed by the Police on 28 March 2024. The latter confirmed his presence on that day and also acknowledged having protested against the canvassing exercise carried out by members of L'Union Moris.

COLLINE CANDOS – FLOOD MITIGATION – MASTER PLAN

(No. B/111) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to Colline Candos, he will state if a master plan has been prepared to address the risk of flooding thereat.

Reply: The surrounding regions of Colline Candos, including Hillcrest area, Sodnac and Lall-Bahadoor Shastri Lane have been identified as flood-prone areas by the Land Drainage Authority (LDA).

With a view to mitigating flooding in the region of Candos, drain projects are being designed using a holistic and catchment-based approach in line with the recommendations of the LDA.

To that effect, the NDU has appointed a Consultant, namely VYYAASS Consultant Engineer Ltd, in July 2023 for a comprehensive flood mitigation plan for the region. The preliminary report has been submitted and the LDA has recommended that the technical feasibility for the implementation of a cut off drain at the foot of Candos Hill and/or a retention structure be assessed. In addition, thereto, the Consultant has been requested to identify a safe

discharge for the evacuation of the storm run-off. The detailed designed report incorporating the recommendations of the LDA is expected in April 2024.

Flood mitigation measures for the catchment from Candos Hill towards La Louise have also been assessed. The design has been completed and comprises the following –

- Construction of Trapezoidal cut off masonry drain along the Boundary of Candos Hill;
- Construction of new drains along Lall Bahadoor Shastri up to the discharge point at River Rempart;
- Construction of drain along Seechurn Avenue;
- Construction of drain along Nehru Road, and
- Construction of drain along Phoenix Beau Songes Link Road.

However, in view of the complexity of the flooding problem, the project is being implemented in three phases, namely –

- Phase 1: Construction of drain from Lall Bahadoor Shastri Lane and part of Candos/Vacoas Road upto its discharge point at Rivière Rempart, Pierre Fonds.
- Phase 2: Construction of drain along Candos/ Vacoas Road, Palma Road upto discharge point at Pierre Fonds.
- Phase 3: Construction of drains along internal roads, namely Mahant Kabir Temple Road, Remy Ollier Road, Droopnath Ramphul Street, Carreau Lalliane Road and SSR Lane to eventually discharge in Candos/ Vacoas Road.

In addition to the projects being implemented by the NDU, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes is undertaking minor projects with a view to mitigating water accumulation. The Council is currently carrying out trial pits along Cardinal Avenue where water accumulation has been reported by the inhabitants residing downstream which are prone to flooding and were affected during the passage of Cyclone Belal.

As at date, with a view to alleviating flooding in the region of Quatre Bornes, including Colline Candos, 43 drain projects to the tune of some Rs233 m. have been completed. Three

drain projects amounting to some Rs28,067,158.90 are under construction and one project is at tender stage.

AFRICA NATIONS CUP – CLUB M v/s CHAD

(No. B/118) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the football match Club M v/s Chad for the preliminary round of the Africa Nations Cup held at the Côte d’Or stadium on 26 March 2024, he will state the –

- (a) total seating capacity available at the stadium during the match;
- (b) number of complimentary tickets distributed, and
- (c) number of spectators present.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Member to my reply to PQ B/1749 of 12 December 2023.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Football Association (MFA) that 600 complimentary tickets were distributed.

As for part (c) of the question, the MFA informed my Ministry that a total number of 4,259 spectators were present.

STC – PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS IMPORTATION – APPLICATION TO PHARMACY BOARD

(No. B/125) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to pharmaceutical products, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to if the Corporation has applied to the Pharmacy Board for the importation thereof and, if so, where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the State Trading Corporation that it has not submitted any application to the Pharmacy Board for the importation of pharmaceutical products.

MOTORWAY (M5), SOUTH – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/126) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a motorway (M5) in the South, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CENTRE ÉQUESTRE, PETIT GAMIN – GLOBAL EQUESTRIAN LTD. – OPERATING LICENCE

(No. B/127) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Centre Équestre de Petit Gamin, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if a licence to operate same has been issued to Global Equestrian Ltd., and, if so, since when.

(Withdrawn)

BEAU BASSIN – SERGE ALFRED SWIMMING POOL – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/128) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the renovation works to be undertaken at the Serge Alfred Swimming Pool at Beau Bassin, he will state where matters stand, indicating if a proposed reopening date has been scheduled and, if not, why not.

Reply: I am informed that a bidding exercise has already been launched for repairs and waterproofing works at the Serge Alfred Swimming Pool. The closing date for the submission of bids is 15 April 2024.

