



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 12 MAY 2026

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(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)

Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands
Hon. Ms Marie Arianne Navarre-Marie	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Shakeel Ahmed Yousuf Abdul Razack Mohamed, GCSK	Minister of Housing and Lands
Hon. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan, GCSK	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell, GOSK	Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries
Hon. Govindranath Gunness	Minister of National Infrastructure
Hon. Anil Kumar Bachoo, GOSK	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Christian Harold Richard Duval	Minister of Tourism
Hon. Ashok Kumar Subron	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Gavin Patrick Cyril Glover, SC	Attorney-General
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Jyoti Jeetun	Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning
Hon. Patrick Gervais Assirvaden	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities

Hon. Dhananjay Ramful	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Darmarajen Nagalingum	Minister of Youth and Sports
Hon. Muhammad Reza Cassam Uteem	Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations
Hon. Mahomed Osman Cassam Mahomed	Minister of Land Transport
Hon. John Michaël Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kaviraj Sharma Sukon	Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research
Hon. Sayed Muhammad Aadil Ameer Meea	Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives
Dr. the Hon. Mahend Gungapersad, PDSM	Minister of Education and Human Resource
Dr. the Hon. Avinash Ramtohl	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Lutchmanah Pentiah	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Ranjiv Wochit, OSK	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Mahendra Gondeea, OSK	Minister of Arts and Culture

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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 09 of 2026

Sitting of Tuesday 12 May 2026

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Ag. Prime Minister (Ms A. Navarre-Marie): Madam Speaker, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry of Finance

Ministry for Rodrigues and Outer Islands

The Annual Report of the Local Government Service Commission for the financial year 2024/2025. (In Original)

B. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Energy Efficiency (Control of Non-Essential Grid-Powered Activities) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 50 of 2026)

C. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 49 of 2026)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Control of Sale of Imported Live Animals for Home Slaughter) (Amendment) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 52 of 2026)
- (c) The Competition Commission (Trade Association and Cooperatives Amnesty Programme) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 53 of 2026)

D. Ministry of Local Government

- (a) The Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes (Naming of Public Places and Buildings) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 51 of 2026)
- (b) The District Council of Pamplémousses (Plaine des Papayes Multipurpose Complex) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 54 of 2026)
- (c) The District Council of Pamplémousses (Pamplémousses Multipurpose Hall) Regulations 2026. (Government Notice No. 55 of 2026)

E. Ministry of Arts and Culture

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Tamil Speaking Union for the:

- (i) year ended 30 June 2021; and
- (ii) year ended 30 June 2022.

**COMMUNICABLE DISEASES – RECENT OUTBREAK – CASES & FATALITIES –
PREVENTION MEASURES**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the recent outbreak of communicable diseases, he will state the –

- (a) number of confirmed cases thereof in each case as at date, indicating the conditions of the patients and the number of related fatalities recorded;
- (b) specific containment and prevention measures implemented or being envisaged;
- (c) current operational capacity of public hospitals to deal therewith, indicating the number of medical and paramedical personnel trained for the management thereof, and
- (d) different medicines, diagnostic kits and personal protective equipment available for the management and control thereof.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Minister of Health!

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, I would humbly request you to allow me enough time to dwell on this issue as it is of national importance.

Madam Speaker: Yes, of course, but we need to give him the time also to put his supplementary questions.

Mr Bachoo: Yes, of course. I also wish to reassure the House that my Ministry is treating the present situation with the utmost seriousness.

Madam Speaker, communicable diseases are illnesses caused by infectious agents such as virus, bacteria, parasites or fungus that can be transmitted from one person to another or from an animal, objects, through water, environment or vector to a person.

In our local context, presently, we are concerned with Chikungunya, Dengue, Leptospirosis and Mpox. The vectors concerned with the communicable diseases are mostly mosquitoes, rodents and other animals.

Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne viral disease caused by Chikungunya virus, transmitted mainly by infected Aedes mosquitoes. It usually causes sudden fever and severe

joint pain, often with rash, headache, muscle pain and fatigue. Joint pain may persist for weeks or months.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral infection caused by Dengue virus, also transmitted mainly by infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. It may cause higher fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, muscle and joint pain, rash, nausea and low platelet count. Severe dengue can lead to bleeding, shock organ failure and death.

Leptospirosis is a bacterial zoonotic disease caused by bacteria of the genus *Leptospira*. It is transmitted to humans through contact with urine of infected animals or with water, mud or soil contaminated by infected urine. Rats, cattle, pigs, dogs and other animals may be reservoirs. It may range from mild fever to severe disease with jaundice, kidney failure, lung bleeding, shock and death.

It is important to understand that leptospirosis is not one single uniform disease. There are more than 200 pathogenic serovars, classically grouped into different serogroups. Some publications refer to more than 250 known serovars overall. Different serovars are associated with different animal reservoirs and may be associated with different clinical patterns and severity.

For example, rat associated leptospirosis is often linked to serogroups such as *Icterohaemorrhagiae*, which may be associated with severe Weil's disease, jaundice, renal failure and haemorrhagic complications.

Cattle associated leptospirosis is often linked to serovars such as *Hardjo*, which may in some settings be associated with milder occupational disease, although severe disease can still occur. The outcome depends on the serovar, the bacterial load, the delay in diagnosis and treatment, the patient's underlying conditions and the occurrence of complications such as renal failure, jaundice, shock and pulmonary haemorrhage.

Mpox is an infectious viral disease caused by monkeypox virus. It can cause fever, painful rash or skin lesions, swollen lymph nodes, headache, muscle aches, back pain and fatigue. It spreads mainly through close contact with an infected person, contaminated materials or infected animals.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, the number of confirmed cases from January 2026 to 11 May 2026 –

- a) Chikungunya – 2,816 local cases, of which 102 are still active. The others have been treated and have recovered completely. In addition, there are five imported cases which have also recovered.
- b) Dengue – there has been only one local case and six imported cases, all have recovered.
- c) Leptospirosis – there have been 21 reported cases of which six have passed away. In Mauritius, the six registered deaths are of the severe type. Additionally, all the six patients had comorbidities, including one who was brought dead to the hospital.
- d) Mpox – there are two imported cases, one was a Mauritian and the other one was a foreigner; both of whom had come from Madagascar. Both have recovered, their immediate contacts have been followed up and none have shown any sign of infection.

Madam Speaker, since the outbreak of Chikungunya and Leptospirosis, my Ministry has intensified public awareness and sensitisation campaign, where activities have been carried out as follows –

- Community sensitisation sessions – 224;
- Health education talks in high-risk areas – 61;
- Sensitisation of Municipal District Council workers – 400;
- Radio/TV intervention – more than 200;
- School media campaign – 9 digital media platforms used;
- Distribution of posters, leaflets – more than 30,000.

The key messages have focused on early recognition of symptoms, avoidance of contact with contaminated water and mud, use of protective boots and gloves, rodent control, safe handling of livestock areas and the importance of seeking medical care early.

Larviciding and mist blowing activities are carried out whenever a case is detected. House-to-house inspections and rooftop service are also carried out –

- 25,341 premises were inspected;
- 524 sanitary notices were served;
- 2,195 water notices were served;
- 1,300 statements of nuisances were issued;
- 2,195 contacts were screened;
- 1,224 blotting papers were taken among contacts;

- 105,905 premises were treated with larvicides;
- Mist blowing activities were carried out at 81,535 locations;
- Indoor residual spraying was conducted in 1,811 houses;
- 100,000 male sterile mosquitoes are being released on a weekly basis.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Ministry of Local Government that dedicated teams have been set up at the level of all local authority to attend to the cleaning of bare lands for unknown owners, cleaning of public places, fortnightly flushing of markets, rodent control, and issuance of notice on owners of bare lands.

The local authorities have, so far, taken the following actions –

- (i) Around 3,100 plots of bare land have been cleaned;
- (ii) Weekly flushing of markets and fairs with the assistance of Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services and larviciding;
- (iii) Intensified rodent control either through in-house labour or outsourced services;
- (iv) Around 2,800 notices have been issued;
- (v) Fixing of notice boards to prevent illegal dumping;
- (vi) Regular cleaning of drains, and
- (vii) Cleaning of rooftops of building owned by local authorities.

Moreover, local authorities are undertaking sensitisation campaign through distribution of posters and public announcements through loudspeakers. Additionally, the Ministry of Local Government is in the process of printing posters to be affixed in public places such as market and fairs, village halls and sports complexes among others. Funds to the tune of Rs260,000 had been earmarked for this specific item. In some local authorities, a special service is being provided for night collection of waste, as is the case of Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, in commercial areas, including collection of restaurant food waste.

Madam Speaker, these diseases cannot be controlled by the Ministry of Health and Wellness alone. It is a disease at the interface of human health, animal health and the environment. This is why a one health and multisectoral approach is essential. Multisectoral meetings led by my Ministry have been held with the participation of Ministry responsible for Environment, Agriculture, Veterinary Services, Local Government, Municipal/District Councils, Police Department, Rodent Control Services, Environmental Health Officers,

Public Health Inspectors, representatives of hospitals and Primary Health Care Services, Laboratory Services, Communication and Health Promotion Teams, the Medine Sugar Estate, and other relevant authorities.

Madam Speaker, I have personally chaired several meetings with my colleagues, the Ministers of Agro-Industry, Local Government and representatives of ministries and other organisations. The meetings have focused on –

1. mapping of affected regions and high-risk localities;
2. identification of possible sources of exposure;
3. strengthening of surveillance and reporting;
4. enhancing rodent control and environmental sanitation;
5. drain cleaning and removal of stagnant water;
6. public sensitisation in affected localities;
7. protection of high-risk workers;
8. veterinary and livestock related measures;
9. hospital preparedness and clinical management;
10. review of severe cases and deaths.

Madam Speaker, the national response is being structured around the following pillars with, at baseline, a national cleaning campaign –

A. Strengthened surveillance –

- immediate notification of suspected cases;
- standardised case definition;
- daily/weekly monitoring of cases;
- mapping of cases by locality;
- identification of clusters, for example, the Chikungunya in Plaine Wilhems, Port Louis and Black River;
- analysis of risk factors and exposure history.

B. Early diagnosis and laboratory support –

- strengthening access to diagnostic testing;
- use of appropriate laboratory methods, including serology and PCR when indicated;
- faster communication of laboratory results to clinical teams;

- clear guidance to clinicians not to wait for laboratory confirmation before starting treatment when leptospirosis is clinically suspected.
- C. Standardised clinical management –
- updated clinical protocol for suspected leptospirosis;
 - early antibiotics;
 - timely assessment for warning signs;
 - rapid referral of severe cases;
 - monitoring for renal failure, jaundice, thrombocytopenia, pulmonary haemorrhage and shock;
 - early involvement of nephrology, ICU and internal medicine teams when needed, especially in cases of leptospirosis.
- D. Review of deaths and severe cases –
- audit of all deaths;
 - identification of delays in presentation, diagnosis, referral, antibiotics, dialysis or ICU care;
 - corrective action at hospital and community level;
 - feedback to clinicians and public health team.
- E. Public sensitisation and risk communication –
- targeted communication in affected region;
 - information to labourers, livestock handlers, cleaners, drain workers, gardeners and outdoor workers;
 - advice to avoid working barefoot in mud, stagnant water or drains;
 - promotion of protective clothing, gloves and boots;
 - advice to seek early medical care for fever after exposure to mud, flood, animals, rodents or contaminated environments.
- F. Rodent Control and Environmental Sanitation

The Rodent Control Department/Unit has a central role in national strategy. Details regarding the Department/Unit are as follows –

- Rodent Control Unit is responsible for rodent control activities in all public health institutions, warehouses and offices of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. 36 staff are involved in rodent control activities daily.

- Activities consist of placing rodenticides and baiting, attending complaints and enquiry around the leptospirosis cases. Additionally, glue traps are also being used.
- Number of interventions –
2024 – 9,751;
2025 –25,492.
- The strategy for leptospirosis includes –
 - intensified rodent control in affected localities,
 - baiting and environmental clean-up;
 - clearing of illegal dumping sites,
 - cleaning of drains,
 - improved waste management;
 - removal of stagnant water,
 - action around markets, rivers, canals, livestock areas and high-risk residential zones.

Madam Speaker, occupational health measures for high-risk workers include labourers, cleaners, drain workers, waste handlers, gardeners, sewage workers, veterinary workers and abattoir workers.

Measures include –

- the use of boots and gloves, protective clothing,
- education on early symptoms,
- reporting of occupational exposure,
- early referral for medical assessment,
- workplace risk assessment.

The national strategy for these diseases is based on a one-health approach, recognising that the disease sits at the intersection of human health, animal reservoir, rodent, livestock, water and sanitation and the environment.

To summarise, our strategy includes –

- enhanced surveillance of suspected and confirmed cases;
- rapid reporting from hospital clinics and laboratories;
- early clinical recognition by doctors and nurses;

- immediate treatment protocols, especially for febrile patients with jaundice, renal impairment, thrombocythemia or relevant exposure;
- audit of deaths and severe cases to identify preventable factors;
- strengthening of laboratory diagnosis, including timely testing;
- rodent control, environmental sanitation in affected areas;
- multi-sectoral coordination, the local authorities, agriculture, veterinary services and environmental health team;
- protection of high-risk occupational groups,
- public education and risk communication;
- mapping of high-risk zones and targeted interventions;
- regular reporting to the Ministry on progress, gaps and corrective measures.

The present situation is being dealt with in a serious structured and evidence-based manner. The Ministry will continue to inform the public transparently, strengthen early diagnosis and treatment, carry out audit of deaths and work with all relevant ministries and authorities to reduce transmission, prevent avoidable deaths and protect the population.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (c) of the question, all regional hospitals and designated health institutions are equipped with isolation and treatment facilities for infectious diseases. The New Souillac Hospital serves as a designated admitting institution for highly infectious diseases due to its proximity to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport. Strategic stockpiles of personal protective equipment, disinfectants, medicines, laboratory consumables and infection prevention and control materials are maintained. Laboratory diagnostic capacities have also been strengthened through collaboration with organisations such as World Health Organisation, the Indian Ocean Commission and Africa CDC.

Sanitary officers are posted at the airport and port on a roster basis to screen incoming passengers and vessels. Free pratique is granted to vessels only after clearance by my Ministry. Incoming passengers are required to complete the Mauritius All-In-One Travel Form and particulars of travellers arriving from affected countries, are transmitted to the 13 Regional Health Offices for follow-up surveillance. Blood and sputum samples are taken whenever required for laboratory analysis.

In addition, dedicated general practitioners have been deployed to strengthen surveillance against imported infectious diseases. Enhanced surveillance protocols are implemented for passengers arriving from countries affected by diseases such as Mpox,

including physical visit, telephone monitoring, immediate referral procedures where necessary.

With regard to part (d) of the question, I am informed that my Ministry has sufficient stock of essential medicines, diagnostic kits and personal protective equipment.

With regard to the outbreak of Chikungunya, Dengue, Leptospirosis and Mpox, the following are available –

(a) for preventive measures

- vaccine for Mpox,
- mosquito repellent cream,
- personal protective equipment,
- sprayers and insecticide,
- rodenticide and rat glues,
- laboratory testing kits,
- impregnated insecticide bed nets

(b) for treatment for all outbreaks

- analgesic oral intravenous,
- antibiotic oral intravenous,
- anti-inflammatory in oral form.

All essential drugs needed to manage critical cases and intensive care are available in all Regional Hospitals and Medclinics.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight that the public also has an important role to play in fighting against Chikungunya, Dengue, Leptospirosis and Mpox as a responsible citizen by maintaining the plot of land in a clean state. However, we have observed that many of our citizens are not maintaining the land, thereby causing public nuisance to the neighbourhood.

I wish to highlight also that in 2024, there were 9,393 cases of Dengue and eight deaths due to Dengue. In 2025, there were 55 cases and no death.

I am confident that the decision taken by the government, as far as public health and sanitary measures are concerned, will bear the fruits and that we will win this battle against the spread of these diseases.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, your first supplementary, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What a good coincidence, Madam Speaker. Today we celebrate the International Nurses Day. Allow me to pay tribute to all those nurses who work very hard in this country to protect us, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the figures given to the House by the hon. Minister, can he confirm to the House whether they also include cases reported in private clinics?

Mr Bachoo: Of course! My Ministry is a meeting point of all the different departments that we have, whether it is government or non-government organisations.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Yes, second.

Mr Lesjongard: Yeah. Let me start with Leptospirosis, Madam Speaker. We now have and the hon. Minister confirmed, six deceased and 21 confirmed cases. Can the hon. Minister inform the House why there was a delay to establish that the last victim from Bambous, in fact, passed away due to Leptospirosis?

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, well, out of the six, all of them had comorbidities, that is, other complications, and there was one patient who was brought dead to the hospital. I know of two cases, one on the dying bed, was brought to the hospital, and if I'm not mistaken, the one who was brought from Bambous, was almost dead. Yes, the one who was brought from Bambous was already dead. He had not undergone any medication, nothing. The test was repeated thrice but unfortunately, he was brought dead, and there have been other similar cases, also.

There is one case in Camp de Masque. The man was almost on the dying bed and nothing was done because he was living alone in the house, and when his relatives found out that he was not coming out, they inquired and then they brought him nearly dead. So, these are the cases whereby we can't do anything but we are definitely on our guard. Any such case that is coming where we can save the lives of those people, we are going to do it. And again, this Leptospirosis, I have mentioned there are about 250 types. Unfortunately, I'm told in Mauritius, we have got the most serious type compared to La Réunion and other countries.

Madam Speaker: Okay, yes, third question.

Mr Lesjongard: I'll come to that later, Madam Speaker. Can the hon. Minister confirm that the observed mortality rate in the country, and he said six deceased, exceeds WHO benchmarks, which is between 5 to 15%, and if so, will he inform the House what specific factors are contributing to that high rate of death, Madam Speaker?