ROCHE BOIS, M2 – OVERHEAD PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE COLLAPSED

(No. B/129) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the overhead pedestrian bridge along M2 at Roche Bois which was damaged following a road accident involving a lorry on 24 February 2024, he will state the –

- (a) immediate remedial measures taken to ensure the safety of inhabitants when crossing the motorway thereat, and
- (b) future project, if any, to replace same.

(Withdrawn)

SEGREGATED WASTE COLLECTION – APPROPRIATE BINS PROVISION

(No. B/130) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to segregated waste collection, he will state where matters stand as to the provision of appropriate bins to households.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 15 – CYCLONE BELAL –PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE – COST

(No. B/131) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Rs500 m. earmarked for repairs of public infrastructure and amenities damaged by cyclone Belal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority and the National Development Unit, information as to the number of roads and lanes earmarked therefor in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix, indicating –

- (a) the sums allocated therefor, and
- (b) the expected start and completion dates thereof.

(Vide reply to PQ B/101)

PUBLIC SECTOR DEBT – QUANTUM – DECEMBER 2023 – REDUCTION MEASURES

(No. B/132) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Public Sector Debt, he will state the –

- (a) quantum thereof as at December 2023, indicating the quantum thereof –
 - (i) denominated in Mauritian rupees and foreign currencies, respectively, and

- (ii) as a ratio of the Gross Domestic Product, and
- (b) measures that will be taken for the reduction thereof.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, public sector debt as at end December 2023 stood at Rs511.9 billion, of which Rs388.6 billion were denominated in Mauritian rupees and Rs123.3 billion in foreign currencies.

Public sector debt as a percentage of GDP was 78.6% as at end December 2023.

The debt ratio has been on a declining trend. It has dropped by 13.3% of GDP, that is, from 91.9% as at end June 2021 during the COVID-19 period to 81.1% as at end June 2023, and further down to 78.6% as at end December 2023.

As regards part (b) of the question, the House may wish to note that Government has already taken a number of measures, which has resulted in the constant drop in the debt to GDP ratio. The House is aware that a new budget exercise is now underway.

HEFORSHE CLUBS – *MODUS OPERANDI* – MEMBERS

(No. B/133) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether in regard to the HeForShe Clubs in Community Centres, she will give a list thereof, giving details of the –

- (a) *modus operandi* thereof, and
- (b) members thereof, indicating their age groups.

(Withdrawn)

MOKLOUD APPLICATION – PHOTOGRAPH UPLOAD – REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT

(No. B/134) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the MoKloud Government Application, he will state if the uploading of a photograph is a mandatory requirement for registration thereto.

(Withdrawn)

**AFRICAN GAMES 13TH EDITION, GHANA – MAURITIUS DELEGATION –
COMPOSITION**

(No. B/135) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the 13th edition of the African Games, which was held in Ghana, Accra from 08 to 23 March 2024, he will state the composition of the Mauritius delegation having participated therein.

(Withdrawn)

RODRIGUES – ELECTRICITY SUPPLY – ENERGY DEMAND

(No. B/136) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to electricity supply, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board of Rodrigues, information as to if there is an increase in the demand thereof, indicating the –

- (a) measures being taken thereon, and
- (b) reasons for the recurrent disruption thereof in some regions in Rodrigues.

Reply: I am informed by the CEB that an all-time maximum peak demand of 8.52 MW was recorded on the island of Rodrigues on 13 December 2023. This represents an approximate increase of 12% in energy demand, as compared to the peak recorded for 2022, which was to the tune of 7.61 MW.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that from a planning perspective, Rodrigues Island has currently sufficient generation capacity to meet the forecasted power demand till December 2025, taking into consideration all planning constraints, such as planned maintenances, forced outages and operational reserves.

Future power expansion plan for Rodrigues would take into account renewable energy technologies to remain consistent with the Rodrigues Ile Verte vision which aims to achieve 100% renewable energy target by 2050.

With regard to part (b) of the question, it is worth noting that there are two types of power outages namely planned outages and unplanned outages. Planned outages allow CEB personnel to carry out maintenance works safely on the generating sets, transmission and distribution networks which enables the CEB to ensure a reliable and safe electricity supply to the people of Rodrigues. These planned power cuts are announced on radio beforehand to allow the public at large, offices and businesses to take the necessary actions as deemed necessary. Moreover, announcements are also posted online on CEB's website.

Unplanned outages, on the other hand, cannot be predicted and the duration depends on nature of the fault. I am informed that the CEB ensures that actions being taken to minimize faults include preventive maintenance on the power system such as tree lopping in proximity of the electricity networks. Furthermore, CEB is contemplating to deploy equipment of latest technology to analyse system disturbances and to further improve reliability of the network.

I am further informed that there is generally no recurrent disruption of electricity in Rodrigues except during period 15 January 2024 to 11 February 2024 when repairs works were being carried out to a Generating Unit at Port Mathurin. The Unit has been successfully synchronised back the grid on 11 February 2024.