Mr Bachoo: I have just mentioned. I have just mentioned, unfortunately, there are about 250 types of that disease. We have it in La Réunion and it is important to compare Mauritius with Réunion carefully and scientifically.

First, the denominator may be different. Réunion is most likely detecting and reporting many mild cases and therefore, its fatality rate will appear lower. Since Mauritius is detecting and reporting mainly severe hospitalised cases, the apparent fatality rate appears to be higher.

Second, there may be differences in case definition and reporting. Some countries include suspected, probable and confirmed cases differently. This changes the denominator and therefore, the calculated mortality rate.

Third, there may be differences in circulating serovars and reservoirs. Studies from Réunion have apparently identified cattle as a major reservoir while recognising possible role for dog, cows and mice. The local mix of reservoir and serovars may influence clinical severity. In Réunion, there has been a shift in the serovar causing Leptospirosis. In recent years, most cases have been caused by *Leptospira borgpetersenii*, which causes less severe disease, whereas prior to 2020, most cases were caused by *Leptospira Icterohaemorrhagiae*.

Fourth, differences may arise for delays in presentation. Patients who present late, already jaundiced, breathless or shocked, have a much higher risk of death.

Fifth, there may be differences in comorbidities. Mauritius has a high burden of diabetics compared to Réunion Island, chronic kidney disease, cardiovascular disease and obesity. These conditions may worsen outcomes in severe infectious diseases, including Leptospirosis.

Sixth, mortality is strongly influenced by whether patients develop pulmonary haemorrhage, renal failure, shock or multi-organ failure. Severe pulmonary Leptospirosis is associated with particularly high mortality.

I just want to explain; you have to compare like with like. Unfortunately, we have a country, we have got more than 20% of our population who are diabetics and that becomes a cause of concern for us compared to Réunion Island.

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, the fact is that we have a mortality rate which is much higher than the international benchmark.

Madam Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether his Ministry has undertaken a post-mortem audit or clinical review of Leptospirosis cases, and if so, will he confirm to the House that such a review will be initiated to identify systemic gaps in diagnosis and case management?

Madam Speaker: Post mortem.

Mr Bachoo: I have already taken the decision and the experts – I can call experts, those who are really skilled in that, regarding the six deaths which have occurred – have already gone through the details and I can submit the report in the House. I can name the research scholar that I have in my Ministry, Dr. Nuckchady. I'm proud of him, he has been a laureate and he's working in my Ministry. He has done a thorough study into that. And for the benefit of the House, I'm going to present all the three operational plans, whether it is for Chikungunya, Leptospirosis or even for Mpox. We are ready with all these. I'm going to submit it to the House and I can assure the House that we are not sleeping, we are working. In fact, we are acting.

Madam Speaker: Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House that the high rate of mortality is due to late diagnosis, Madam Speaker?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, I repeat again and again. In such a case of Leptospirosis, it's only when the patient turns up. He's in his house; we are not aware of it. And as I told you, the first two cases I remember very well of old people, they already have a number of comorbidities, as my colleague is telling, too many complications, and then it becomes difficult. It's not a question of comparing. Here we have got a problem, our own specificity, but I can assure the House. I have already given you a long list of the actions that have been taken by my Ministry. Anybody who needs their support, they come immediately before the doorstep and they try to help.

So, I can say frankly, sincerely, that with limited capacity, we are doing an extraordinary job. I do hope that we will be able to overcome all these problems.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister confirm if the proliferation of rats around the island is due to considerable delays in the collection of solid waste by municipalities and district councils?

Et tout le monde sait, Madame la présidente, le pays est sale...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Twa kin salir li !*

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let the hon. Minister reply.

Mr Bachoo: The real cause of proliferation and so much of degradation is because the last 10 years, nothing was done. That is the real cause. And I can assure the House that in each local authority, wherever you turn, you will see cleaning works going on at an accelerating speed. And I have to thank the hon. Minister of Local Government for that.

Madam Speaker: Okay, your next question. Don't comment, please!

(Interruptions)

Chut!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, with regard to Chikungunya now, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House if his Ministry is in the presence of a report from WHO on the chemicals used for fumigation, and if yes, will he table the report?

Madam Speaker: Fumigation.

Mr Bachoo: I know very well. We have got regular meetings with WHO. It's almost regular meetings and one representative of WHO is in all my meetings; whenever I conduct.

(Interruptions)

First of all, let me explain. And not only that, WHO is giving us full support. I remember, as far as larviciding is concerned, they are in favour of it. But they have been slightly against fogging.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Mr Bachoo: Fogging because they say that those insects have already developed...

Hon. Members: Resistance!

Mr Bachoo: Resistance! They have developed resistance. Hence, fogging had to be decreased. We have completely eliminated fogging, but larviciding and all these things are already continuing. I am not aware of any chemicals that we are using which are harmful.

Madam Speaker: Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: I understand that he has a report in his possession whereby...

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Lesjongard: Can he table that report to the House?

Mr Bachoo: I'm not speaking of report. I'm speaking of what information is available to me. If there was a report in my hand, without hesitation, I would have submitted it.

Mr Lesjongard: You have the report.

Mr Bachoo: But WHO is praising our Government and our Ministry for the good work that is being done. It's not an exaggeration if I say that WHO is also trying to help us financially to combat all these diseases.

Madam Speaker: Next question, please!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Madam Speaker, Government, in 2025, proposed the introduction of sterilised mosquitoes into the wild, starting with the villages of Triolet, where some 80,000 mosquitoes were released. Can the hon. Minister state to the House...

Madam Speaker: Male ones. Male ones.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, male ones. ...if this measure was conclusive, and if yes, how, Madam Speaker?

Mr Bachoo: It is not 80,000 now. It's on average 100,000 per week. We are we are releasing 100,000 in the air. But, you know, recently, though we are releasing, we cannot release everywhere because where larviciding campaign is going on, we are going to kill what we are producing. So, we are not utilising it in areas where we are doing larviciding. We are using it in places where larviciding is not being undertaken. It is 100,000 on average per week.

Madam Speaker: Next question, please.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, let me come to Mpox, Madam Speaker. The hon. Minister has confirmed that we have had imported cases. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of protocols in place at the airport and the port to detect this virus on passengers?

Mr Bachoo: I have lengthily spoken on that, Madam Speaker. I am not going to repeat all these. But I can assure the whole House that complete surveillance is being kept everywhere at the airport and at the harbour also. All passengers that are coming, I have already mentioned that we are following those passengers, particularly anyone coming from countries which are affected by those mosquitoes.

I can assure the House on that. Our Ministry is very well known; our department is known for that. If you come from abroad, they will try to pursue, run after you, unless and until you give your pricks. This is a known fact.

Mr Mohamed: I confirm!

Madam Speaker: One last question, please.

Mr Lesjongard: No, I've got two last questions, Madam Speaker, please. In terms of security at our hospitals, can the hon. Minister now inform the House whether it has been established how a patient with Mpox managed to escape from the Victoria Hospital?

Mr Bachoo: During visitor's time of one hour, do you think it is possible for my nursing officers to follow someone?

Madam Speaker: No, no, answer! Answer!

Mr Bachoo: I am told there was one case where he escaped. But out of hundreds and thousands of people who come and go in the hospital, if one such case occurs, I am not going to blame anybody nor my nursing officers who are there.

Mr Jhummun: *Pa prizon sa!*

Mr Lesjongard: Last one, Madam Speaker. We are facing a virus outbreak on four fronts, Madam Speaker, and winter season has just started. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of his plan to manage this particular period of the year with an abrupt surge in cases of flu, and like I said, the four different viruses?

Now, in the same vein – I heard what he said – in case of full capacity in our hospitals and keeping in mind that certain departments might be quarantined to avoid contamination, what is the contingency plan? Will patients be sent home, Madam Speaker?

Mr Bachoo: As far as flu is concerned, we have already started massive vaccinations throughout the country.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Bachoo: Anyone who is above 60 years of age, all of them are already getting it.

Secondly, you know, during winter, there is a tendency for all these; at least, for Chikungunya to go down. This is out of experience, we know, during winter.

Thirdly, as far as hospitals are concerned, I can assure the House that all measures that are required to be taken have already been taken. I have no doubt that all those who are involved in it, directly or indirectly, are doing their best to avoid such type of diseases.

Madam Speaker: Okay, one question, Dr. Aumeer. Last question and then that's it.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I ask the hon. Minister in regard to communicable diseases with the recent flare up of Hantavirus on cruise ships in one or two particular countries whether, his Ministry has put a preparedness plan, particularly at borders, so that they are properly screened to avoid having any cases in Mauritius? Thank you.

Mr Bachoo: I thank the hon. Member. This is a question which I expected from the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Okay, this...

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, but this is...

Madam Speaker: Okay, hon. Members!

Mr Bachoo: This is a rare, but potentially serious...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members!

Mr Bachoo: A rare, but potentially serious infection linked to infected rodents and transmitted through urine droppings or saliva. So, my Ministry is maintaining vigilance through surveillance, clinical awareness, coordination with public health and environment services. We are in contact with the international organisations, the WHO and COI also. They are trying to give us all types of help.

In any case, even if it comes, there's a doubt, then, of course, we have the National Institute for Communicable Disease, a laboratory in South Africa and Louis Pasteur in

Madagascar. We are in contact with them. We'll be sending the urine for inspection and all. So, we are readily prepared for that.

Madam Speaker: Okay, time is up!

Ms Anquetil: Well done, Anil!

Madam Speaker: One moment. Now, we go to PMQT.

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/630 will be replied by hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

PQ B/668 will be replied by the hon. Ag. Prime Minister, time permitting.

PQ A/34 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands.

Hon. François!

Mr François: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege to ask the first PQ B/631 of this PMQT to the first female DPM and hon. Ag. Prime Minister of our Republic!

**PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA – FREE TRADE AGREEMENT – ZERO-TARIFF
POLICY RECIPROCATION**

(No. B/630) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the People's Republic of China, he will state –

- (a) whether Mauritius will be reciprocating the recent zero-tariff policy to our imports applicable as from 01 May 2026, and
- (b) in respect of the Free Trade Agreement entered therewith in 2021, indicate –
 - (i) whether Mauritius is benefitting therefrom and, if so, indicate the impact thereof on local businesses, and
 - (ii) the total amount of revenue foregone in terms of excise and import duties as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

**RODRIGUES, POINTE CANON STATION – WEATHER & CLIMATE DATA
ACCESSIBILITY**

(No. B/631) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to weather and climate data and information for Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Meteorological Services, information as to whether same is available and accessible to the public at the Pte Canon Meteorological Station and, if not, indicate the reasons therefor and the remedial measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

The Ag. Prime Minister (Ms A. Navarre-Marie): Thank you.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Acting Director of the Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) that the official website of the MMS provides comprehensive real-time weather information, forecasts, and safety warnings for the Republic of Mauritius, including Rodrigues, Agaléga and St Brandon.

For the island of Rodrigues, dedicated observations and forecasts, including current temperature, wind speed/direction, and humidity, are available on the website of the MMS. Hourly observations are transmitted on a daily basis to the MMS, of which, communiqués are published in French on the official website at 04:30 hours, 11:30 hours, and 16:30 hours. The last 24-hour rainfall data is also provided in the weather communiqués.

I'm further informed by the MMS that daily weather communiqués for the island of Rodrigues are broadcast on the MBC Rodrigues radio channel at 05:00 hours to provide weather forecast. A meteorologist provides daily live interventions at around 05:00 hours and as and when required during the day. Moreover, current weather conditions as well as information pertaining to wind,

temperature, and relative humidity collected at Pointe Canon and Pointe Corail Stations are displayed on real-time on a 24/7 basis on the website.

I wish to highlight that daily fishermen weather communiqués in Creole language are issued at 04:10 hours in the morning and updated at 10:30 hours on the same day to inform the fishers' community about sea state and provide useful advice for their safety. In case of severe weather conditions, warning bulletins are issued.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that early warning bulletins related to severe weather conditions such as heavy/torrential rainfall, strong winds, heavy swells, tropical cyclones and tsunamis are issued by the MMS for Rodrigues when the island is exposed to such risks. Timely weather warnings are disseminated through various communication channels, thereby supporting disaster risk reduction, public safety and preparedness measures over the island of Rodrigues. Furthermore, the Pointe Canon Rodrigues Meteorological Station communicates with Rodrigues Emergency Operation Command (REOC), when activated, during severe weather conditions, and information is disseminated to the public. The Rodrigues Meteorological Station also provides walk-in information to its stakeholders and the public.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to the Mauritius Meteorological Services Charges Regulations 2022, service charges are applicable to any person who wishes to obtain any information or service as specified in the Regulations, subject to an application being made to the Director of the MMS. The data referred to is in respect of rainfall, temperature, humidity, wind, mean sea-level pressure, radiation or sunshine hours, and are available on daily, hourly, monthly and yearly basis.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. François!

Mr François: Yes, I have a few supplementaries, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I'll give you two. We'll try and keep two as far as possible.

Mr François: Okay.

Madam Speaker: So that everyone gets a chance to have a question.

Mr François: Thank you.

L'honorable Première ministre par intérim, a-t-elle connaissance que les données des cinq stations météorologiques automatiques opérationnelles à Rodrigues ne sont pas transmises instantanément à aucun récepteur, ni à Pointe Canon, ni à l'aéroport de Plaine Corail depuis plus de cinq ans ? Ce qui implique l'absence d'affichage et même les personnels n'ont pas accès en temps réel à ces données. Ils doivent contacter Vacoas.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madame la présidente, comme je l'ai expliqué dans ma réponse, le *MMS* émet quotidiennement des communiqués météorologiques pour Rodrigues en version française de manière régulière à 4h30, à 11h30 et à 16h30.

D'autres informations sont également disponibles, à savoir le bulletin climatique mensuel, le résumé pluviométrique et les perspectives. De plus, il y a déjà un *portal*. Donc, un portail en ligne existe déjà et les informations climatiques relatives à Rodrigues peuvent être consultées à n'importe quel moment.

Madam Speaker: Second!

Mr François: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

L'honorable Première ministre par intérim, est-elle consciente qu'il est crucial de moderniser les instruments des stations météorologiques à Rodrigues, principalement à Pointe Canon et à l'aéroport de Plaine Corail, afin de générer des rapports météorologiques précis pour l'aviation civile ? Par exemple, à Plaine Corail, il y a qu'un vieux baromètre et un vieil anémomètre sans *backup*.

The Ag. Prime Minister: I will look into the matter, Madam Speaker, and will communicate later.

Madam Speaker: Of course. No, Miss Collet, yes.

Ms Collet: Merci beaucoup, Madame la présidente. L'honorable Première ministre, peut-elle fournir des explications à la Chambre pourquoi les données météorologiques et climatiques relatives à Rodrigues ne sont pas facilement accessibles au public malgré l'importance croissante de la résilience climatique et de la préparation aux catastrophes ?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madame la présidente, je pense avoir déjà répondu à cette question.

Ms Collet: Est-ce que l'honorable Madame la Première ministre pourra informer la Chambre sur la possibilité de revoir les règlements existants concernant l'accès et paiement pour avoir des copies des rapports météorologiques relatifs à Rodrigues, puisqu'à présent un rapport est fourni seulement après application faite à Vacoas contre paiement d'une somme de R1000. Pourra-t-elle voir la possibilité d'avoir un comptoir à Rodrigues pour ce genre de demande et paiement ? Merci.

Madam Speaker: Yes !

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madame la présidente, je vais transmettre le message à qui de droit.

Madam Speaker: *Très bien.* No, no, we've already got four questions – four supplementaries, I mean.

Now, the hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue.

Mr Caserne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Since this will be my first PQ addressed to the hon. DPM, please, allow me to address my sincere congratulations to hon. Ms Navarre Marie for her promotion.

POLICE QUARTERS – LOCATION & OCCUPANCY – PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/632) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Police Quarters, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police and table the list thereof, indicating the –

- (a) location thereof, and
- (b) number thereof occupied and unoccupied respectively, giving details of projects earmarked for implementation thereat, if any.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) and part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that there are 608 police quarters, out of which 545 are being occupied for residential purposes. The remaining 63 are unoccupied as they are beyond repair and there is no project for their rehabilitation.

As at now, there is no project for the construction of new police quarters. I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Yes, one question.

Mr Caserne: May I ask to the hon. Ag. Prime Minister, what are the criteria for having access to these quarters, please?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Criteria to access. I am informed that police quarters are allocated to married police officers for occupation by them and their families as long as they are serving members of the Mauritius Police Force. They also abide with the conditions and obligations for the allocation thereof, as laid down in Police Standing Orders 140, and the lease agreement.

I am also informed that upon retirement, secondment of duty or resignation, the occupants have to vacate the police quarters on or before the date of their retirement or resignation.

Madam Speaker: Yes, alright. Hon. Ms Savabaddy!

FATAL ROAD ACCIDENTS – REPORTED CASES

(No. B/633) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to fatal road accidents, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof since January 2026 to date, indicating the –

- (a) main reasons therefor;
- (b) number thereof linked to drink or drug driving;
- (c) number of hit and run cases, and
- (d) number of arrests effected in connection therewith.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that for the period 01 January 2026 to 07 May 2026, a total of 48 cases of fatal road accidents have been recorded, resulting in the death of 51 persons. Of these, three cases were linked to driving under influence of intoxicating drink or drugs, and one case was reported as a hit-and-run accident.

In connection with these cases, 37 persons have been arrested and provisional charges of involuntary homicide have been lodged against them. 36 accused have been released on bail with conditions, while one accused, involved in driving under the influence of intoxicating drugs, is currently on remand in prison.

I am further informed that investigations into these accidents are ongoing.

Madam Speaker, one life lost on our roads is one too many. Several preventive measures are being taken by Police to reduce road accidents, including sensitisation campaigns, roadblocks, random alcohol and drug testing, targeted operations against reckless driving, and speed control using handheld cameras and radars. However, greater discipline

and responsibility from all road users remain essential to reducing preventable accidents and saving lives.

Madam Speaker, Government is further reinforcing measures to improve road safety and curbing dangerous driving behaviours. It has been decided last week to amend the Penalty Point System by increasing from 3 to 6 points to 5 to 10 points for those using telephone while driving.

Ms Savabaddy: Yes. I have two supplementaries. Thank you, Madam Speaker. From the answer given by the hon. Ag. Prime Minister, is the number of fatal road accidents on rise or on downward trend with the Penalty Point System?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I am not in presence of this information, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, second.

Ms Savabaddy: My second and my last. Can the hon. Ag. Prime Minister also inform the House, what is the approximate time between accident and the matter to be brought forward the court, for in my constituency last year, a young kid K. A., at a tender age, has lost his life, then the family does not hear anything about the inquiry. Is that normal after such a tragic loss? Thank you.

The Ag. Prime Minister: It is not normal, Madam Speaker. I will enquire.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Now we have hon. Apollon, Second Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien!

SSR AIRPORT – DRUG IMPORTATION CHARGE – ARREST (23 MARCH 2026) – INQUIRY

(No. B/634) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the arrest of a passenger on a charge of drug importation at the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport on or about Monday 23 March 2026, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand regarding the inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating whether the collaboration of the French Authorities has been or is being sought in connection therewith.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that Ms L.L.I.R., a French national, arrived in Mauritius on 23 March 2026 at 08.06

hours on board flight MK015 from France. After completion of immigration formalities, Ms L.L.I.R. collected a suitcase from the conveyor belt and proceeded through the green channel where she was asked to proceed to the Customs Examination Hall. The suitcase was scanned and she was allowed to leave the airport premises.

Later, on the same day, an unclaimed suitcase tagged in the name of Ms L.L.I.R. was seized by Custom and ADSU officers at the airport. Following a search on the content of the unclaimed suitcase, 10.43 kg of cannabis and 6.05 kg of cannabis resin were found.

On 24 March 2026, ADSU officers arrested Ms L.L.I.R. and lodged a provisional charge against her for the offences of Drug Dealing with aggravating circumstances, Importation of Cannabis and Importation of Hashish with an averment of trafficking. Ms L.L.I.R. has been remanded to police cell since 24 March 2026. Police have raised objection to her release on bail.

Madam Speaker, in the course of this enquiry by ADSU, nine other persons, including two Police Constables, have been arrested. Police Constable N.P. posted at the ADSU airport and Police Constable A.H. posted at Mahebourg Police Station have been remanded to Police Cell since 24 March and 25 March 2026, respectively. Police have objected to their release on bail.

The seven other persons arrested in this case have been charged with Drug Dealing for the importation of dangerous drugs. Three of the suspects have been remanded to jail and the remaining four suspects have been remanded to Police Cell.

The Police sought and obtained intelligence report on Ms L.L.I.R. from INTERPOL France.

Madam Speaker, since the inquiry is ongoing, it will not be appropriate for me to provide further information. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes? Good. Next question.

Now, B/635 has been withdrawn.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD – AIRCRAFTS – SALES & PURCHASING DETAILS

(No. B/635) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the

aircrafts, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from., information as to, since 2014 to 2024, the number thereof –

- (a) sold, indicating in each case, the proceeds thereof and time of service at time of sale, and
- (b) purchased and hired, indicating in each case the
 - (i) cost thereof;
 - (ii) time in service at the time of purchase/hire, and
 - (iii) number of times same was grounded, indicating the reasons and duration thereof.

(Withdrawn)

Madam Speaker: So, the next question is for hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac.

**COVID-19 PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT FUND – INVESTMENT IN SILVER BANK
– SELECTION EXERCISE**

(No. B/636) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the then COVID-19 Projects Development Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to who authorized the deposit of Rs 3 billion thereof into the Silver Bank in 2023, indicating whether the selection of the said bank was made pursuant to a bidding exercise.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund, now known as the Projects Development Fund, was set up on 28 April 2020 as a special fund by way of regulations made under the Finance and Audit Act.

The Fund is administered and managed by the Projects Development Committee.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that the Projects Development Committee had invested a total amount of Rs3 billion in Silver Bank Limited in 2022 and not in 2023 as mentioned in the PQ. The investments were made on three occasions as follows –

- (i) Rs500 million in April 2022;
- (ii) Rs500 million in August 2022, and

(iii) Rs2 billion in September 2022.

At that time, the Committee was chaired by the former Financial Secretary and comprised representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Finance, and the Bank of Mauritius. The Committee also comprised the Accountant General, an officer from the Attorney General's Office, a former Adviser of the Ministry of Finance, as well as three representatives from the private sector.

All these investments were made following the approval of the then Minister of Finance as provided for in the Finance and Audit Act...

An hon. Member: *Savat dodo!*

The Ag. Prime Minister: ... and the Finance and Audit (Projects Development Fund) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

Madam Speaker, all these investments were made despite the former Minister of Finance being aware that the Silver Bank had the following systemic issues –

- (i) The Silver Bank was a newly constituted bank, being given that on 11 June 2021, the Board of the Bank of Mauritius approved the acquisition of the shares on Banyan Tree Bank by the shareholders of Silver Bank. The Banyan Tree Bank was itself a problematic bank.
- (ii) The Silver Bank had at its inception a shareholding structure not in conformity with the provisions of the Banking Act 2004, which stipulates that no single shareholder should hold more than 10% of shares in a bank, except with the prior approval of the Bank of Mauritius. In fact, approval for a 75% shareholding to a single shareholder, in this case, Ginni Gupta, was given by the Bank of Mauritius and this tantamount to endangering existing and future depositors, and
- (iii) Silver Bank had difficulties in appointing an external auditor to perform the mandatory auditing of its accounts.

Madam Speaker, again, we must highlight the weakness in the supervisory role of the former management of the Bank of Mauritius. The representative of the Bank of Mauritius on the Projects Development Committee intimated that investment in Silver Bank, at that time, was safe as it was being supervised by the Bank of Mauritius.

Despite knowing all these systemic issues, the former Minister of Finance gave his approval for these massive investments of public funds into such an ailing bank. With the

unfolding of all the facts today, it is clear that this was a wrong decision to invest public funds in such a bank.

An hon. Member: Shame!

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, let me come to the process for investing Rs3 billion into the Silver Bank Limited.

With regard to the first investment of Rs500 million, on 05 April 2022, the Projects Development Committee received an investment offer from Silver Bank Limited through the Ministry of Finance for its consideration.

On 06 April 2022, the Committee sought quotations from four other commercial banks. Quotations were received from two banks, namely State Bank (Mauritius) Ltd (SBM) and Bank One Ltd.

On the basis of an evaluation of the quotations made by the Projects Development Committee and taking into account the offer from Silver Bank Limited, the Projects Development Committee agreed to invest Rs2.5 billion as follows –

- Rs500 million in Silver Bank Limited;
- Rs1 billion at SBM, and
- Rs1 billion at Bank One.

The approval of the then Minister of Finance was accordingly sought and obtained for the investments.

As regards the second investment of Rs500 million, on 11 August 2022, the Projects Development Committee received another offer from Silver Bank Limited through the Ministry of Finance. The Committee invested Rs500 million directly into Silver Bank Limited after seeking and obtaining the approval of the then Minister of Finance.

Concerning the third investment of Rs2 billion, on 31 August 2022, the Projects Development Committee sought quotations from various commercial banks. Quotations were received from six commercial banks, including Silver Bank Limited. On the basis of an evaluation exercise, the Committee invested Rs2 billion in Silver Bank Limited, again after having sought and obtained the approval of the then Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, out of the Rs3 billion invested in the Silver Bank Limited, Rs500 million are still outstanding and there is no certainty of its recovery.

It is regrettable that the decision to invest so much of taxpayers' money was made only on the basis of higher returns without any consideration at all of the risks involved.

Madam Speaker, basic principles of portfolio investment stipulate that investment decisions must consider both returns and risks. Clearly, the risks associated with the investments in Silver Bank Limited were prohibitively high. It is incomprehensible that such investments were made and with the support of the *protégés* of the previous regime at the Bank of Mauritius.

There is definitely *anguille sous roche*! The Financial Crimes Commission is currently investigating into this whole financial scam.

Madam Speaker: Yes, good. Hon. Ms Bérenger, yes?

BUDGET 2025-2026 – FAIR SHARE CONTRIBUTION – REVENUE PROJECTED

(No. B/637) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Fair Share Contribution, as announced in the Budget Speech 2025-2026 and subsequently amended, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the –

- (a) amount of revenue projected under the original measure;
- (b) revised amount of revenue expected following the amendments, and
- (c) number of individual taxpayers and companies expected to be liable under the original and revised schemes, respectively.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as everyone knows, the previous Government left public finances in an unprecedented state of precariousness, a disastrous legacy hindering our actions. The economic mismanagement and irresponsible fiscal stewardship have led to public debt soaring beyond unbelievable level and the country edging to the brink of a downgrade to speculative grade (junk status) by Moody's.

In the last budget, Government had to, accordingly, focus its efforts on bold fiscal consolidation measures to address the situation, including implementation of several measures to increase revenue from income tax collected from individuals and corporates.

Indeed, one of the main decisions was to appeal to the spirit of solidarity among the more fortunate, urging them to support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society. A Fair Share Contribution has been introduced for three years on high income earners and highly profitable corporations.

Madam Speaker, let me remind the House that, in spite of the pressing need for fiscal consolidation, the Personal Income Tax System was reviewed to make it fairer. The income tax exemption threshold was raised by Rs110,000 and the number of tax bands was reduced from 11 to only 3. As a result, it was estimated that 44,000 income earners would be removed from the tax net while some 75,000 individuals, earning between Rs500,000 and Rs1 million in a year, would actually pay less income tax than under the previous tax structure.

The tax structure becomes more progressive above the Rs1 million threshold.

The wealthiest taxpayers, in addition to their normal income tax payable, are required to contribute under the Fair Share Contribution for 3 years, an extra 15% of their chargeable income in excess of Rs12 million.

Madam Speaker, in the Budget Speech, it was announced that a high-income earner, earning an annual net income exceeding Rs12 million, inclusive of dividend income, will be required to pay a Fair Share Contribution at the rate of 15% of his chargeable income after adding thereto any dividend income received during the year from domestic companies.

On 17 June 2025, with a view to dispelling any doubt about the interpretation of paragraph 272 of the Budget Speech 2025-2026 relating to the Fair Share Contribution, the Prime Minister informed the House that it relates to a high income earner, earning annual net income exceeding Rs12 million, inclusive of dividend income received during the year from domestic companies, who will be required to pay a Fair Share Contribution at the rate of 15% of his chargeable income in excess of Rs12 million.

This clarification was brought to provide tax certainty and maintain the attractiveness of our jurisdiction to high-net-worth individuals and for high-end foreign talents and investors.

Madam Speaker, as regards corporate income tax, in the last budget Government has, *inter alia*, introduced an Alternative Minimum Tax on certain profitable sectors with low effective tax rate. A Qualified Domestic Minimum Top-Up Tax was also introduced on a resident parent or subsidiary of a large multinational enterprise to raise their effective tax rate to 15%.

In addition, a Fair Share Contribution of up to 5% of chargeable income has been introduced for three years on domestic enterprises having annual chargeable income above Rs24 million.

There is an additional Fair Share Contribution of 2.5% on the chargeable income of banks on their domestic operations.

Madam Speaker, representations were received from banks and telecom operators, raising concern that they are already subject to special levies imposed partly on turnover and that the Fair Share Contribution would increase their effective tax rates to excessive levels.

It was accordingly decided that the tax burden of banks and telecom operators, that is, the aggregate of corporate tax, levy, corporate climate responsibility levy, corporate social responsibility, and Fair Share Contribution will be capped at 35% of their chargeable income.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (a), (b) and (c) of the question, regarding the impact of the change brought to the Fair Share Contribution, I am informed by the MRA as follows –

- (a) the initial annual projected contribution from individuals was Rs1.3 billion and from corporates Rs3.8 billion;
- (b) the revised annual projection from individuals is Rs535 million and from corporates Rs3.25 billion – yes, Rs3.25 billion – bulk of which comes from banks and the financial services sector, and
- (c) the initial estimated number of individuals subject to the contribution was 425 and the revised projection 405, whilst there is no change in the estimated number of liable corporates which was estimated at 573.

Madam Speaker, revisions were brought to the Fair Share Contribution to strike an appropriate balance between revenue mobilisation objectives and the need to ensure fairness, equity, and competitiveness for both individuals and businesses, while also safeguarding economic activity and maintaining Mauritius as an attractive jurisdiction for investment.

Madam Speaker, both the IMF and Moody's Ratings have, in their recent reports, acknowledged the concrete progress being made by the Government in restoring economic stability and consolidating public finances. The IMF has specifically underlined that our fiscal position is expected to improve significantly this year, reflecting higher revenues mainly from the Fair Share Contribution.

Madam Speaker: Yes, you have one?

Ms J. Bérenger: *Yes, je voudrais savoir quelles mesures ont été prévues pour prévenir toute forme d'optimisation fiscale ou de restructuration visant à contourner le Fair Share Contribution.*

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madame la présidente, comme je ne suis pas la *substantive minister*, je conseillerais à l'honorable membre d'adresser sa question au Premier ministre quand il retourne.

Madam Speaker: Okay, good. Time is up anyway.

Now, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/638, B/639, B/642, B/643, B/644, B/645, B/646, B/647, B/648, B/649, and B/640.

Now, we go to questions to Ministers. Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, hon. Dr. Ms Daureeawo!

RIVIÈRE DU POSTE – STATE LAND – USE & FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

(No. B/650) Dr. Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to State land at Rivière du Poste, he will state the extent thereof lying bare thereat, indicating whether his Ministry is

–

- (a) in presence of an application from certain members of the public for the use and occupation of part thereof and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof, and
- (b) envisaging any future development or use thereof, including the construction of a Centre for Women on the plot adjacent to the traffic lights.

Mr Mohamed: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There is, at present, a plot of land of an extent of three acres adjacent to the traffic lights at Rivière du Poste that was vested in the then Ministry of Environment and NDU for a sports complex.

However, the project was never undertaken. In year 2008, a portion of 1 acre 44 perches was excised therefrom and vested in the then Ministry of Women's Right, Child Development and Family Welfare for the construction of a women's centre. That was back in 2008. In addition, an extent of 12 perches has been used for the provision of an access road to the remaining portion of 1 acre 44 perches.

Following Budget Speech of 2022-2023, the extent of 1 acre 44 perches, retrieved from the then Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, was vested in

the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Family Welfare for the setting up of an integrated shelter for victims of gender-based violence.

I am sure the hon. Member would not be surprised. As at date, none of the two projects have materialised, and the whole plot of 2 acres 88 perches is still undeveloped.

In regard to part (a), there is no record at my Ministry of any application for that plot of land from any member of the public.

In regard to part (b), I understand that the Ministry of Youth and Sports is awaiting availability of funds to start its project, whilst the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare has only just informed my Ministry that in view of budget constraints, it is not envisaging any construction project for the time being. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, thank you, Minister. No? Good!

Second Member for Rodrigues, hon. François!

MEDICAL & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – ACTION PLAN

(No. B/651) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the implementation of the policy of developing medical and sustainable tourism for the transformation of Mauritius into a medical hub, he will state where matters stand, indicating the expected benefits thereof for the tourism sector, further indicating how same is expected to contribute towards enhancing the attractiveness of Mauritius as a destination.

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I will reply to this Parliamentary Question.

Medical tourism constitutes a niche market in our tourism product offering, just like cultural tourism and sports tourism, amongst others. As per statistics provided by the Economic Development Board in 2025, there are over 4,000 foreign patients visiting Mauritius annually for medical and wellness treatments. Approximately 1,000 patients, out of these foreign patients, are from Africa, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros.

Given the growth potential of this niche market, the Ministry of Tourism has, since August 2025, initiated the development of an action plan aimed at advancing medical tourism

in Mauritius in collaboration with the Economic Development Board. The action plan aims at

–

- (i) developing and promoting Mauritius as a leading destination for medical tourism;
- (ii) facilitating investment in healthcare facilities, wellness centres and medical support infrastructure;
- (iii) promoting cross-sector synergies between healthcare providers, travel operators and hospitality services, and
- (iv) increasing international awareness of Mauritius' medical tourism offerings.

Madam Speaker, to support the preparation of this action plan, the Ministry of Tourism held a series of meetings with key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the private healthcare providers, the Medical Council, the Prime Minister's Office and the Passport and Immigration Office. These consultations were intended to gather valuable insights on the further development of medical tourism, to assess the issues and challenges currently faced by stakeholders, and to identify priority areas for improvement and policy interventions.

The following challenges were highlighted –

- (i) lack of common and shared vision regarding medical tourism in Mauritius, with no clear definition thereto;
- (ii) poor coordination and support between public and private health providers;
- (iii) different specialised high quality medical services being marketed individually by the different service providers;
- (iv) poor visibility of our specialised high-quality medical services on the international market, and
- (v) lengthy administrative procedures both for foreign clients and the operators.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that a first draft of the action plan has been elaborated, in March 2026, and circulated to key stakeholders to gather their views and comments prior to validation and finalisation thereof.

With regard to the benefits that medical tourism will bring to our country and how it will enhance its attractiveness, I must inform the House, Madam Speaker, that medical tourism will –

- (a) no doubt position Mauritius as a destination for both high-quality healthcare and leisure experiences, especially over the recent years, where our country has been investing in the development of public and private healthcare facilities equipped with advanced medical technologies and internationally trained practitioners;
- (b) enhance international visibility and reputation of Mauritius as a modern, professional and service oriented destination, more specifically among African countries, taking into account our strategic location between Africa and Asia, and
- (c) stimulate investment in healthcare infrastructure, technology and facilities, boost local suppliers and value chains such as pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, rehabilitation and wellness centres.