CEB & COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL (MAURITIUS) LTD. – POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT & LEGAL FEES

(No. B/137) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to when the latest Agreement was signed between the Board and Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd., indicating the total amount of legal fees paid therefor to date, giving details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**CYCLONE BELAL (JAN 2024) – AFFECTED HOUSEHOLDS – FUNDS
DISBURSED**

(No. B/138) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, whether in regard to the National Empowerment Foundation, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the total amount of funds disbursed after the passage of cyclone Belal in January 2024 to help affected families who are listed on the Social Register of Mauritius.

Reply: The Ministry has effected payment of cyclone and flood allowances for a total amount of Rs1,390,650 to 662 households eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius which were affected by the passage of cyclone Belal. These households were also provided with food packs.

MITD – EX-MEDCO (CASSIS) – INFRASTRUCTURAL WORKS

(No. B/139) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in regard to infrastructural works being carried out at the Mauritius Institute Training and Development in ex-MEDCO in Cassis, he will state where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) cost thereof;
- (b) scope of work;
- (c) name of the successful bidder, and
- (d) expected completion date thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) is offering the National Certificate Level 2 (NC Level 2) in Technical Training with Bright Up Programme. This is an innovative training programme combining technical training with holistic, life skills and sports activities. This training programme is run in collaboration with the Mauritius Sports Council and the National Social Inclusion Foundation.

I am informed by the MITD that to cater for a large demand, the Ex-Medco Cassis was put at the disposal of the MITD by the Mauritius Educational Development Company Ltd. on 22 January 2024 to offer the NC Level 2 Technical Training with Bright Up Programme which started on 29 January 2024. 307 trainees have been enrolled in the course and the following modules are being offered at the centre –

- (a) Hospitality Services;
- (b) Garment Making and Handicraft;
- (c) Electrical and Plumbing Works;
- (d) Bicycle and Motorcycle Mechanics, and
- (e) Agriculture.

In order to accommodate the trainees within the short span of time, refurbishment works have been planned in two phases.

Phase I consisted of the refurbishment of the administrative block, workshops, Information Technology Laboratory, classrooms and toilets.

All the above refurbishment works which started during the second week of February 2024 have been completed and training is being dispensed smoothly.

As regards part (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the question, I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly a document comprising the project, the supplier/contractor who was awarded the contract after bidding exercise was carried out, the awarded sum and the status of each project under Phase I.

I am further informed that Phase II would comprise –

- (a) replacing the roof structure and sheets to Blocks A and D;
- (b) external painting of all blocks;
- (c) refurbishment of Block D to accommodate new courses;
- (d) waterproofing works to Block E;
- (e) upgrading of existing boundary wall, and
- (f) resurfacing works.

Financial provisions for these works have been included in the Budget proposal for the financial year 2024-2025. All these above works are expected to start in August 2024 and will be completed by December 2024, prior to January 2025 intake.

E-HEALTH SYSTEM – PROCUREMENT EXERCISE

(No. B/140) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Supply, Design, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of the E-Health System, he will state the –

- (a) start and closing dates of the bidding process;

- (b) number of bids received;
- (c) name of the successful bidder, and
- (d) date of the award of the contract, indicating the value thereof.

(Withdrawn)

HARM REDUCTION UNIT, MOH – DR. C.G. & DR. L.T. – DUTIES & QUALIFICATIONS

(No. B/141) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Harm Reduction Unit of his Ministry, he will state if Dr. C.G. and Dr. L.T. are attached thereto and, if so, –

- (a) indicate the responsibilities assigned thereto, and
- (b) if they are both accredited as Specialists in Psychiatry or Addictology by the Medical Council of Mauritius and, if not, indicate their respective specialist qualifications as recognised by the Medical Council of Mauritius.

(Withdrawn)

CEB & COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL (MAURITIUS) LTD. – POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT – CONDITIONS PRECEDENTS

(No. B/142) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement signed between the Central Electricity Board and Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd., for the purchase of electricity from Renewable Energy Hybrid Facilities, in particular in relation to 2 projects of SPV 30 MW, he will state if the delay in fulfilling the Conditions Precedents continued for more than 120 days from the Long Stop Date and, if so, indicate if the Board will terminate the entire agreement and encash the entire development security.

Reply: In reply to PQ B/1539 at our Sitting of 21 November 2023, the House was informed of the competitive international bidding process adopted by the Central Electricity Board (CEB) for the procurement of energy from 30 Megawatt Renewable Energy Hybrid Facilities (REHF) with Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) in the context of the green energy transition. With particular regard to our target to phase out the use of coal by 2030, the RE

Hybrid Facilities are expected to contribute to democratise the energy landscape when it comes to base load. It is to be noted that currently CEB base load energy requirement is being met exclusively by CEB thermal power plants and the sugar-industry based coal-bagasse Independent Power Producers.

At our Sitting of 21 November 2023, the House was further informed that Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd and Qair International Ltd. were awarded the contracts for the RE Hybrid Facilities of a total capacity of 130MW as they had submitted the lowest evaluated substantially responsive bids.

I am informed that on 15 February 2023, Corexsolar signed two Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with the Central Electricity Board for two RE Hybrid Facility Projects of 30 Megawatt each. According to the PPA's, the longstop date was set to 14 November 2023, i.e., nine months as from 15 February 2023 to achieve the Conditions Precedents specified. On 16 March 2023, Corexsolar submitted two Development Securities in the total amount of Rs180 million for the two 30 Megawatt projects as part of the Conditions Precedents.

The PPA also provides for a further period of 120 days from the Longstop Date to achieve the Conditions Precedent, during which delay damages are applied. I am informed that, as at 02 April 2024, delay damages of an amount of Rs38,520,000 has been paid by Corexsolar to the CEB. I am also informed that Corexsolar has been replenishing its Development Security regularly.

The CEB has conveyed that, on 25 January 2024, Corexsolar has informed the CEB that negotiations with land owner Massilia Ltd have not been conclusive and has requested for a change in site for the two projects from Baie du Tombeau to Mare D'Australia. According to the Promoter, the abrupt end of negotiations with Massilia was due to "adverse press coverage and unfounded allegations" which had "fostered a climate of unwarranted scrutiny and overly cautious behaviour" delaying negotiations, slowing decision-making and culminating in Massilia's decision to terminate the agreement.

The Promoter further informed that it had secured an agreement with a reputable landowner in the north of Mauritius in respect of alternative plots of land for the projects and

these sites do not change the commercial and technical terms of the PPAs, notably, the tariffs and interconnection points will remain the same. The Promoter further added that the Company would suffer irreparable financial and reputational damage should its request to provide alternative plots of land be declined.

The CEB subsequently sought legal advice on whether the CEB could refuse the request of the Promoter for change in site considering that the PPA is still live, what would be CEB's liabilities and whether it would tantamount to a breach of PPA. Legal advice was also sought on due diligence to be performed in assessing the seriousness of the request, the documents to be sought and the conditions to be imposed.

I am further informed by the CEB that legal advice received on 06 February 2024 highlighted CEB's obligation to act in good faith in the exercise of its rights in accordance with Articles 16 and 1134 of the Code Civil Mauricien together with the importance to shield the CEB against any potential claims or litigation initiated by Corexsolar. Consideration should be given to the fact that the PPA was live and that Corexsolar has been paying the penalties as agreed under the PPAs for its existing defaults and replenishing the bank accounts after the necessary deductions have been made. It was essential that the CEB establishes its good faith throughout the process, making it unlikely that it will incur liability or even be found to be in breach of the PPA where the CEB declines the request of Corexsolar. Thus, as a first step, CEB was requested to seek additional information from the Promoter to assess the seriousness of the request of the Promoter.

Thus, over period 09 February 2024 to 13 March 2024, CEB sought a number of notarized documents, information and confirmation from the Promoter with a view to assessing its request. These include, *inter alia* –

- (a) the identity of the landowner;
- (b) particulars of land including the title deed;
- (c) time frame for signature of lease agreement;

- (d) a bordereau or attestation to confirm that the land has been reserved for the project and that the commercial terms and conditions of the lease have been agreed between the land owner and the Promoter;
- (e) joint site inspection and written confirmation that the selected land is adequate for the project;
- (f) written confirmation that the interconnection point and tariff remain same;
- (g) written confirmation that all terms of the PPA remain the same and must be met by the Promoter;
- (h) written confirmation that there will be no other request to relocate the projects sites;
- (i) an indemnity Clause to protect the interests of the CEB if there is a successful claim by a bidder related to the change in land;
- (j) written agreement that delay damages be applied for a further period of 60 days as from 14 March 2024 and same may be extended if mutually agreed, and
- (k) Financial Close to be achieved at latest 5 months after obtention of the clearance under the Non-Citizen (Property Restriction) Act.

Following receipt of required documents, fulfilment of conditions imposed and requested confirmation, and on the basis of legal advice obtained, the CEB has conveyed its agreement to the request for site relocation. The promoter has informed that an application for clearance has been made under the Non-Citizen (Property Restriction) Act on 13 March 2024 in respect of both projects.

I am informed that delay damages remain applicable for another period of 60 days as from 14 March 2024. The question of encashing of the Development Security does not arise for the moment.