Madam Speaker, our country has significant potential to establish itself as a competitive medical tourism destination, supported by its modern healthcare infrastructure, qualified medical professionals and strong reputation for safety and political stability. For this, we require concerted efforts from all stakeholders in the health sector, coordinated actions, synergy between the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and above all, a well-formulated strategy.

I am sure, Madam Speaker, that the action plan which has been elaborated in consultation with relevant stakeholders, whether in the health sector or otherwise, will chart out the way for the development of a proper medical tourism sector in our country. I have no doubt that in the years to come, the medical tourism sector will not only be one of our strategic economic pillars, but also a main driver of our foreign exchange earnings.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr François: Just one supplementary. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister be agreeable to share the draft action plan with us, parliamentarians, as well, before its validation? The draft action plan.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I will check with the substantive Minister. If it is possible, we will do it.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Ms Collet!

Ms Collet: Merci beaucoup, Madame la présidente. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre pourrait indiquer à la Chambre si ce premier brouillon de l'*action plan* inclut des services pour les étrangers souffrant d'infertilité ?

Madam Speaker: Il ne va pas savoir !

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Allow me to check with the substantive Minister. Of course, we will discuss about the details in the future.

Madam Speaker: So, basically, we do not know which areas? Yes. So, let us find.

I will take another question. Hon. First Member for Port-Louis North!

LOCAL AUTHORITIES - RECENT RECRUITMENT EXERCISE

(No. B/652) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port-Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the report submitted following the inquiry conducted into the recent recruitment exercise in the local authorities, he will state –

- (a) whether copy thereof will be tabled, and
- (b) the measures taken or being envisaged on the findings thereof.

Mr Wochit: Madam Speaker, I am informed that recruitment and appointment exercises for local authorities fall under the responsibility of the Local Government Service Commission, which is an independent statutory body. I am further informed that under section 4 (2) of the Local Government Service Commission Act, the Commission shall not, in the exercise of its functions, be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority.

Accordingly, neither my Ministry nor I, as Minister of Local Government, can interfere in any matter falling within the statutory function or internal processes of the Commission, which operates under the Prime Minister's Office.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that the recruitment exercises, referred to in the question, were carried out following the reconstitution of the Local Government Service Commission, after this Government took office in November 2024. I am further informed that concerns were subsequently raised regarding the manner in which certain appointment had been processed under the previous administration. Following this, and after consultation with the Attorney General's Office, advice was tendered to the effect that the appointment convened were tainted with nullity, procedurally improper and patently illegal. Consequently, I am informed that the employment of 1,463 employees, recruited on a temporary basis, was brought to an end on 15 June 2025, in accordance with the advice received and legal position prevailing at that time.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that a number of those employees challenged the decision before the Supreme Court and obtained interim relief, pending the determination of the matter. In view of the stay granted by the court, they were allowed to continue working until final judgment was delivered. I am informed that following the judgment of the Supreme Court on 23 January 2026, the termination process was implemented on 29 January 2026, in accordance with the decision of the court.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that, thereafter, fresh recruitment exercises were carried out by the reconstituted board of the LGSC in order to ensure continuity of the delivery of essential services within the local authorities. I am informed that these new recruitment exercises were conducted in accordance with the Local Government Service Commission Act, the relevant schemes of service and established procedures.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that following those recruitment exercises, allegation and rumours of possible malpractice were again raised publicly. As the hon. Prime Minister stated in this House, a few weeks ago, the matter was looked into at the level of the Commission and the new chairperson, subsequently, tendered his resignation. However, I am informed that as matters presently stand, no inquiry has been initiated at the level of the LGSC in relation of these recruitment exercises. Subsequently, there is no inquiry report

before my Ministry to be tabled, and there are no measures arising from any such report for my Ministry to state or envisage.

I must also emphasise that since the Local Government Service Commission is a statutory body operating under its own legal framework and under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, my Ministry has no authority to intervene in its internal administrative matters or decision-making processes. In the absence of any active enquiry, there is, therefore, nothing before my Ministry for further action. I am not in a position to comment on any internal step which the Commission or any other competent authority may or may not contemplate in relation to the LGSC.

Madam Speaker, I am, nevertheless, informed that ongoing recruitment exercises are being carried out with greater transparency, accountability and strict compliance with the law and established procedures. I am further informed that in order to reinforce transparency, efficiency and accountability, an e-recruitment system is being worked upon and is expected to be introduced as from early next year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, one!

Ms Savabaddy: Merci, Madame la présidente. J'ai une question pour le ministre. Ne serait-il pas judicieux d'annuler les récents exercices de recrutement et de faire appel à candidature où la méritocratie primera cette fois-ci sans l'intervention de qui que ce soit ? L'honorable ministre trouve-t-il normal qu'il y ait 323 au sein d'une collectivité locale ? Merci.

Madam Speaker: But he has explained it. There is a legal system.

Ms Savabaddy: Oui, Madame la présidente, mais la méritocratie n'a pas primé.

Madam Speaker: Peu importe. Le ministre, lui, n'est pas responsable.

Okay, you want to reply?

Mr Wochit: Madam Speaker, I have already explained very clearly and explicitly.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Maybe we can have one more question. Ms Anquetil, yes!

Deux supplémentaires ! Je l'ai dit, aujourd'hui, à tout le monde. J'ai dit deux à tout le monde !

CONSTITUENCY NO. 18 – DRAIN PROJECTS

(No. B/653) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the construction of drains in Constituency No.18, Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that for Constituency No. 18, Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes, some 13 drain projects have been earmarked for implementation, out of which one, project namely, drain works at Saint Jean has been practically completed with a few minor snags currently ongoing in the defect liability period till 11 June 2026.

Five other projects out of the 13 would also be implemented by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, namely –

- (a) flood mitigating measures at Gaya Lane, Robert Edward Hart Avenue;
- (b) flood mitigating measures at Sobha Lane, Olivier Avenue;
- (c) drain works in front of Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo Government School at Atruche Avenue;
- (d) upgrading of drain along Nellan Lane up to Canal Nellan, supply fixing of metal gratings, and
- (e) flood mitigating measures at 75, Avenue Dansant, Quatre Bornes entrusted by the Land Drainage Authority on 06 February 2026 to the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes for implementation.

Approval for design for the mentioned projects has been sought by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes from the Land Drainage Authority on 17 April 2026. The project upgrading of Canal Nellan and removal of obstruction over a length of approximately 2 km as from Lal Bahadur Shastri Street is ready for implementation by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes and is awaiting financial clearance.

Madam Speaker, concerning the National Development Unit, there are four complex drain projects which are all located in the densely populated regions of Constituency No. 18 and are still at preparatory stage, namely –

- (a) flood mitigation measures in the region of La Louise, La Source and Candos, Quatre Bornes;
- (b) flood mitigation measures in the region of Quatre Bornes, Belle Rose, Sodnac, Berthaud;
- (c) construction of drain at Duperre Avenue and Brown Avenue, Old Quatre Bornes, and
- (d) construction of drain at Trianon Avenue after Shoprite roundabout, road to Kovil Trianon.

The Drains Infrastructure Construction Limited has also been entrusted with the project construction of cutoff drain at Berthaud Avenue, Quatre Bornes, which is currently at land acquisition and wayleave stage. I am also informed that bids for drain network at Résidence Beau-Sejour is ready for implementation by the National Development Unit and bids will be launched by 15 July 2026 subject to financial clearance.

Madam Speaker, I wish to point out that the projects being implemented by the National Development Unit and the Drain Infrastructure Construction Limited are very complex to implement owing to the extensive network of buried services whereby appropriate measures would need to be undertaken to prevent any disruption in the existing services and to avoid inconvenience to the inhabitants as the projects will take quite a few years to be fully implemented.

Moreover, the holistic approach being adopted for implementation of drain project in Constituency No. 18 will entail considerable cost amounting to over Rs6 billion. Due to financial constraints, it will be difficult to complete these projects in the near future. Alternately, I called for focused meetings with the National Development Unit, Drain Infrastructure Construction Limited, the Land Drainage Authority and the Road Development Authority to explore different and more cost-effective short-term solutions to mitigate flooding. Two meetings have already been held on 30 April and 11 May, respectively, at the seat of my Ministry.

Further to discussions held during these meetings, the following measures to alleviate flooding have been identified for the project at La Louise, namely –

- (1) geotechnical and investigative assessments owing to the site conditions;
- (2) the construction of absorption drains along Lal Bahadur Shastri Street and Boundary Street;
- (3) the construction of a retention pond to cater for the overflow of water from the absorption drains;
- (4) the conversion of the existing Road Development Authority drains into upsized absorption drains from La Paix Street to the junction at La Louise along Candos-Vacoas Road, and
- (5) the construction of drains along SSR Road and in the vicinity of Winners.

Let me reassure the House that the implementation of these projects will be effected in phases upon approval of the design by the Land Drainage Authority and subject to availability of funds, which I gather will be far less costly than adopting a holistic approach. My Ministry is focused on implementing projects responsibly with efficient use of funds without forgetting the prevailing fiscal situation of the country.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente. Je remercie également le ministre pour sa réponse détaillée. Nous remercions le ministre, le Dr. Boolell, le Deputy Speaker et moi pour sa réponse détaillée. Le ministre peut-il informer la Chambre les raisons pour lesquelles les travaux de construction de drains dans les régions de Candos et de La Louise accusent des retards depuis plus de dix ans malgré les inondations répétées qui contraignent les habitants et les commerçants à vivre dans l'angoisse à chaque grosse pluie ? Merci.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, as I explained, if we take a holistic approach for the construction of drains in the region of Quatre Bornes and La Louise, it will cost 6 billion. I presume that the previous government was working on a holistic one which can never be implemented. That's why, now, we are going on phase-wise short-term measures, having an absorption drain, we shall try to have a cut off drain before the Candos Hospital. We will try to see how it works, then we will go downstream, we will construct the two sides of the drain

and the Road Development Authority will upgrade it, then we will see how it works and then we will go to La Louise instead of having holistic and never implement the project. So, we are going phase-wise, short-term measures so as to solve the problem.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente. Le ministre peut-il informer la Chambre si les travaux – il a mentionné dans sa réponse qu'il y aura des travaux à Lal Bahadur – prévus à Lal Bahadur permettront de résoudre de manière significative les problèmes récurrents de drainage et d'inondation affectant non seulement les régions de Candos et de La Louise mais également Palma, Bassin, Boundary Road, ainsi qu'une partie de Sodnac à proximité du supermarché de Winners ? Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Short!

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, I cannot give guarantee that we will solve the problem entirely. According to consultants, if we do the first measure, it can solve the problem up to 35-40%. At least we are solving 35 to 40% of the problem, and then we see how we move forward instead of doing nothing.

Madam Speaker: Pas à pas !

Thank you very much everyone. I am raising until 2.30 p.m.

At 1.06 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.31 p.m., with the Deputy Speaker on the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière.

**TRUST FUND FOR EXCELLENCE IN SPORTS – MR N.V, CHAIRPERSON –
REVOCATION – INQUIRY**

(No. B/654) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the revocation of Mr N. V. as Chairperson of the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports, he will state –

- (a) the reasons therefor, indicating whether an inquiry was conducted prior thereto, and

(b) whether –

- (i) he has taken cognizance of allegations of irregularities thereat and of interference by the Chief Executive Officer thereof in the management of the Fund made by Mr N.V., and
- (ii) the governance structure and operation of the Fund will be reviewed.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports was established under the Finance and Audit Regulation 2002. Following the reconstitution of the management committee in February 2025, Mr N.V. was appointed as Chairperson. In accordance with established governance principles, the Chairperson chairs the management committee, which establishes policies and develops strategies for the fund. On the other hand, the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the operation and day-to-day management of the Fund by executing the decision and policies of the management committee.

Unfortunately, my attention has been drawn to the fact that due to the persistent interference of the Chairperson in the day-to-day management of the fund, problems started to escalate. I personally met Mr. N.V. on several occasions in the presence of officers of my Ministry and clearly explained to him that there should be clear demarcation between governance and administration. He was also reminded of his role as a Chairperson. Despite these repeated interventions, there was no noticeable improvement.

In addition, I have been made aware that certain decisions were made by the management committee for the personal benefit of the Chairperson, which were totally against established procedures in the public sector. Hence, with a view to restoring serenity and ensuring that the principles of good governance are held at the level of the fund, I had to take a bold decision to revoke him in the interest of the institution and its beneficiaries and replace him by a new chairperson.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I'm not aware of any allegation or irregularities thereat made by the former Chairperson. In so far as the alleged interference of the Chief Executive Officer is concerned, I need to stress that his co-responsibility in the discharge of his duties is to give effect to the decision of the management committee. He cannot and is not allowed to change these decisions. I have never been made

aware of any change brought by the Chief Executive Officer to the decision of the management committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as the governance structure of the fund is concerned, it is clearly defined in the regulations which established the fund. In addition, there is a well-established governance framework for public sector organisation to which this fund subscribes.

The House may rest assured that I will leave no stone unturned to continuously improve the administrative processes in the parastatal bodies that fall under the purview of my Ministry so as to give satisfaction to our stakeholders.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre peut-il dire à la Chambre si une enquête indépendante et impartiale, j'ai bien écouté sa réponse, a été menée avant la décision de révoquer monsieur N.V. ou s'agit-il d'une mesure prise de manière précipitée et sans procédure transparente ?

Mr Nagalingum: I can assure the hon. Member that at the level of my Ministry, officers have conducted all inquiries and have come to that conclusion.

Mr Quirin : L'honorable ministre a informé la Chambre qu'il n'est au courant d'aucune allégation d'ingérence du Chief Executive Officer, comme l'a bien fait mention monsieur N.V. dans ses déclarations à la presse ...

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question.

Mr Quirin: Oui, j'arrive.

Et j'aimerais savoir de l'honorable ministre pourquoi il n'y a pas eu, suite à la déclaration de monsieur N.V. dans les médias, une communication claire et publique jusqu'ici ; ou au moins une enquête interne par rapport aux allégations qui ont été faites par monsieur N.V. ?

Mr Nagalingum: Let me assure the hon. Member, I am in receipt of a complaint on workplace conduct and concern relating to the CEO from a staff member of the fund. Same was also addressed to the Chairperson and members of the fund. Given that this complaint is

an internal matter for the fund, which is the employer of the complainant, my Ministry has left same to be attended to the management committee of the fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in respect to the complaint letters received from the employees, I would like to draw the attention of the House that after explaining her predicament, she stated as follows –

“Finally, I wish to clarify that this correspondence is not intended to undermine the authority of the CEO.”

In addition, in the same correspondence, she stated that she was seeking clarifications as to whether the actions of the CEO amounted to intimidation or harassment.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once a new Chairperson is appointed, I will request him, in the next board, to look into the matter and give his reply.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien.

SPECIAL MOBILE FORCE MUSEUM, VACOAS – RENOVATION & REOPENING DATE

(No. B/655) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the Museum of the Special Mobile Force, at Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the closing date thereof to the public, indicating whether consideration is being given for the renovation thereof and, if so –

- (a) give details thereof, and
- (b) indicate the expected reopening date thereof to the public.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr R. Bhagwan): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Special Mobile Force Museum has been closed to the public since December 1997. Following the closure, the site was taken over by the Tourism Authority in 2009 to serve as an operational venue for its cleaning team. The Tourism Authority occupied the building and its premises until September 2022. Following the establishment of the National Environment Cleaning Agency,

(NECA), in 2022, the ex SMF Museum building and its premises, which were then under the control of the Prime Minister's Office, were allocated to the NECA in September 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a sum of Rs40 million was earmarked under the capital budget for the Financial Year 2023-2024 for the renovation of the building for NECA. The renovation works were not carried out due to financial constraint. The maintenance of the building and the yard is undertaken by the employees of the Mauri Facilities Management Company Ltd.

The House may further wish to note that a request has been made to the Prime Minister's Office to take over the site and the building on the 20th March 2026.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b), the question does not arise as there is no museum.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle.

FISHERMAN REGISTRATION CARD – CERTIFICATE OF CHARACTER – REJECTED APPLICATIONS

(No. B/656) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Fisherman Registration Card, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) whether it is a prerequisite for the applicants to hold a clean Certificate of Character for eligibility thereto, and
- (b) the number of applications rejected on account of the Certificate of Character over the past five years.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, hon. Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, presently, there are 2,506 persons who are registered as fishermen, out of whom, 608 persons were issued with fisherman card in the year 2024, that is, prior to the general election. I'm informed that since 2007, a certificate of character is required at the time of submitting an application for a fisherman card.

In regards to part (a) of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a clean certificate of character is not a prerequisite to be eligible for a fisherman card. A person having been convicted for any offence other than drug dealing may be issued with a fisherman card provided that he meets all the other criteria.

Now, it is only when the applicant is convicted for drug dealing that he is debarred from having a fisherman card. Under Section 122 (f) of the Fisheries Act 2023, a person convicted for the offence of drug dealing under the Dangerous Drugs Act shall be deregistered as a fisherman.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, a total of 60 applications have been rejected on account of the certificate of character over the past five years. In all these instances, the Certificate of Character indicated that the applicant was convicted of a drug dealing offence.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. First Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East!

15% ELECTRICITY TARRIF INCREASE – HOUSEHOLDS & SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT

(No. B/657) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the announced 15 percent increase in electricity tariffs as from May 2026, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the –

- (a) estimated impact thereof on households and small businesses, indicating the mitigating measures being envisaged for vulnerable consumers, and
- (b) number of households having had their electricity supply disconnected over the past year for non-payment of bills, and
- (c) incentives being envisaged to help consumers acquire solar panels.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, avec votre permission, je répondrai conjointement aux questions B/657 de l'honorable membre et B/693 de l'honorable Rookny. Celles-ci portant sur un même sujet.

M. le président, depuis plusieurs mois, les marchés énergétiques mondiaux connaissent de fortes turbulences. Malgré le cessez-le-feu conditionnel, les perturbations des routes maritimes, les tensions géopolitiques persistantes ainsi que les dommages causés aux

infrastructures énergétiques continuent d'alimenter une flambée des prix des produits pétroliers.