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY – BOARD COMPOSITION & SUBCOMMITTEES

(No. B/143) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Gambling Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) current composition of the board thereof, indicating the names of the Chairperson and members thereof, giving details in each case as to the –
 - (i) remuneration, and
 - (ii) other allowances and benefits drawn, and
- (b) number of subcommittees of the board, indicating –
 - (i) their respective Chairperson and members, and
 - (ii) allowances payable thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Gambling Regulatory Authority that the Chairperson and Members of the Gambling Regulatory Board are appointed in accordance with Section 5 of the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am placing the information requested by the hon. Member in the Library of the National Assembly, regarding the names of the Chairperson and Members thereof and the allowances payable. The hon. Member may wish to note that they are not entitled to any other benefits or remuneration. Moreover, Members who form part of the Sub Committees set up by the Board are paid an allowance.

As regards part (b) of the question I am informed that there are five Sub Committees of the Board which I am also placing in the Library of the National Assembly, with their respective Chairpersons and Members as well as the allowances payable.

PETIT GAMIN RACING TRACK – GLOBAL EQUESTRIAN LTD. – CLEARANCES & PERMITS

(No. B/144) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Horse Racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to –

- (a) if any licence has now been issued to Global Equestrian Ltd., therefor at the Petit Gamin Racing Track and, if so, since when, and

- (b) if all the necessary clearances have been sought and obtained therefor by the company, including fire certificate and operational permit from the Pamplémousses District Council, further indicating in each case the date thereof.

(Withdrawn)

VACOAS BUS TERMINAL – UPGRADING WORKS

(No. B/145) 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 upgrading works being carried out at the Vacoas Bus Terminal, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 18 – DAMAGED ROADS – REPAIRS & RESURFACING

(No. B/146) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to roads in Constituency No. 18, Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes, he will state if an assessment has been made to determine the number thereof requiring repairs or resurfacing and, if, so, give a list of the sites identified therefor and entrusted to the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes by the Citizen Support Unit.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes that it has received 92 requests/complaints/concerns through the Citizen Support Unit Portal for Constituency No. 18 regarding patching, resurfacing and road works.

The Citizen Support Portal which is an initiative of the Prime Minister's Office, is an online service which allows citizens to directly transmit their requests, share their concerns and ideas with ministries, departments, parastatals and local authorities through Citizen's Advice Bureau. They can also keep track of their requests through a ticketing system.

According to the Council, patching works are effected regularly as per programme of work and on availability of stockpiles.

I am placing the list of requests/complaints/concerns received on Citizen Support Unit portal with respect to roads requiring repairs or resurfacing in the Library of the National Assembly.

I am also informed by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes that following cyclone Belal, on 15 January 2024, several roads were damaged as a result of flooding. After the cyclone, all local authorities were requested to carry out a survey to assess the extent of the damages caused to secondary and lateral roads under their respective jurisdiction.

Following its survey, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes submitted a list of 12 roads that were damaged and needed to be resurfaced or reconstructed to the tune of Rs16,748,400. A request for funds was submitted to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and financial clearance was obtained on 14 February 2024. The Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes was subsequently requested to proceed with the resurfacing/rehabilitation works at the earliest.

The Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes has informed that it will award the contract for resurfacing and construction of several new roads within the township on 26 April 2024 and the intended completion date would be within 90 days from the start date.

I am placing the list of roads being rehabilitated by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes after the passage of cyclone Belal in the Library of the National Assembly.

I am further informed that the National Development Unit (NDU) would be proceeding with the resurfacing of 17 roads following an assessment made after the passage of cyclone Belal. Works orders will be issued by the NDU shortly.

DENGUE FEVER – REPORTED CASES – DEATH RATE

(No. B/147) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Dengue fever, he will state the number of reported cases thereof on a yearly basis since 2019 to 2023 and from January 2024 to date, indicating the number of persons having –

- (a) been hospitalised, and

- (b) passed away as a result thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD PROSTITUTION – PREVENTIVE MEASURES

(No. B/148) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child prostitution, she will state if she has been made aware of the increase in the number of cases thereof, indicating the preventive measures taken by her Ministry to combat same.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the number of reported cases of child prostitution from 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and to date stands at 0, 2, 3, 2, 3, 3, respectively, which does not reflect any substantial increase.

Child prostitution is unfortunately a social ill that impacts adversely on too many diverse aspects of our society, be it at the individual, familial and community level. As a caring government, we are duty bound to provide for sustained intervention to eliminating the serial adverse effects and impacts on both the child and his immediate environment.

Preventing child prostitution involves a combination of legal, social and educational measures. The Children's Act 2020 is a comprehensive legal framework that aims to provide better care, protection and assistance to children. It includes a mandatory reporting on a person having reasonable grounds to believe that a child with whom he is in contact has been, is being or is likely to be exposed to harm together with a specific provision on child prostitution and access to brothel.

Several measures have been and are being taken by my Ministry in collaboration with a plethora of empowered and relevant stakeholders to reduce, counter and eventually eliminate this scourge. These measures include the following –

- i. Sustained Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns targeting the public at large and stakeholders involving State and non-State actors;
- ii. Capacity building of front liners within and outside the Ministry;
- iii. Development of targeted IEC materials and training modules;

- iv. Development of targeted campaigns and ensuring their conduct island-wide;
- v. Ensure networking with all relevant stakeholders, especially *Brigade pour la Protection de la Famille* and NGOs (MFWPA, Pedostop, *Association pour la Population et Development*, SAFIRE) and joint intervention;
- vi. Implementing the Community Child Protection Programme and Community Child Watch at community level;
- vii. Conduct of *Atelier Partage Parents (APP)* wherein the issue of how to protect children from child prostitution is always raised and parents provided with information as to how to recognise and identify signs of abuse on children, especially signs of child prostitution and the need to report as appropriate;
- viii. Conduct of lavish campaigns against CSEC during the whole year at the level of schools by my Ministry, the NCC, the Ombudsperson for Children, the Police, the MFWPA and the Drop-In Centre as well as the Ministry of Health;
- ix. Conduct of focus group discussion with parents in high risk areas through the Parent Empowerment Programme, and
- x. Conduct of peer group counselling and group therapy to prevent relapse of those children already victim of CSEC.

My Ministry has already awarded a contract for the services of a local firm for an in-depth study on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which includes child prostitution. My Ministry will stand guided by the recommendations which will be made therein.

POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/149) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the proposed introduction in the Assembly of a Police and Criminal Justice Bill, he will state where matters stand as to the consultations initiated thereinto with stakeholders

concerned, indicating if consideration will also be given for the doing away with the practice of lodging of provisional charges.

(Withdrawn)

DENGUE FEVER – PATIENTS HOSPITALISED

(No. B/150) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Dengue fever, he will state the number of patients hospitalised since January 2024 to date, indicating the medical treatment administered thereto.

Reply: I am informed that since January 2024, seven hundred and nine persons have been hospitalised in both the private and public sector.

I am also informed that there is an operational plan for the prevention and control of Chikungunya, Dengue and Zika in the Republic of Mauritius which was prepared by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The plan was last updated in September 2021 and comprises the operational procedures for managing outbreaks, including overall planning and coordination for logistics of an outbreak, outbreak investigation, management of cases, situation monitoring adult and larval control and social mobilisation and communication. Another component of the plan also encompasses the surveillance tasks for inter-epidemic period. Since the resurgence of Dengue in December 2023, relevant actions were initiated as per the plan, taking into consideration the specificities of the actual epidemic.

The protocol for medical treatment of the patients affected with Dengue fever is therefore applied as per the provisions of the preparedness plan, namely at annexes 6 and 7 at page 42-43. For mild cases, the patient only requires treatment of the symptoms that present themselves. For more serious cases, the protocol also indicates the parameters to be observed before taking the appropriate measures.

E-COMMERCE LEGISLATION – REGULATION

(No. B/151) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to consumer protection,

she will state if consideration will be given for amendments to be brought to the existing legislation in line with the recommendation made by the Law Reform Commission to regulate e-Commerce.

Reply: The existing consumer protection legislations, which aim at promoting and safeguarding the rights and interests of consumers, provide a legal framework for the achievement and maintenance of a consumer market which is accessible, fair, efficient, responsible and sustainable, and which provides adequate protection to consumers. As at date, there is no e-Commerce legislation specific for consumer protection.

E-commerce transactions can happen between a buyer and a seller anywhere in the world having internet access. E-commerce is much complex mainly due to the fact that transactions occur on the internet in different locations through multiple intermediaries and platforms, among others. Few countries have of date come up with legislations governing e-Commerce.

Designing the required legislations and ensuring its implementation to cater for such complexity requires collaboration, cooperation and coordinated action and enforcement in different jurisdictions and, above all, commitments of various countries around the world.

The proposals made by the Law Reform Commission, which relate only to ‘the law pertaining to display of price’, are most welcomed and necessary action has already been initiated at the level of my Ministry for amendments to be made to the existing legislation.

In addition, stakeholders, including the governmental bodies, the private sector and civil society organisations, have been requested to submit all relevant proposals. Consultations are ongoing.

The assistance of regional and international institutions has also been sought for the drafting of e-Commerce Strategy and the ensuing e-Commerce legislation.

E-HEALTH PROJECT – CONTRACT AWARDED & LIST OF BIDDERS

(No. B/152) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the E-Health project, he will state when the contract therefor was awarded, giving details as to the –

- (a) list of bidders and amount of their respective bids, and

(b) name of the successful bidder.