À Maurice, et en tant que pays fortement dépendant des importations énergétiques, notre pays subit directement cette situation. Le cas du *heavy fuel oil* illustre parfaitement cette réalité. Aujourd'hui, chaque cargaison d'environ 33, 500 tonnes de fioul lourd coûtent au CEB près de R 489 millions supplémentaires, soit une augmentation de 68% par cargaison.

Il convient de rappeler que le fioul lourd représente encore l'une des principales sources pour assurer la production d'électricité du pays et contribue à près de 40% des besoins du pays.

L'impact financier, M. le président, est colossal. Le CEB estime devoir absorber un surcoût annuel additionnel d'environ R 4.8 milliards uniquement pour couvrir les dépenses liées à l'importation du fioul lourd. M. le président, cette situation intervient alors même que les finances du CEB se trouvent dans un état extrêmement fragile.

Il est important de rappeler qu'en 2014, lorsque le Parti travailliste quittait le pouvoir, le CEB disposait encore des réserves de R 894 millions. En 2022, le CEB avait R 7 milliards de surplus dans ses comptes. Pourtant, en l'espace de deux ans seulement, cette situation s'est totalement renversée.

Au 31 décembre 2024, alors que j'assumais les fonctions de ministre de l'Énergie, le CEB affichait une balance négative de R 5.9 milliards. Autrement dit, l'organisme est passé d'une situation de réserve importante à une situation financière extrêmement dégradée, marquée par des déficits massifs et une dépendance croissante aux facilités bancaires, *loans et overdrafts*. À ce jour, la dette totale du CEB a atteint R 9.3 milliards, dont R 5.2 milliards de découvertes bancaires, *overdrafts*.

Les comptes audités au 30 juin 2024 faisaient déjà ressortir un déficit de R 243 millions. M. le président, dans ces circonstances, il aurait été irréaliste, financièrement irresponsable, d'exiger au CEB qu'elle absorbe seule l'intégralité des hausses liées au *heavy fuel oil* sans procéder à une révision tarifaire. Il faut d'ailleurs préciser que la hausse appliquée à partir du 01 mai 2026 ne permettra même pas au CEB de récupérer l'ensemble des coûts supplémentaires qu'il devra supporter.

Alors, que les dépenses additionnelles liées au fioul lourd sont estimées à R 4.8 milliards par an, la révision tarifaire ne devrait générer que R 3 milliards de revenus

supplémentaires. Le différentiel, donc, entre R 4.8 milliards et R 3 milliards, soit environ R 1.8 milliards, devra encore être absorbé par le CEB.

Autrement dit, M. le président, si le CEB avait choisi de répercuter l'intégralité de la hausse du coût de fioul lourd sur les consommateurs, le tarif d'électricité aurait dû augmenter d'environ 25%. Ceci n'a pas été le cas. Malgré la situation financière extrêmement tendue, le gouvernement et le CEB ont veillé à protéger les catégories les plus faibles, les plus vulnérables de la population, ainsi que les petites entreprises.

Près de 128 000 familles clients du CEB, incluant les 8 000 bénéficiaires des kits photovoltaïques, ne seront pas affectées par la hausse tarifaire. Ces mesures concernent principalement les ménages enregistrés au *Social Register of Mauritius*.

Au total, M. le président, 25% de la clientèle du CEB bénéficieront d'un mécanisme de protection contre la hausse des tarifs. M. le président, toutefois, la CEB a pris en considération ces impacts potentiels pour protéger les plus faibles.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne les déconnexions, le CEB m'informe qu'au cours de l'année écoulée, 21 211 ménages sur un total de 482 000 ménages à Maurice et à Rodrigues ont été déconnectés en raison du non-paiement de leur facture d'électricité.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Belle Rose Quatre and Bornes!

SHELTER CAP L'ESPOIR – ACTING SHELTER MANAGER – SCHEME OF DUTIES & QUALIFICATIONS

(No. B/658) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Shelter Cap L'Espoir, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the identity of the current Acting Shelter Manager, indicating the scheme of duties thereof and qualification requirements therefor.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Mrs B.S., Assistant Child Programme Officer at the National Children's Council since 2012, is currently the Acting Shelter Manager at the residential care institution Cap l'Espoir, managed by the council.

She has been appointed on 23 April 2026 by the NCC after the previous Acting Shelter Manager resigned on 20 April.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the qualifications of a Shelter Manager as per the scheme of service approved by the NCC's board on 28 August 2015 are as follows –

- (a) A diploma in social work or administration or management or an equivalent qualification acceptable to the council, and
- (b) At least three years of experience in the field of social work.

I am tabling the scheme of service of Shelter Manager of the RCI.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Je remercie l'honorable Première ministre par intérim pour sa réponse.

La Première ministre par intérim peut-elle expliquer à la Chambre comment un établissement aussi sensible peut fonctionner correctement alors qu'il a connu trois *managers* en seulement cinq mois depuis sa réouverture le 5 décembre 2025 ? Un véritable *musical chair*, témoignant d'une instabilité chronique et soulevant de sérieuses préoccupations quant à sa gestion. D'ailleurs, pas plus tard que la semaine dernière, des pains moisissés ont été servis aux enfants. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

The Ag. Prime Minister: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre d'avoir soulevé cette question. Je dois avouer qu'il existe des problèmes relationnels entre les employés de ce *shelter*. Ils se seraient constitués, M. le président, en clan et essaieraient de manipuler les enfants contre tel ou tel clan.

Le *board* enquête sur le sujet et des actions seront prises en temps et lieu. En attendant, nous relançons pour la troisième fois un *expression of interest* pour inviter les ONG à prendre la gestion du *shelter* avec un personnel formé et *dedicated*.

Quant aux questions de pains moisissés, je remercie encore une fois l'honorable membre d'avoir soulevé la question parce que nous aussi, moi aussi, je trouve que c'est inacceptable qu'on puisse donner aux enfants du *shelter* du pain moisi. M. le président le 5 mai, le ministère a été informé que du pain moisi avait été servi à un des enfants du *shelter*. Une enquête a été initiée. Il s'avère que la cuisinière a déclaré qu'elle n'avait pas constaté que le pain était moisi vu qu'il n'y avait pas suffisamment de luminosité dans la cuisine. La cuisine n'était pas suffisamment éclairée.

Un officier du ministère s'est rendu sur les lieux et a constaté que toutes les lumières, toutes les ampoules fonctionnaient. La cuisinière a tout de suite été remplacée. Un *statement* a été donné à la police de Grand Baie le même jour, OB 1449/26.

L'enfant a été conduit à l'hôpital pour des examens médicaux. Heureusement qu'aucun problème de santé n'a été relevé.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, one last one.

Ms Anquetil: Une dernière, M. le président. D'ailleurs, je vous en remercie. Je remercie la Première ministre par intérim pour sa réponse. En attendant, qu'une ONG prenne la gérance du *shelter* Cap l'Espoir, would the hon. Ag. Prime Minister inform the House whether there are plans to review the organisational structure and staffing requirements of a shelter with a view to improving service delivery. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Oui, évidemment, c'est pourquoi le *National Children's Council* est en train de tout revoir ; revoir le fonctionnement du *shelter* en attendant qu'une ONG digne de ce nom puisse être confiée ce *shelter*.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Fourth Member for Rodrigues!

MAURITIUS & RODRIGUES – PESTICIDE USE – CONTROL MEASURES

(No. B/659) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the use of pesticides in agriculture in mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues Island, he will state the –

- (a) norms applicable thereto, and
- (b) control measures in place to prevent contamination in the chain of agricultural products.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, my apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I'm informed that the use of pesticides in Mauritius and Rodrigues is regulated under the Use of Pesticides Act 2018.

This Act, which is enforced by the Pesticides Regulatory Office of the Ministry, provides a comprehensive legal framework governing the proper use, handling and disposal of pesticides. The legislation is aligned with international standards and best practices and

aims to safeguard public health and the environment from the potential risks associated with pesticide use.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the agricultural services of the Ministry that regular monitoring and inspection exercises are carried out by the Pesticides Regulatory Office to ensure compliance with established norms. The office also develops strategies for the sound use and management of pesticides with a view to reducing risks associated with their use and has devised a comprehensive code of practice.

The code of practice covers *inter alia* the responsibilities of pesticide users, guidance on when to use pesticides, interpretation of pesticide labels, safety precaution during use, and requirements relating to the storage, mixing and application and transportation of pesticides.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Food and Agricultural Research Extension Institute has been implementing continuous training and sensitisation programme on the safe and judicious use of pesticides since 2002.

To date, over 6,400 farmers have benefited from these programmes. This has been complemented by extensive field advisory services with some 15,000 or more visits carried out to guide planters on proper pesticide use and pesticide diagnosis. Following the proclamation of the Use of Pesticides Act in 2018, I am informed that additional structured training courses have been delivered to more than 1,700 planters, thereby further strengthening capacity in the responsible handling and application of pesticides. These efforts are further supported by a wide range of extension materials and media outreach initiatives covering integrated pest management alternatives to chemical control and of course good agricultural practices including the MauriGAP programme.

Now, in order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to further strengthen the enforcement of the Use of Pesticides Act, the Ministry is collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme and the Attorney General's Office to finalise four regulations under the Act. In this context, my Ministry has organised a validation workshop on the four draft Pesticides Regulations on 06 May 2026 with the participation of 75 stakeholders from the public and private sectors, regulatory institutions, growers, importers of agricultural produce, agrochemicals and technical experts.

These Regulations will, *inter alia*, provide for the control of pesticide use with respect to maximum residue level on harvested produce, establish guidelines for the sampling of

agricultural commodities and set out requirements relating to the mixing of pesticides and the training of pesticide applicators.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, remains committed to continuously strengthening pesticide governance to protect public health, preserve the environment and ensure the safety and quality of agricultural produce.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Edouard!

Mr Edouard: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister, is there any collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health to study if there is any relation to the rise in cancer cases with the use of pesticides in agriculture?

Thank you.

Dr. Boolell: Certainly, this question has been raised, flagged, flogged, but it is very difficult to establish clearly whether there is a link. Although, if I refer to the number of cases referred to hospital, there may be. But as of now, I have gone through literature, to establish fully that there is a link is yet to be determined. But, certainly, it cannot be ruled out.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger : Je vous remercie. Dans un contexte où le Directeur de l'audit regrette lui-même que les contrôles soient insuffisants, que les sanctions par rapport à l'utilisation excessive de pesticides soient inexistantes, est-ce que réduire les effectifs du *Pesticide Regulatory Office* ne revient pas à exposer davantage la population à des produits potentiellement dangereux ?

Dr. Boolell: There is always room for improvement. One of the shortcomings is effectively the shortage of officers and this matter is being addressed in a very forceful manner. Secondly, I must say, since some time, the lab has been out of order because of unavailability of spare parts. It is only now that the technician from South Africa is coming to Mauritius to ensure that spare parts are available to repair the lab. And thirdly, in the meantime, we are not leaving any stone unturned. We are sending samples, or what we call the 'dues' to a laboratory in Egypt.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle.

FLEET MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/660) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Land Transport Whether in regard to the proposed implementation of the fleet management system by his Ministry, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since my becoming Minister of Land Transport, I have initiated several initiatives that seek to modernise the transport sector. Today, the Penalty Point System is fully digital, just like the online payment of road tax, commonly known as online MVL. Forthcoming ones are the digital driving licence and online payment of fines, for which the drafting instructions have already been issued to the Attorney General's Office. A cashless ticketing system is at consultancy stage. We are going for the extra mile in the quest for digitalisation of the land transport, and I am sure my colleague, the Minister of ICT, will surely concur with me on this front.

The Fleet Management System, which is the subject matter of hon. A. Ramdass, is a key initiative which I and officers of my Ministry have relentlessly worked on. With an initial intention to have it on a PPP basis, almost no budgetary provision, except for consultancy services, we have after a consultation with the Attorney General's Office, deemed it more appropriate that it be financed and implemented by government as all PPP projects that followed strictly the process of the Build-Operate-Transfer Unit of the Ministry of Finance have never been completed, as far as we know.

An international bidding exercise was launched on 21 January 2026 for implementation of the Fleet Management System with an initial closing date of 09 March 2026 and a bid opening on 11 March 2026. The closing date was subsequently extended to 24 March 2026, following representations from bidders and opened on 26 March 2026. Three bids have been received at the closing date. The technical evaluation exercise has been completed and the relevant report has been submitted and is being processed for endorsement. My Ministry expects to award the contract very shortly in line with procedures laid down in the Public Procurement Act. I am confident that the Fleet Management System will be running in early 2027 and will go a long way in enhancing transparency, efficiency and accountability in the public transport system while improving service delivery to commuters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for his interest in the project, which when coupled with the Bus Services Bill, for which we have already issued drafting instructions to the Attorney General's Office, seeks to modernise the public bus services that convey nearly half a million people daily.

The Fleet Management System which, *inter alia*, entails the installation of GPSs in all buses will profoundly redefine the current bus operation system. It will introduce digital tools to support real-time operations, improve timetable adherence, and enable data-driven decision-making for both operators and regulators. It will also allow for payment of compensation for free travel and diesel subsidies based on the real numbers of trips effected.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Ramdass.

Mr Ramdass: *M. le président*, in view of the difficulties faced by the inhabitants of remote areas of the country including Saint Hubert, as the hon. Minister is aware himself, may we have a clear timeline as to the full implementation and putting into practice of the Fleet Management System?

Mr Osman Mahomed: My officers and technicians tell me that it will be early 2027. Because once the tender is awarded, there will be extensive work involved in the installation of the electronic system in 2,000 buses and the central control system. So, we should be okay by 2007, if all goes on well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'or!

CENTRAL ELECTRICITY BOARD – CADET TECHNICIANS – NON- TERMINATION OF CONTRACTS

(No. B/661) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the recruitment of Cadet Technicians at the Central Electricity Board in or about 2019 and the recent award of the Employment Relations Tribunal in relation thereto, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) reasons for the non-termination of the contracts of employment of the said technicians, and
- (b) identity of the Head of the Human Resource Management Department thereat at the material time.

Mr Assirvaden : M. le président, le CEB m'informe qu'entre 2016 et 2019, un total de 288 recrues techniques ont été engagées en trois vagues distinctes, soit 152 *Technicians Trainees* et 38 *Technicians Grade II*, ainsi que 98 *Cadet Technicians*.

J'ai également été informé que les critères de recrutement applicables au poste de *Technician Trainee* avaient été modifiés afin de permettre l'enrôlement des candidats ne détenant pas encore la certification NC3 ou NTC Level 3. Donc, cela a été modifié pour que pour que vous ayez du travail comme cadet technicien au CEB, vous devez avoir soit le NC3 ou le NTC3. Ce qui s'est passé dans le dans le passé, l'ancien régime, ce qu'ils ont fait, c'est qu'ils ont recruté des gens sans avoir la certification NTC3. Donc, ceci dit, ce travail de *Cadet Technician*, c'est un travail technique. Vous avez à travailler directement avec l'électricité.

Donc, ils ont ils ont modifié le *scheme of duty* pour pouvoir recruter certaines personnes de leurs circonscriptions. Il avait alors été convenu que le CEB prendrait les dispositions nécessaires avec le MITD afin que ces recrues qui n'ont pas de certificat, puissent suivre la formation requise et obtenir leur qualification durant leur période de stage. Donc, on vous recrute pour travailler, ensuite on vous demande de passer les tests. C'est comme si on prend un infirmier à l'hôpital, il n'a pas ses certificats, il travaille comme infirmier ou comme médecin et c'est après qu'il est demandé d'avoir sa certification. M. le président, les contrats prévoyaient clairement que ces formations devraient s'étendre sur une période minimale de 24 mois, 2 ans, et maximum de 36 mois, 3 ans. Après quoi, les recrues devraient être confirmées dans leurs fonctions ou soit, voir leur engagement prendre fin.

Or, M. le président, les faits aujourd'hui relevés démontrent de graves défaillances administratives et un manque flagrant de suivi au sein du CEB. J'ai appris que plusieurs années après leur recrutement, dans certains cas, plus de 5 ans après, certains *Cadet Technicians* n'avaient toujours ni complété leur formation, ni réussi leur *competency test*, ni été régularisés dans leur statut.

Ces dysfonctionnements n'ont été pleinement découverts qu'en décembre de l'année dernière, en 2025. Lorsque le nouveau Conseil d'administration du CEB a exigé un rapport complet sur la gestion de ces recrutements et du suivi des *Cadet Technicians*. M. le président, cependant, cette affaire, malheureusement, a pris une tournure extrêmement sérieuse lorsque quatre anciens *Cadet Technicians* ont contesté leur licenciement devant le *Employment Relations Tribunal*.

Dans son jugement, l'ERT a sévèrement pointé du doigt le CEB pour non-respect des dispositions fondamentales du *Workers' Rights Act*. Le tribunal a conclu que ces employés étaient demeurés en poste bien au-delà de la période maximale prévue dans leur contrat de *cadetship* et qu'ils devaient être considérés comme des *workers* pleinement protégés par la loi. Plus grave, le tribunal a constaté que le CEB n'avait pas respecté les procédures obligatoires prévues sous la Section 64 du *Workers' Rights Act*. M. le président, cette affaire relève des manquements graves au niveau du suivi administratif et des responsabilités du département des ressources humaines du CEB.

Je dois d'ailleurs dire que personnellement, je ne partage nullement l'interprétation que certains veulent me faire dire ici au Parlement, selon laquelle il appartenait uniquement au chef des départements Techniques de recommander la résiliation ou non, des stages et des *cadetship*.

La question liée aux nominations, au renouvellement des contrats, au suivi des formations, au respect des délais contractuels, ainsi qu'à la conformité avec les obligations légales, relève directement de la responsabilité du département des ressources humaines. Or, il est forcé de constater que déjà depuis ni en 2021, ni en 2022, le département de HR n'a attiré l'attention de la direction du CEB sur les risques légaux considérables découlant du maintien prolongé de ces employés dans une situation irrégulière pendant plusieurs années.