Reply: As the House is aware, my Ministry entered into a Portfolio Agreement in January 2022 with the UNDP to implement *inter alia* the National eHealth Project. Accordingly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a market engagement through an Expression of Interest exercise followed by launching and evaluation of bids through international bidding for the project. The procurement process of the UNDP applied throughout the processes.

I am informed that the bids were floated on 23 November 2022 with an extended closing date of 10 February 2023. A public bid opening was conducted by the UNDP and nine bids were received.

The UNDP staff conducted an evaluation exercise consisting of preliminary evaluation of documents submitted, technical evaluation, including a demo of solutions received, financial evaluation and a due diligence exercise carried out by independent auditors contracted by the UNDP.

The evaluation was multi-staged and the financial opening of bids was made only for those bidders which passed the minimum requirements for the technical evaluation.

As regards part (a) of the question, given that the UNDP procurement process applied and officers from my Ministry, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, who acted as observers signed a non-disclosure agreement, my Ministry has no record of the details of the names of bidders and their amount quoted.

With regard to part (b) of the question, following a step-by-step extensive evaluation process after the authorisation from the Procurement Office at UNDP headquarters, award was made on 09 January 2024 to the consortium led by TrioTree Technologies (India) and comprising Informatics International (Mtius) Ltd and Netcom Partners Ltd (Mauritius) for a total amount of USD 4,440,576 for Phase 1 of the eHealth Project.

LABOURDONNAIS, M1 – TRAFFIC CONGESTION – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/153) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to

the daily traffic congestion along M1 at Labourdonnais, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the remedial measures envisaged to address same.

(Withdrawn)

MON DESIR, VACOAS – KALIMATA MANDIR – PEDESTRIANS SAFETY

(No. B/154) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, he will state if he is in presence of a request from the representatives of the Mon Desir Kalimata Mandir situated at Mon Desir, Vacoas for the putting up of a pedestrian crossing and/or speed breaker near the said Mandir for the safety of the pedestrians and, if so, indicate when same will be implemented and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

DRUG USERS – METHADONE TREATMENT – CONDITIONS ATTACHED

(No. B/155) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the decision of his Ministry to allow young drug users to have access to methadone treatment as from the age of 15 years, he will state the reasons therefor, indicating –

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

(Withdrawn)

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY – VICTIM'S HOSPITALISATION – OFFICER PRESENT

(No. B/156) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the alleged case of child pornography involving a 4-year-old girl, she will state if an officer from her Ministry was present at the victim's bedside during her hospitalization and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

**PLANTERS & BREEDERS – THEFTS & DAMAGES REPORTED CASES –
REMEDIAL ACTIONS**

(No. B/157) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to thefts and damages caused to the premises and lands of planters and breeders, he will state the number of reported cases thereof to his Ministry, indicating, in each case, the remedial measures and actions taken in relation thereto.

Reply (The Prime Minister): I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the number of thefts and damages to the premises and lands of planters and breeders that have been reported to the Police for the period January to March 2024 is 188.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that with a view to curbing down such cases, the Police are undertaking the following measures –

- (a) A dynamic Community Policing Network is operational at Divisional Level and Police Station Levels whereby the Police in collaboration with the Small Farmers Welfare Fund have implemented the following strategies –
 - i. Setting up of Road blocks at strategic places and time near plantations;
 - ii. Field counseling in the plantations to prevent theft;
 - iii. Community Policing Forums with planters and breeders;
 - iv. Integrated and targeted patrols comprising Field Intelligence Officers (FIOs) of the Central Investigation Division;
 - v. Implementation of a Whatsapp Group for timely exchange of information between the Police and Planters Community, and
 - vi. Optimising the use of safe city cameras where available for the surveillance of agricultural blocks.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Crime Prevention Unit is working closely with the Planters Community with a view to sensitizing them on the precautions

to be taken to protect themselves and their plantations from theft and damages. Support is also being provided to planters by deploying teams of the Special Support Unit, the Special Mobile Force and the Emergency Response Service around the island by day and night to carry out vehicle Check/Road Blocks and mobile patrols in crime prone areas including agricultural plantations.

GOODS & SERVICES – PROCUREMENT PROCESS & DETAILS

(No. A/6) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the procurement of goods and services exceeding Rs50,000 since 2020 to date, he will, table a list of all bids, indicating in each case the –

- (a) names of the bidders invited to tender and the corresponding items being procured, indicating the –
 - (i) date and time invitation to bid was sent to the potential bidders;
 - (ii) date and time the bids were closed;
 - (iii) date bids were evaluated, and
 - (iv) date an award was made;
- (b) name of the successful bidder;
- (c) cost estimate of the bids, and
- (d) bidding price by the bidders.