Cette négligence administrative place aujourd'hui, le CEB dans une situation extrêmement embarrassante où des fonds publics devront être mobilisés pour assumer les conséquences de ces erreurs. Dommage que l'honorable Leader de l'Opposition ne soit pas présent.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Hon. Beejan!

Mr Beejan: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister, according to my information, around Rs5.6 million of public funds have already been paid by the CEB. Can he inform this House what disciplinary action has been taken against any person responsible for this situation?

Mr Assirvaden: Je dois dire, M. le président, qu'effectivement, un montant de plus de 5.6 millions devra être payé ou a été payé à ces employés et personnellement, M. le président, j'ai demandé au *Board* du CEB de demander des explications formelles, que ces explications formelles soient réclamées au chef du département des ressources humaines afin de déterminer pourquoi ces situations n'ont pas été signalées plus tôt et pourquoi les procédures

qui étaient prévues n'ont pas été respectées avant les licenciements. J'ai également été informé que le chef du département des ressources humaines qui est une dame, Madame C.M., a essayé de donner une explication mais, je dirais que si les explications ne sont pas satisfaisantes, des sanctions administratives et disciplinaires pourront être envisagées à l'encontre des responsables concernés parce que dans ce cas précis, il y a eu complot.

Ms Anquetil: Bravo!

The Deputy Speaker: One last question from hon. Beejan.

Ms Anquetil: Un sérieux impeccable !

Mr Beehook: Oui, vu la dangerosité du métier et du poste de *Cadet Technician* et que vu que la plupart des candidats n'étaient pas aptes à exercer ce métier, est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous informer s'il y a eu un audit pour déterminer si ces candidats sont désormais aptes ou non à exercer ce métier ? Merci.

Mr Assirvaden: Oui, c'est sûr qu'un audit a été fait pour voir si ces techniciens sont des véritables techniciens ou ce sont des gens qui n'ont pas les qualités requises pour faire ce travail, parce que comme je l'ai dit un peu plus tôt, M. le président, ce sont des gens qui sont obligés de travailler en contact directe avec l'électricité sur les colonnes. Oui, mais je dirai aussi que dorénavant les *schemes of duty* seront changés complètement. Vous devez avoir au préalable le NCC3 ou le NC3 pour pouvoir être admis, être recruté en tant que *Cadet Technician* ou *Trainee Technician* au CEB.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. First Member for Rodrigues!

MAURITIUS – EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES – PREPAREDNESS, PROTOCOLS & MEASURES

(No. B/662) Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the preparedness of the Republic of Mauritius to respond to emerging infectious diseases, he will state the –

(a) adequacy of the –

- (i) regional and other hospitals;
- (ii) Areas and Community Health Centres;
- (iii) sanitary officers;
- (iv) medical officers posted at the ports and airports, and

- (v) other relevant Ministries to deal therewith and table relevant information in relation thereto, and
- (b) protocols and/or measures in place in respect of surveillance, treatment, sanitation and inter-agency coordination.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that Mauritius, as a tropical island state with heavy rainfall, flooding, including urban density and continuous international travel, remains vulnerable to the spread and importation of infectious diseases such as Chikungunya, Dengue and Mpox. My Ministry has therefore reinforced preparedness, surveillance and response mechanism in collaboration with the relevant Ministries and stakeholders.

With regard to part (a)(i) of the question, all regional hospitals and designated health institutions are equipped with isolation and treatment facilities for infectious diseases. The New Souillac Hospital serves as the designated admitting institution for highly infectious disease due to its proximity to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport. Strategic stockpiles of personal protective equipment, disinfectants, medicines, laboratory consumables and infection prevention and control materials are maintained. Laboratory diagnostic capacities have also been strengthened through collaboration with organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the Indian Ocean Commission and Africa CDC.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard Area Health Centres and Community Health Centres, these institutions play a key role in early detection reporting, prevention and management of infectious diseases through screening, triage, referral vaccination, health education and surveillance activities. With regard to sanitary officers posted at the airport and port, officers are deployed on a roster basis to screen incoming passengers and vessels. Free pratique is granted to vessels only after clearance by my Ministry. Incoming passengers are required to complete the Mauritius all-in-one Travel form and particulars of travellers arriving from affected countries are transmitted to the 13 regional health offices for follow-up surveillance. Blood and sputum samples are taken whenever required for laboratory analysis. In addition, dedicated general practitioners have been deployed to strengthen surveillance against imported infectious diseases. Enhanced surveillance protocols are implemented for passengers arriving from countries affected by diseases such as Mpox, including physical visits, telephone monitoring and immediate referral procedures where necessary.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, effective prevention and control require coordinated action across several sectors. Mauritius has therefore strengthened intersectoral collaboration under the 'One Health' approach involving Ministries responsible for Environment, Agro-Industry, Local Government, Tourism, Education and other relevant stakeholders. A multisectoral committee chaired by me ensures high level coordination for surveillance, vector control, sanitation, risk communication and outbreak preparedness. I am tabling the various measures put in place regarding preparedness to respond to emerging infectious diseases.

With regard to part (b) of the question, my Ministry has developed and implemented several preparedness and response plans, including the national operational plans for Leptospirosis, Mpox, Dengue, Chikungunya and viral haemorrhagic fever diseases. These preparedness and response plans are also implemented in Rodrigues. Mauritius is also implementing innovative vector control strategies such as the sterile insect techniques involving the release of sterile male *Aedes Albopictus* mosquitoes in selected regions to reduce vector populations, risk communication and community engagement activities are carried out through door-to-door sensitisation, schools, community talks and mass media campaigns to encourage behavioural change and elimination of breeding sites.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Rodrigues!

**RODRIGUES – BUS MODERNISATION SCHEME – SEMI-FLOOR BUSES
PURCHASE – SUBSIDY REVIEW**

(No. B/663) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the purchase of conventional high-floor or semi-low-floor buses under the Bus Modernisation Scheme in Rodrigues Island, he will state whether consideration will be given for a review of the subsidy payable thereunder, considering that the cost of the bus-body is higher than that of the chassis and engine.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bus Modernisation Scheme was introduced in 2014 to provide a financial support to bus operators for renewal of bus fleet through the replacement of aging buses with safer, more efficient and environmentally compliant vehicles, with the objective of improving passenger comfort, service reliability, road safety and sustainable public transport, both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

For Mauritius, the Bus Modernisation Scheme (BMS) is administered by the NLTA and the bus operators are provided subsidies as follows –

- (i) high-floor diesel bus; 20% of the total price of the bus subject to a maximum of Rs700,000.
- (ii) semi-low floor bus; Rs1 million;
- (iii) electric bus; 30% of the price of the bus subject to a maximum of Rs3.5 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are currently 73 buses in Rodrigues and that for the period 2017-202, the NLTA was making the disbursement to applicants from Rodrigues for subsidy under the BMS. Thereafter, payment has been effected by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA). I am further informed that since 2014, these bus operators are entitled to a government subsidy of Rs1 million for high-floor buses, that is, Rs300,000 more is paid to operators in Mauritius. This difference is explained by the fact that operators in Rodrigues incur additional costs in shipping, the bus acquired from Mauritius to Rodrigues, a cost which is not borne by local operators. Moreover, justification for higher subsidy arose from the fact that the wear and tear of buses running in Rodrigues was more due to topography of the island. More often than not, spare parts required for repairs had to be acquired from Mauritius, which again, entailed increased expenses. The NLTA is called upon only to check compliance of the bus with the specifications of the Road Traffic Construction and Use Regulations 2010 and to recommend the applications for payment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question from the hon. Member on the cost of the bus body being higher than the chassis, I am informed by the NLTA that this is not quite the case, although true it is that the bus body costs as much as 85-90% of the cost of the chassis and the fitted engine. This cost is equally borne by operators in Mauritius as well as those from Rodrigues. I wish to clarify that the BMS Subsidy Framework is not structured around individual cost components of any bus such as the body, the chassis or the engine but rather takes into account the overall acquisition cost of a compliant bus. The subsidy amount has been worked out as a fixed sum on the total capital investment of any bus operator without factoring in the different cost of buses based on make, model, seating capacity etc. The only defining criteria is whether the bus is a high floor, semi-low floor or electric bus.

Having regards to the specificity of Rodrigues, I am given to understand that only high floor buses are concerned. I am made to understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that disbursement and therefore the BMS for the last three years for Rodrigues are as follows as per the financial years –

- 2022-2023; Rs2 million for two buses;
- 2023-2024; Rs3 million for three buses;

- 2024-2025; Rs7 million for seven buses;
- 2025-2026; Rs3 million, only three applications processed so far as at May 2026.

As announced in the budget exercise 2025-2026, the NLTA is carrying out a comprehensive exercise for the revamping of the BMS.

During that exercise, the quantum of the subsidy will be worked out anew to align subsidy amount with actual investment cost, taking into account government policy objectives, including environmental considerations. The Road Transport Advisory Board has also been requested to submit their advice on the proposed views.

To end, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once this exercise is completed, the new quantum will be shared with the RRA, enabling them to adjust subsidy payment to bus operators at their end.

I am informed by the Ministry of Finance that as at date, no request for review, under the BMS, has been received at the level of the Commission for Public Infrastructure and others in Rodrigues. I am also given to understand that there is a provision of Rs5 million for financial year 2026-2027 under the BMS. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. First Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East!

AGRICULTURAL LANDS ALLOCATION (NOV 2024-MAY 2026) & CULTIVATION INCENTIVES

(No. B/664) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to agricultural lands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the extent thereof –

- (a) allocated to planters since November 2024 to date, indicating the extent thereof effectively under cultivation, and
- (b) that will be made available to planters and, if so, indicate the incentives to be provided to encourage same amidst the prevailing food supply issue.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I wish to inform the House that there are currently around 65,000 hectares of land potentially available for agriculture, out of which, 40,000 hectares are dedicated to sugar cane production and some 8,000 hectares to food crop production. The remaining extent is under other crops, including greenhouse farming, tea plantations and orchards.

Our most recent analysis shows that around 6,500 hectares of land, out of the 40,000 hectares, belonging to small planters, Government and corporate growers, were no longer under sugar cane plantation in 2025. Out of these, 4,000 hectares are located in areas classified as high or moderate potential for agriculture.

With regard to part (a) of the question, since November 2024 to date, some 1,100 acres of State land or arpents have been allocated to planters from the Ministry, Rose Belle Sugar Estate and Sugar Investment Trust. This extent of land is actively under cultivation.

With reference part (b) of the question, I am informed that some 1,050 acres of State land remain available and will be allocated to planters who have submitted or who will submit application for State land for agricultural purposes. The hon. Member may wish to note that the procedures for obtaining State land have been streamlined to facilitate timely access for planters and to accelerate cultivation in support of national food security.

In the light of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and its implication for global food supplies, it is increasingly imperative that our country expand domestic production to reduce dependence on import and moves toward greater self-sufficiency. To this end, my Ministry has reduced the number of eligibility criteria applied to applicants for State land from 14 to 4 so as to fast-track the allocation process and render same more attractive to small planters.

I wish to assure the House that the Ministry remains fully committed to promote measures to achieve and strengthen food security. The Ministry, through the Small Farmers Welfare Fund, the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Unit and the Agricultural Marketing Board, provides extensive support and incentives to small planters and farmers to the tune of Rs568 million so as to ease the burden of increase in cost of import for the agricultural sector such as fertilizer, mechanisation, seeds and livestock feed, amongst others.

For the benefit of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the comprehensive list of incentives and support measures administered through Small Famers Welfare Fund and the FAREI.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for raising this important question. I reiterate the Ministry's determination to support the planters with all the necessary measures to ensure national food security.

The Deputy Speaker: The Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 6 – BARACHOIS – PROMOTERS

(No. B/665) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Barachois operating in Constituency No. 6, Grand Baie and Poudre D'Or, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the names and addresses of the leaseholders thereof in each case, indicating the start and completion dates of the respective leases.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, presently, there are two barachois which are operational in Constituency No. 6, which have been allocated to promoters and not leased to them. These are as follows –

- (i) Barachois Lagesse, also known as Petit Barachois, allocated on 09 January 2014, for oyster culture, to Persand Royal Company Ltd, having as Director, Mr Khemraj Persand, and located at Coacaud Road, Grand Gaube, and
- (ii) Grand Barachois, also known as Bassin Humbert, allocated to Mauricoast Ltd, on 17 September 2015, having as Director Mr Yashodhar Boygah, and located at Maurel, Rivière du Rempart.

Ms Anquetil: Ah, qui ne se souvient pas !

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the activities carried out by the above promoters are as follows –

Persand Royal Company Ltd has been allocated the Petit Barachois of an extent of 90 arpents for the barachois, and 3 arpents 25 perches for the adjoining State land for oyster

culture for a period of three years from 2016. The company was allowed to continue its activities till date.

The species which are currently farmed in plastic drums in the barachois are oysters, clams and crabs. Future development in the barachois include the construction of a hatchery, a depuration station, and a laboratory which has been favourably considered by the Ministry.

A lease agreement for a period of 10 years has been worked out by the Ministry for this barachois, and has been legally vetted by the Attorney General's Office. On 22 April 2026, the draft lease agreement has been submitted to the company for its view prior to the signature. The Ministry is awaiting for the company's reply. The Ministry of Housing and Lands has also been requested to confirm the demarcation coordinates of the barachois, if ever the lease agreement will be finalised.

Let me come to the Grand Barachois also known as Bassin Humbert. Mauricoast Ltd has been allocated the Grand Barachois of an extent of 110 arpents for the barachois, and 11 arpents 85 perches for the adjoining State land for mud crabs, sea cucumber and oyster aquaculture for an initial period of five years since 2015. The company was allowed to continue its activities till date.

The species which are currently farmed in the barachois are oysters and mud crab. There was also production of sea cucumber, and sea cucumber juveniles have been released in the barachois. Further development plan includes production of high economic value, critical for cosmetic and health industry. The project write-up submitted by the company was in March 2025, and it is being looked into.

The draft lease agreement for this barachois is currently being drafted by the Ministry, which will include all approved ongoing above mentioned. Once finalised – if ever it is finalised – the draft lease agreement would be vetted by the Attorney General's Office and then finalised, if we are going ahead with the lease agreement. So, let us wait and see. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Member!

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister indicate whether any arrears of payment fees are outstanding in respect to any barachois operating in Constituency No. 6? If so, what are the measures taken till now?

Dr. Boolell: As I have stated, there was no lease agreement. I leave it to the Attorney General's Office. Once advice is tendered to us, if the need is felt, we will have to recover the arrears. You can rest assured appropriate measure will be taken. There is also the indemnity, which my good friend is conveying.

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister state whether the Ministry has carried out inspections of the barachois during the last three years? With regard to any non-compliance, what action has been taken till now?

Dr. Boolell: We have no choice, but following the questions which you have put, it is an eye-opener and you can rest assured more than one visit will be carried out.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien!

FATAL ROAD ACCIDENTS – SOUTHERN DIVISION – CAUSES & SAFETY MEASURES

(No. B/666) Mr C. Lukeeram (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to fatal road accidents reported in the Southern Division, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof over the past three years, on a yearly basis, indicating the –

- (a) principal causes thereof, and
- (b) measures being envisaged in terms of policy, enforcement, and infrastructural or technological improvements for road safety enhancement in the said region.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, coincidence has it that this year's Global Road Safety Week was kickstarted last Saturday morning at Mahebourg, in the presence of the hon. Lukeeram and hon. Apollo. The hon. Ramful could not make it as he was overseas. I have to thank the three hon. Members for the arrangements they have made to make this event a success.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from 01 January 2023 to 07 May 2026, that is, three and a half years period, a total of 74 fatal road

accidents has been recorded in the Southern Division of the island, unfortunately, resulting in the loss of 78 lives. I am tabling the yearly breakdown thereof.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the principal causes of these fatal road accidents have been identified as speeding as well as dangerous, careless and inconsiderate driving.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the major policy measures already implemented since 31 January 2026, albeit not specific to the Southern region is the penalty points system.

Last Friday, I have for the first time ever presented a first quarterly report to the Cabinet of Ministers about road accidents, more specifically about how the Penalty Point System has fared since its coming into operation three months down the line. I intend to, henceforth, do this on a quarterly basis as such transparent exercise allows us to bring changes wherever necessary and, hopefully, improve on road safety. I use the word 'hopefully' because road safety is not merely a matter of infrastructure or law enforcement; it is a matter of culture.

There was a peak in January 2026 as compared to January 2025, but in this respect, the Police recorded a reduction of 25% in road fatalities in April 2026 under the Penalty Point System as compared to April 2025 under the cumulative road traffic offences. Government has deemed it necessary to increase the range of points for the offence of using hand held phone while driving from 3-6 points to 5-6 points because of the high percentage of 70% that this offence constitute in the total number of contraventions established under the Penalty Point System.

In terms of technological improvement, it may be realistically expected that the capture of road traffic offences through safe city cameras can significantly enhance compliance. In fact, I had the opportunity to visit the Main Command and Control Centre of the Police relating to the safe city cameras on 02 April 2026. I will be holding a meeting on the subject matter in due course, but sufficient for me to say right now that there will have to be quite a bit of investment to be made by the Police in order for the cameras to be able to detect offences with the help of AI. My colleague was with me during the visit that we made to the Police, Dr. the hon. Ramtohul.

In the meantime, the Attorney-General's Office is working on several other decisions of Government to strengthen enforcement on our roads, notably the possible impoundment of

vehicles in case a driver is driving while being under the influence of alcohol or drug, and also, to include road rage as an offence under the Road Traffic Act.

In terms of policy formulation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to underscore that a consultative workshop involving all key partners involved in the road safety was held yesterday, in relation to the National Road Safety Strategy 2026-2030. Once finalised, the approval of Government will be sought on that strategy document for its implementation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Commissioner of Police has informed that intelligence-led policing through data analysis to identify accident prone areas and black spots, high visibility enforcement operations, implementation of Selective Traffic Enforcement Policy (STEP), regular alco-test operations, speed enforcement through fixed and hand-held devices, special weekend crackdown operations and daily vehicle checkpoints along motorways are being conducted.

In addition, road block and vehicle checkpoints are regularly conducted with the support of the Special Mobile Force and local Police Division across the island including the Southern region, which is the subject of the question.

In terms of infrastructural improvement, the TRMSU has identified several high-risk areas in the Southern region, classified as black spots or hazardous road sections where remedial works...

The Deputy Speaker: You have got long to go, hon. Minister?

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, not quite. Finishing soon.

The Deputy Speaker: Because you are being quite long!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Two paragraphs more. If I may?

The Deputy Speaker: Make it one!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ... where remedial works are expected to commence shortly. These sites include Mare d'Albert Roundabout, Plaine Magnien, Mahebourg Road, Saint Aubin along Savanne Road. The TRMSU will additionally implement traffic calming measures at several locations namely Grand Bel Air, Britannia near the school area, Rivière des Anguilles, – almost finishing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, – along La Baraque Road, Midlands, Cité La Chaux, works have already been issued in this regard. There we are.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Lukeeram!

Mr Lukeeram: Could the hon. Minister, please, state how many of the fatal accidents in the Southern Region involved drivers testing positive for prohibited substances or synthetic drugs in the last three years?

Mr Osman Mahomed: That is an interesting question. I have the statistics for overall accident. I can ...

The Deputy Speaker: You can file it. You can file the statistics.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Jhummun!

Mr Jhummun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House where matters stand regarding the repeated request for speed breakers in Constituency No. 13?

An hon. Member: At No. 9, also.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Request for speed breakers is not only to Constituency No. 13 – even in my own Constituency.

The Deputy Speaker: This question is far from the main question.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I have to add that there is a process to follow but they will be doing it shortly. I have a list that the TRMSU has been submitted.

Mr Jhummun: Shortly – how short?

Mr Osman Mahomed: I can tell you even in my Constituency, I am having a lot of trouble with people but it is going to be done.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, next question.

The hon. First Member for Rodrigues!

CEB AGRIVOLTAICS SCHEME – SUCCESS RATE – APPLICATIONS

(No. B/667) **Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the implementation of the CEB Agrivoltaics Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to where matters stand, indicating, as at to date, the –

- (a) success rate thereof, and
- (b) number of applications received, indicating the number thereof –
 - (i) processed;
 - (ii) approved, and
 - (iii) pending.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, le CEB gère actuellement deux projets agrivoltaïques. Donc le CEB Agrivoltaïque 1 et le projet CEB Agrivoltaïque II.

Le projet Agrivoltaïque 1 a été lancé en juillet 2024. Depuis ma prise de fonction au ministère, M. le président, j'ai demandé au CEB de revoir tous les programmes d'énergies renouvelables, car je suis conscient des nombreuses faiblesses et des obstacles et des contraintes qui entravent leur mise en œuvre. Ces éléments expliquent en grande partie la faible adoption des projets d'énergies renouvelables par différentes catégories de la population ces 10 dernières années.

À la lumière des changements apportés, en décembre de l'année dernière, donc en 2025, nous avons lancé le projet Agrivoltaïque II. Le système agrivoltaïque, c'est un système qui associe la production agricole et la production d'énergie. Il vise à répondre au double défi de sécurité alimentaire et de sécurité énergétique. Il est particulièrement important car il permet une utilisation optimale des ressources foncières limitées tout en rendant les activités agricoles plus rentables.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, le CEB m'informe que 131 demandes ont été reçues pour le programme d'Agrivoltaïque 1, lancé en juillet 2024. L'équivalent de 47,7 MW. 62 lettres d'intention ont été émises par le CEB à des demandeurs admissibles, représentant 21,8 MW, y compris pour Rodrigues.

Suite aux évaluations techniques, seuls 22 accords de raccordement ont été signés à ce jour pour l'Agrivoltaïque 1, ce qui représente une capacité totale de 9,1 MW. Concernant Rodrigues, cinq demandes représentant 1,6 MW ont été reçues. Trois lettres d'intention ont été émises. Deux raccordements ont été envoyés aux demandeurs, dont une a été signée. Trois demandeurs sont sur la liste d'attente et seront traités par ordre d'arrivée.

En ce qui concerne l'Agrivoltaïque I toujours, sur les 131 demandes initialement reçues, dont pour Maurice et Rodrigues, pour une capacité de 47,7 MW, un seul projet de 25 kW a été mis en service à ce jour.

Cela confirme, M. le président, ce que j'ai déjà mentionné un peu plus tôt, l'adoption insatisfaisante de ce système et ses problèmes inhérents.

Le nouveau programme Agrivoltaïque (CAV II), qui a été lancé l'année dernière, associé au stockage de batteries, a été lancé par le CEB le 2 décembre 2025. Agrivoltaïque II représente une évolution significative par rapport au programme agrivoltaïque I initialement, tant en termes de portée que d'exigences techniques et de structure de marché. La capacité prévue pour l'agrivoltaïque II est de 40 MW pour l'île Maurice et de 2 MW pour Rodrigues.

Le CEB m'informe que 43 demandes ont été reçues, représentant une capacité proposée de 118 MW. 31 lettres d'intention ont été émises en février de cette année-ci, en 2026, représentant 93 MW, dont 24 accords de raccordement ont déjà été signés cette année-ci pour une capacité totale de 72 MW. Pour Rodrigues, une demande a été reçue représentant 1,8 MW et est actuellement en cours de traitement.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you have a supplementary?

Ms Collet: Yes. J'ai deux questions supplémentaires. Est-ce que l'honorable Ministre pourra rassurer la Chambre que son ministère agira pour promouvoir ces deux *schemes* à Rodrigues et encourager les applications à Rodrigues avec la collaboration de l'Assemblée régionale bien sûr ?

Mr Assirvaden: Je peux rassurer l'honorable membre que nous avons eu un engouement par rapport à Agrivoltaïque I et Agrivoltaïque II. D'abord, ce qui a changé, c'est bien de savoir, ce qui a changé en collaboration avec le ministère de l'Agriculture, nous avons changé au moins quatre points du *scheme* premier, si je peux l'appeler ainsi, de l'Agrivoltaïque I à l'Agrivoltaïque II.

Donc, ce que nous faisons, c'est que d'abord l'Agrivoltaïque II, vous êtes obligé de mettre la batterie. Que ce soit à Rodrigues, que ce soit à Maurice, la batterie est obligatoire. Pourquoi ? Parce que notre problème à nous, vous le savez déjà, de 6h à 9h du soir, nous avons un problème de pression sur notre demande. Donc la batterie va nous aider.

Deuxième chose, c'est que l'Agrivoltaïque I, c'était de 600 kW maximum. Dorénavant, c'est 4 MW maximum. Donc nous avons plus que triplé la capacité d'installation. Donc, de

600 kW à 4 MW. Et la batterie demandée, nous avons demandé des batteries de 2 MW pour pouvoir injecter sur le réseau. Nous avons aussi, je suis content de le dire, nous avons aussi discuter avec mon honorable collègue ministre de l'Agriculture, et dorénavant *the Land Convention Permit (LCP)*, sera traité en espace de 7 jours. Donc si vous êtes un promoteur, vous demandez de *Land Convention Permit*, en 7 jours, vous savez déjà si votre projet peut aller de l'avant ou votre projet va être rejeté.

Ceci dit, nous avons aussi, avec la collaboration de l'Agro, arrivé à une entente pour dire que dorénavant vous avez un projet, peu importe que ce soit à Maurice ou à Rodrigues, déjà le ministère de l'Agro-industrie, peut vous dire déjà en amont que si votre terrain est *low potential, medium potential*. Donc au départ, vous savez déjà que ce n'est pas nécessaire d'attendre 3 mois, 3 ans après que l'Agro va vous dire que non, on ne pourra pas vous donner parce que c'est *high potential*.

Donc, quatre items ont été ajoutés et changés dans le *scheme* initial. On n'invente rien, à l'île de la Réunion, ils le font déjà. Il n'y a absolument rien. Donc, ce que nous voulons, c'est qu'à Maurice et à Rodrigues, que ce soit l'agriculture, mais l'élevage aussi puisse se faire sous les panneaux de photovoltaïque.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle.

KOREK MOBILE APPLICATION – PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES

(No. B/669) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the KOREK mobile application, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether the procurement procedures were followed in relation thereto and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Ramtohul: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in reply to my PQs B/420 and B/466 on 21st April, I elaborated lengthily on the essence, features, services available and measures taken by my Ministry to promote the uptake and accessibility of the KOREK mobile application.

This app represents a shift towards a proactive government that anticipates citizens' needs rather than reacting to the requests while fostering citizen empowerment through enhanced digital access, convenience and participation in public service delivery. It's the opposite of what the previous government used to do.

The KOREK application has been established with the aim of consolidating fragmented government applications into a single window for all the inhabitants of the Republic. We would recall that in the past, there were different types of applications. There was this MoKouran, MOPRI, all sorts of *moloys* were there earlier, but the citizens could not actually take advantage of the investment that was made out of public funds and this is where the story was really sad.

Keeping the citizens at the centre, we redesigned, re-engineered and restructured the services. And now we have the immediacy of service, the immediacy of information. One concrete example is the Penalty Point System that was worked upon collaboratively with my colleague from the Ministry for Transport. The driving license details and very soon, it will be a digital driving License, the real-time electricity consumption as seen from the grid on the app KOREK, and there are more to come. The mobile ID, the application for morality certificate and also the possibility for issuing complaints online for water leakages.

So, we have restructured it and it's a restructured version of the National Authentication Framework application which used to be referred as MauPass. We have separated now authentication from services. And one direct benefit has been the establishment of a single-user ID and password for all of those services, which was not the case earlier. Since its launch on 30 January 2026, the KOREK application is now easily accessible on Play Store, AppStore and Huawei App Gallery. To date, we have 462,310 registered users and 413,409 active users.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on page 7 of the National Audit Report 2023-2024, the Director of Audit had been critical of the uptake of e-government services. And back then, out of 123 e-services, less than 10 were being effectively used by citizens. Clearly, the value versus investment ratio did not do justice to public funds. Our approach is to leverage existing investment in order to drive value for citizens. Therefore, it was necessary to extend the functionality of existing services to increase the uptake. And this extension pertains to phase 1 of KOREK app, which is of limited scope and is being carried out under an existing agreement with the supplier of MauPass, and that agreement provides for enhancements.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the next step is to embark on phase II of Korek Super App project, for which specifications have already been prepared to kick off the procurement process. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you have a supplementary, hon. Ramdass?

Mr Ramdass: May we have an indication from the hon. Minister as to the timeline for the commencement of phase II of the KOREK app?

Dr. Ramtohul: Thank you, hon. Member. So, within few weeks, we will issue the RFP and we are looking at the regulatory period of around three months before we are able to receive the bids and start the evaluation.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. First Member for Vacoas and Floreal.

**FOREIGN WORKERS – AUTHORISED RECRUITING AGENCIES –
MONITORING MECHANISMS**

(No. B/670) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations whether, in regard to foreign workers, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain and table the list of agencies authorized to recruit same, indicating the –
 - (i) names of the beneficial owner/s in each case, and
 - (ii) number of licences refused, suspended or revoked over the past three years, indicating the reasons therefor and
- (b) state the monitoring mechanisms in place to prevent abuse, the charging of illegal fees and collusion in the recruitment thereof.

Mr Uteem: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I took office in November 2024, there was a total anarchy in the recruitment of foreign workers to work in Mauritius. Mauritius was placed on the blacklist of countries with forced labour by the Department of Trade of the United States of America. Report from international non-governmental organisation suggested that foreign workers were being exploited and made to pay recruitment fees.

My first priority, therefore, has been to work with the International Organisation of Migration of the United Nations to come up with new regulation to ensure the ethical recruitment of foreign workers.

The Private Recruitment Agency Regulations came into force in October 2025 and it is only as from that date that my Ministry considered application for recruitment licenses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a)(i) of the question, following the promulgation of the Private Recruitment Agency Regulations, my Ministry has, to date,

received 69 applications for licences for recruitment of non-citizen for employment in Mauritius.

As at date, only two recruitment licenses have been issued for recruitment of non-citizen for employment in Mauritius. In addition, six applications for such licences have been approved and claims for payment of the licence fees and security have been issued, but payment is being awaited.

Another seven applications have been recommended by the committee, subject to additional information being obtained. I am tabling the names of the two companies which have obtained a recruitment licence for the recruitment for non-citizen for employment in Mauritius.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the names of the beneficial owners cannot be disclosed in view of the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard part (a) (ii) of the question, for the past three years, no recruitment licences have been suspended or revoked. However, all recruitment licenses lapsed in 2024 and were not renewed as the legal framework was being reviewed.

With regard to application for recruitment license for non-citizens to work in Mauritius after October 2025, nine applications have been rejected so far. The reason why the application has been rejected is because they do not meet the new statutory criteria being required to issue a recruitment licence, including –

- (a) technical knowledge and experience in recruitment;
- (b) knowledge of applicable law;
- (c) sufficient financial resources, and
- (d) fitness and suitability of shareholders, directors and senior officers.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that following the issue of the recruitment licences under the new legislation and to prevent illegal recruitment of workers, my Ministry has issued a communique to inform the public and employers that recruitment of workers should be carried out through duly licensed private recruitment agencies in accordance with the law.

The list of licensed private recruitment agencies for each category of licences has been posted on the website of the Ministry and is being updated as soon as new licences are issued.

Such measures have been taken with a view to promoting fair, transparent and ethical recruitment practices, safeguarding the rights and welfare of non-citizen workers, preventing illegal recruitment activities and ensuring compliance with local labour laws and international labour standards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the law already prohibits the charging of fees from workers either by the agent or the employer. The regulations expressly provide that all fees and costs in respect of migrant workers should be borne by the employer and the recruitment agent is not allowed to charge migrant worker any recruitment fees.

In addition, licensees should, on a quarterly basis, submit relevant returns on vacancies and the number of jobseekers placed both locally and abroad.

Any person who contravenes the provisions of the Private Recruitment Agencies legislation shall commit an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine of not less than Rs500,000 and not exceeding Rs1 million and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

All licensees should display their licence and condition conspicuously in their office premises. Otherwise, they may be liable to a fine of up to Rs50,000. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, finally, since January 2025 to May 2026, some 21 cases of recruitment of foreign workers without a valid recruitment licence have referred by my Ministry to the Commissioner of Police.

Despite reminders sent to the Commissioner of Police, it would appear that up to now, the Police have not prosecuted anyone for illegal recruitment. Further to the issuance of recruitment licenses, my Ministry is envisaging post inspection to ensure that recruitment agencies are adhering to the conditions specified in the legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Member!

Ms J. Bérenger: Le ministre est-il au courant que de nombreuses compagnies agissent comme agences de recrutement sous couvert de *consulting*, n'ayant pas de licences officielles ? Et si oui, est-ce qu'il accepte cette pratique non encadrée ?

Mr Uteem: Tout à fait, M. le président. C'est la raison pour laquelle, en 21 occasions, on a référé des cas à la police, parce que c'est inacceptable. Donc, on ne tolère aucun *consultant* qui puisse agir sans la licence voulue. Mais je dois dire qu'on a donné une certaine flexibilité avant octobre 2025 pour que les employeurs puissent faire une demande pour des

travailleurs étrangers en leur propre nom parce qu'on n'avait pas encore émis des *recruitment licenses*.

Maintenant qu'on a émis des *recruitment licenses*, tout le monde devra passer à travers les agences de recrutement qui ont un permis valable.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, last one.

Ms J. Bérenger: Peut-il informer la Chambre si la compagnie Lexus Recruitment Agency & Co. Ltd., incorporée le 5 février 2025 et dont l'adresse du *beneficial owner* est la même que celle de son proche collaborateur et agent électoral, Monsieur J.S., est-ce que cette compagnie fait partie des 21 cas qu'il a mentionnés ? Est-ce qu'elle a été directement ou indirectement impliquée dans le recrutement des travailleurs étrangers depuis l'an dernier ?

Mr Uteem: M. le président, dans la liste des cas référés par mon ministère à la police, il n'y a pas le nom de la compagnie dont fait mention l'honorable membre.

Ms J. Bérenger: Une autre question, s'il vous plaît.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, last one.

Ms J. Bérenger: Il n'a pas répondu à ma question. Est-ce qu'elle a été impliquée d'une manière ou d'une autre, indirectement ou directement, dans le recrutement ?

The Deputy Speaker: He has answered.

Ms J. Bérenger: Même si elle n'est pas dans ces 21 cas, est-ce qu'il est au courant que cette compagnie a directement ou indirectement participé au recrutement de travailleurs étrangers puisqu'il vient de dénoncer cette pratique de *consulting*.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, you have put your question.

Mr Uteem: Comme je l'ai dit, tous les cas d'abus qui sont référés à mon ministère, où, après une enquête, on voit qu'il y a une personne qui a agi comme un agent recruteur sans une licence, cela a été référée à la police. On a une liste de 21 cas qui a été déjà référé à la police.

Malheureusement, le nom de la compagnie dont fait mention l'honorable membre n'est pas sur cette liste. Mais si elle a des informations, je l'invite à aller à la police et à faire une déposition en bonne et due forme.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

SCHOOLS (PRIMARY & SECONDARY) - INDISCIPLINE - REPORTED CASES

(No. B/671) Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to indiscipline in schools, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of reported cases thereof since January 2025 to date, giving a breakdown thereof between primary and secondary schools, respectively.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, students discipline remains a matter of utmost priority for my Ministry and for this Government as it is directly linked to the creation of a safe, stable and conducive learning environment, which is essential for quality education and the holistic development of our learners. Having said that, let me add that today, it is becoming increasingly challenging for heads of schools and educators, both in primary and secondary schools, to manage discipline.