(Reply not available)

JARDIN COCO, PORT LOUIS – LEAKAGE & LIGHTING ISSUES – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. A/7) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether in regard to the Jardin Coco, in Port Louis, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to the –

- (a) absence of lighting thereat and the adjoining road (Magon street);
- (b) leakage of water thereat and under the bridge adjacent thereto, and

- (c) absence of slabs at its entrance and, so, indicate the remedial measures that will be taken to the address name.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port-Louis that as far as lighting facilities at Jardin Coco are concerned, a total of six decorative lights made of plastic have been damaged. Due to the unavailability of the same product on the local market, two street lanterns mounted on metal poles have been placed on site.

However, following a survey carried out after the passage of the cyclone Belal in January 2024, it was noted that two street lanterns were missing. As a temporary measure, two temporary street lanterns are due to be placed on Wednesday 03 April 2024.

I wish to also inform the House that in context of the Greening Project, the Council will install six solar garden lights at Jardin Coco by the end of April 2024.

With regard to lighting at the adjoining road (Magon Street), the following actions have been initiated so far –

- (a) 3 street lighting have been fixed along stretch from Telecom shop up to Jardin Coco, and
- (b) 4 led lanterns of 40 watt have been fixed in the children's playground found next to the Telecom shop.

In addition, arrangements will be made for provision of one additional pole and LED street lantern between the Telecom shop and children's playground to cover a dark spot.

With the respect to the leakage of water at Jardin de Coco and the bridge adjacent thereto, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port-Louis that a site visit was effected by the officers of the Council on 28 March 2024 and it was observed that there was leakage of water in the garden and also under the bridge due to a defective CWA pipe. The Council has, in a correspondence dated 28 March 2024 requested to CWA to carry the necessary repairs at the earliest.

With regard to part (c) of the question which refers to the absence of slabs at the entrance of the garden, the Council intends to place the required number of slabs by the end of April 2024.

**ROCHE BOIS – OVERHEAD PEDESTRIAN CROSSING –
RECONSTRUCTION**

(No. A/8) **Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the overhead pedestrian crossing which was recently damaged at Roche Bois, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to when it will be reconstructed.

(Reply not available)

**GUIBIES/PAILLES – ROADS & DRAINAGE SYSTEMS – REMEDIAL
ACTIONS**

(No. A/9) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the poor road and drainage conditions prevailing in the region of Guibies/Pailles, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to the remedial measures envisaged therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that in regard to the road and drainage conditions prevailing in the region of Guibies/Pailles, remedial works at the hereunder mentioned roads have been completed since January 2024 –

Patching works:

- Talipot Street;
- Avenue Conde 1;
- Avenue Dodo 1;
- Avenue Colline 2, and
- Avenue Claude Delaitre.

Furthermore, Works Order for the resurfacing of road at Avenue Dodo 3 and construction of new road at Avenue Cardinal 6 have already been issued and same will be completed by the end of next week.

Additionally, drain projects have been approved by the Council in the following regions of Guibies/Pailles –

- Avenue Colline 2;
- Avenue Colline 3;
- Avenue Bengali 3;
- Cnr Avenue Claude Delaitre/Avenue Colline 1;
- Cnr Avenue Claude Delaitre/Bengali;
- Avenue Pengouin;
- Avenue Dodo, and
- Avenue Dodo 3.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has also informed that consultancy services have been retained for the above drain works and preliminary design is being undertaken by the Consultant.

PLAINE LAUZUN – INHABITANT’S REQUEST – SYNTHETIC FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND CONSTRUCTION

(No. A/10) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the request of the inhabitants of Plaine Lauzun addressed to the Municipal City Council of Port Louis on 18 June 2021 for the construction of a synthetic football playground, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council information as to where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that a request was received on 14 July 2021 from *Groupeement Volontaire de Plaine Lauzun* for the construction of a football ground on a plot of state land near the Metro railway line and very close to the main road/New Trunk Road, Plaine Lauzun.

In view of the proximity of the site with the Metro Railway line and the above-mentioned main roads and for security and safety reasons, the Council considers that the site is inappropriate for a football ground.

However, I am informed that the Council has a project for the conversion of the volleyball pitch found in the yard of Camp Chapelon/Plaine Lauzun Community Centre into a football ground. This site is under the management of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund.

I am further informed that a request had been made on 13 January 2023 by the Council to the SILWF and the latter is agreeable thereto.

A request for funds has been made to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, in this respect.

WHITE PAPER – CREATIVE MAURITIUS-VISION 2025 – RECOMMENDATIONS

(No. A/11) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the White Paper entitled Creative Mauritius-Vision 2025, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation of the recommendations thereof.

(Reply not available)