I am informed that for the period January 2025 to 07 May 2026, the following cases of indiscipline were reported in primary and secondary schools –

- 353 cases of bullying. 63 in primary schools and 290 in secondary schools.
- 21 drugs related incidents. 7 in primary schools and 14 in secondary schools.
- Moreover, 56 cases of online harassment were reported in secondary schools, while 88 cases of inappropriate behaviour were recorded in primary schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, discipline management in schools remains the responsibility of heads of school under the Education Act.

However, this Government has adopted a structured, preventive approach to tackle indiscipline through close collaboration with the Mauritius Police Force, the family support services and other relevant stakeholders.

Disciplinary committees operate at school level. CCTV surveillance systems have been installed in some schools.

Moreover, targeted police patrols are being conducted in areas identified as high risk. In parallel, prevention and behavioural transformation are being reinforced through the evidence-based Get Connected programme for students at lower secondary level, particularly those in Grades 7, 8 and 9.

The programme focuses on the development of core life skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation and responsible decision-making with the aim of strengthening protective factors at an early stage and reducing vulnerability to risk behaviours including substance abuse. It is delivered by trained educators. This has been complemented by regular sensitisation sessions conducted by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit and the Harm Reduction Unit, as well as class-based interventions on bullying, violence, emotional regulation and conflict resolution.

It is planned to carry out another drug use prevention initiative namely, the REBOUND programme, designed for Grade 10 students. This programme will focus on resilience building, critical thinking and risk awareness. It will adopt interactive and media-based approaches to help students better understand the consequences of drug use and make informed choices.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has also reinforced psychosocial support mechanisms through student care and counselling desks in all State Secondary Schools, counselling units known as *Service d'écoute* and the deployment of educational psychologists and social workers.

Furthermore, a whole school and community-based approach is being promoted through parental sensitisation programmes, multi-agency case conferences for complex situations and early intervention initiatives at primary level through the Body Safety and Well-being Programme. Many anti-bullying workshops have also been conducted and my Ministry is finalising a comprehensive anti-bullying policy together with practical guidelines for schools, parents and students.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government remains committed to maintaining discipline in schools while adopting a balanced approach focused on prevention, support, rehabilitation and student well-being.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Ramkalawon!

Mr Ramkalawon: Does the hon. Minister also consider the appointment of discipline masters in schools from the teaching staff who can help in maintaining discipline?

Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, discussions are ongoing with the Minister of Finance in the prelude for the budget presentation and such requests have been made. We have to wait for the budget in order to know whether it will be implemented or not.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Pamplemousses and Triolet!

MONTAGNE BLANCHE – CREMATORIUM PROJECT

(No. B/672) Dr. R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the implementation of the crematorium project at Montagne Blanche, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) expected completion date thereof, and
- (b) measures being envisaged to ensure the timely operationalisation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

BANCO VALOR INTERNATIONAL LTD – INVESTMENT BANKING LICENCE – DUE DILIGENCE EXERCISE

(No. B/673) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the Investment Banking Licence granted to Banco Valor International Ltd., beneficially owned by Mr A. S., she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Financial Services Commission, information as to the outcome of the due diligence exercise carried out when the application therefor was processed, indicating –

- (a) whether the Board thereof was informed of any red flag concerning Mr A. S. and, if not, whether it was subsequently informed thereof, and
- (b) the actions, if any, taken in respect of the officers involved in the processing thereof.

Dr. Ms Jeetun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Banco Valor International Ltd has not been granted any licence by the Financial Services Commission. On the other hand, on 29 September 2016, the FSC received an application for an investment banking licence in the name of Alvaro Sobrinho Africa Ltd with Mr A.S. as sole shareholder and beneficial owner.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the time of the receipt of the application for the investment banking licence, Mr A.S. was already the ultimate beneficial owner of a number of entities for which the FSC had already issued licences after carrying out the due diligence on his fitness and propriety.

And I am informed that the FSC used the same due diligence that was carried out in assessing the application for the investment banking licence. I am also informed by the FSC that when the initial due diligence was carried out in 2015, adverse remarks were noted and the management company that had submitted the application had provided necessary explanation and submitted the following documents to clear the matter –

- (a) summary of criminal proceedings dated 23 May 2013 carried out against Mr A.S. both in Angola and Portugal, and
- (b) notice of clearance from the Public Prosecution Service, Attorney General's Office of Angola dated 08 November 2011, declaring that the State of Angola had no wish to pursue any legal action against A.S.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the licence for investment banking was therefore granted to Alvaro Sobrinho Africa Ltd. on 25 November 2016.

As regards part (a) of the question, the Board of the FSC was not informed at the time the investment banking licence was granted in 2016. It was only on 02 March 2017, following adverse press articles published in February 2017 that the FSC Board was apprised of the case. These press articles related to the alleged involvement of A. S. in a case where a prosecutor in Portugal was accused of closure of several cases of which one case involved Mr A.S.

This was viewed as a red flag at the FSC which had considered the summary of proceedings dated 2013 carried out on Mr A.S. in Angola and Portugal in determining the fitness and propriety of Mr A.S. while granting the licences.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the FSC Board then, I am informed, was instructed that all entities having Mr A.S. as beneficial owner should not start operation without the approval of the then acting Chief Executive and a communiqué dated 02 March 2017 was issued by the FSC to that effect.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the FSC that on 04 April 2017, Kroll Associates UK Ltd was appointed to carry out an independent due diligence on Mr A.S. and for an assessment of the reputational and integrity profile of Mr A.S. On 21 April 2017, Kroll

submitted its report and highlighted various issues which adversely impacted the reputation and character of Mr A.S. and questioned his fitness and propriety.

However, no documentary evidence was submitted in support of the statement made in the report, and Kroll further indicated that it would be unable to confirm the status of any criminal proceedings on Mr A.S. In the absence of elements to be considered and authoritative confirmations from FSC counterparts regarding wrongdoings imputed to Mr A.S., no enforcement actions were initiated against Mr A.S.

Alvaro Sobrinho Africa Ltd did not commence business operations under the investment banking licence. The said licence was suspended by the FSC on 27 March 2018 and was terminated with effect from 11 September 2023 under section 22(4) of the Financial Services Act for non-payment of fees.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the application for the investment banking licence was examined and approved by the Applications Committee chaired by the former acting Chief Executive and comprising six members who were heads of supervision and licencing clusters at the FSC at its meeting held on 23 November 2016.

I am informed that no actions were initiated against any officer.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over. I will allow one supplementary on it because time is over.

Mr Rookny: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Could the hon. Minister therefore advise the House, did the FSC actually clear Mr Sobrinho given that no enforcement action has been taken against him?

Dr. Ms Jeetun: I would not say that they cleared but they did not take any action. So, they based themselves on the previous due diligence done. They gave the license but when press reports were published, then they commissioned the report from Kroll but in fact, Kroll only gave judgement but they did not supply— from what I am told — any documentary evidence and no action was taken. They only decided to request him not to start any operation. So, the companies were not allowed to operate and subsequently suspended.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn; B/630, B/672, B/675, B/677, B/678, B/680, B/681, B/682, B/683,

B/684, B/685, B/686, B/687, B/688, B/689, B/690, B/691, B/692, B/694, B/695, B/698, B/699, B/700, B/703, B/704, B/705, B/706, B/707, B/708.

Hon. Ag. Prime Minister!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Deputy 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 Mohamed rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

EX-CHA / EDC HOUSING ESTATES – ASBESTOS THREAT – ACTION PLAN

(4.14 p.m.)

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement on a matter of pressing national importance: the persistent threat of legacy asbestos – a known cause of asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma – in the EDC houses built on ex-CHA estates after cyclones Alix and Carol in the early sixties.

This is not a new problem. It has been documented for a quarter of a century by the Addison assessment (2001/2002), the National Action Plan (2002), Dr. Sibartie Report (2006), the National OSH Profile (2009), the Truth and Justice Commission Report (2011), the Communiqué of 22 July 2015, the Ombudsperson for Children Annual Report (2017/2018). Our legislative framework prevents new exposure; what it has not done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is resolve the legacy.

The State's own records are not consistent. Depending on the source and the year, the initial stock has been reported as 3,013 or 3,113 units; the units still contain asbestos as 1,453 or 1,560; and units dismantled since 2015 as 218 or 228. I will not stand here, in this august Assembly and pretend otherwise. The discrepancy in figures is itself one of the hurdles we must overcome, and it is one of the reasons Statistics Mauritius has been tasked to deliver a reconciled, updated national picture. What is not in doubt is the order of magnitude: well over

a thousand families still live under asbestos roofs, and progress over the last decade has been unacceptably slow.

On 10 April 2026, Cabinet established an Inter-Ministerial Committee, which I chair, comprising of my colleagues the hon. Ministers of Environment, National Infrastructure, and Health and Wellness, together with the Junior Minister of Local Government, who was present and who represented his Ministry. The Committee held its first substantive meeting on 06 May 2026 at my Ministry, with senior officials from Finance, Housing and Lands, Environment, National Infrastructure, Health, Local Government, and Statistics Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I make this statement today not to announce a finished plan, but to demonstrate that a process has begun and to be transparent about where it stands.

Three hurdles have, for decades, blocked decisive action. The first is the data discrepancy I have just acknowledged. It will be resolved by a single reconciled inventory.

The second is “*lakaz zeritye*”, the complex inheritance arrangements that stall any intervention. A simplified ownership pathway is being examined, in consultation with the Attorney General’s office, including the constitutional avenues available to cut through prohibitive red tape where strictly necessary.

The third is the rehousing eligibility constraint: current policy disqualifies those who own immovable property, unjustly excluding the very families trapped in toxic homes on their own land. We are designing a voluntary Land-for-Housing Exchange: the State takes over the affected plot, transparently and independently valued, in exchange for a clean social housing unit.

For households who prefer to reconstruct on their own land, two financial options are under examination; channelled credit through the Mauritius Housing Company, or a direct grant per household. Replacement units would be standardised at approximately 49 m², with a monthly rental allowance during a targeted nine-month replacement cycle, indicative reconstruction cost of Rs2.5 to Rs3 million per unit.

Intervention will be evidence-based. The Mauritius Standards Bureau has been engaged to conduct airborne asbestos testing on an initial sample of 35 houses. Statistics Mauritius will shortly submit its comprehensive updated survey. The Ministry of National Infrastructure will undertake structural assessments. The Ministry of Local Government will expedite legal notices on abandoned units.

On finance, the historical record shows Rs800 million provisioned in the 2022/23 Budget, Rs40 million in 2023/24, and Rs100 million under the Casting of Roof Slabs Scheme in 2024/25 but consolidated outturn figures across agencies have not been readily available. A dedicated programme code, ring-fenced sub-heads, quarterly reconciliation, and independent audits will have to be put in place. Public money spent on saving lives must be traceable to the last rupee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me be candid with the House about the sequencing. Everything I have outlined depends on three sequential clearances –

- financial clearance from the Ministry of Finance,
- legal clarification, in particular from the Attorney-General on the Compulsory Intervention Protocol or on the ownership pathway, and thereafter,
- Cabinet approval of the consolidated package.

The immediate milestones are these –

- By end of May 2026, this month: preliminary Statistics Mauritius results and MSB airborne testing results received; the Committee reconvenes.
- In the short term: a reconciled national inventory published; the Attorney-General's opinion obtained; legal notices served on dangerous abandoned units; the dedicated financial programme code activated.
- In the medium and long term: a national communication campaign; the formalisation of the Land-for-Housing Exchange and the financial options; phased dismantling and reconstruction; and a long-term health surveillance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *je crois en une politique de transparence*. I will not promise the House what I cannot yet deliver, and I will not hide from this House the dependencies, the discrepancies, or the difficulties. What I can say with certainty is that a process has begun, that it is structured, that it is anchored in evidence, in law, and in fiscal discipline.

I, therefore, undertake, before this House, to keep the National Assembly fully informed at each stage, once the airborne testing results are received, once Statistics Mauritius reports, once the Attorney General has opined, once Finance has cleared, and once Cabinet has decided. The health and dignity of every Mauritian family living under these roofs is non-negotiable, and the era of reports that gather dust is over.

Thank you.

PUBLIC BILL*Second Reading***THE NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INSTITUTE BILL****(No. IV of 2026)***Order for Second Reading read.*

(4.22 p.m.)

The Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research (Dr. K. Sukon): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill (No. IV of 2026) be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I rise, today, not only to introduce a bill, I also rise for a turning point. A turning point on decades of fragmented research. A turning point on silos institutions that rarely talk to each other. A turning point on reports commissioned, shelved and forgotten. That era ends today. This Bill draws a line, bold, permanent and irreversible between what Mauritius has been and what Mauritius must now become.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what separates a nation that participates in the global economy from one that helps to shape it? It is rarely geography or natural resources. It is the capacity to generate knowledge, to translate that knowledge into innovation and to deploy that innovation in the service of national development. That capacity is what this Bill creates.

C'est pour cela que je le dis avec force, aujourd'hui : ce projet de loi ne vise pas à créer une institution de plus. Il vise à doter notre pays d'un véritable moteur national d'idées, de preuves, d'innovations et de transformations économiques.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are an island with no oil, no gas, no minerals. Our principal resource is the resource that never runs out: the brilliance of our people. The world has changed. Today, knowledge is power. Innovation is power. Research is power. There are so many examples, like Singapore, which did it with brains. South Korea did it with brain. Ireland and Finland did with brain. Singapore generates thousands of patents and supports hundreds of spin-off companies every year. South Korea invests close to 5% of its GDP in research and development.

In 2024, for every resident patent application generated in Mauritius, Singapore generated 270, Finland around 600 and South Korea around 28,000. Even if we normalise it for the population, the per capita innovation intensity for Mauritius is 56 times lower below Singapore, 32 times below Finland, and 676 times below South Korea.

It reflects clearly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, being several times less patent intensive than these countries is not a simple gap. It is a structural gap. It reflects years without a national innovation culture. It will not close down on its own. It will not close down with goodwill. It will not close down with isolated effort. It closes through deliberate institutional intervention. That is precisely what NRII delivers.

The world spent 2.87 trillion dollars on research and development in 2024. Not billions, trillions. Global research and development spending has nearly tripled in real times since year 2000. That is the scale of the global commitment to knowledge.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has decided not to remain behind. That is why I wish to express my gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister because the Government Programme 2025-2029, at paragraphs 21 and 37, committed this Government to a groundbreaking framework for research and innovation, and to the legislation to operationalise it. Consequently, the Budget 2025-2026, at paragraphs 21 and 23, also placed research, development and innovation at the heart of our new economic model and proposed the very institute we are establishing today. This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the delivery of that promise. On time. On mandate. On record.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) ranks Mauritius 53rd in the world on the Global Innovation Index, number one in Sub-Saharan Africa, and classifies Mauritius as one of the fastest climbers on earth. But a ranking is not a destination. In fact, a ranking is a departure point. The NRII being proposed today is how we depart – decisively, ambitiously and permanently.

The MRIC was created with good intentions. It served a purpose. We will never deny that. But the MRIC was built for an earlier phase of our development. That world it was designed for is gone. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for decades, we have produced research reports of impressive thickness and impressive obscurity, beautifully bound, professionally printed and stored. We cannot continue doing this.

Today, fragmentation is a liability. Delay is a liability. Timid ambition is a liability. Section 41 repeals the MRIC Act. This Bill does not rename the MRIC. It does not tinker. It does not adjust. Sections 3 to 45 build something fundamentally and permanently different – what Mauritius needs now, that is, the NRII. A stronger body, a broader body, a sharper body, a national centralised body.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to walk this House briefly through the architecture of the Bill. Sections 1 and 2 set the legal foundation. They define applied research. They define mission-oriented research as research directed at finding practical solutions to national challenges. They define our national research and innovation priorities. No more research for the sake of research. No more papers that collect dust. We start with the problem. We commission the research to solve it.

Here, I would like to let the academic know that we are not saying that we will not do fundamental research; that will continue. They will continue to have research funding from the Higher Education Commission and other sources, but what we are saying is that we are focused on national challenges. We want everybody to contribute to find the solution to the national challenges.

Section 3 establishes the NRII as a body corporate, a real institution, a national institution. Section 4, the heart of the Bill, sets 11 national commitments –

- Evidence-based policy making;
- Coordination of the research ecosystem;
- Mission-oriented research on climate, food, health, the ocean, the digital and energy;
- Capacity building inside the government;
- Resource mobilisation;
- Talent attraction and retention, and
- stronger international positioning.

Section 5 places research inside the government itself. The NRII aims to train public officers to conduct, commission and interpret applied research. Evidence will become the standard, not the exception. NRII promotes research and evidence-based policy decision.

Section 6 empowers NRII to conduct strategic research for new economic sectors: the blue economy, the green economy, biotech, advanced manufacturing, digital frontier to include a few.

I wish to say clearly that diversification that we have been talking about should not remain a slogan. Diversification is research, is evidence, is strategy. The next pillar of our economy is likely to be born from the NRII research.

Section 7 gives the institution the powers to deliver, to contract, to partner, to establish laboratories and innovation hubs, to appoint international experts, to raise funds globally, to patent, to licence and to generate royalties.

Sections 8 to 14 establish five divisions –

- Administration and Support,
- Strategy,
- Applied Research and Commission Studies,
- Partnerships and Innovation, which is the bridge between academia and industry, and crosses the so-called ‘valley of death’ between discovery and deployment, and
- Capacity Building and Talent Development which manages fellowships and the Mauritius brain gain initiative.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me one illustration. We all know Alexander Fleming. He discovered penicillin – by accident, be it – when he saw the bacteria near the mould dying. This happened in 1928, but only 15 years down the lane, it was 15 years after, that is, in 1943 that penicillin was given to everybody.

So, 15 years between discovery and the time it came to the market and made available to everyone. 15 years between discovery and deployment. 15 years lost in what scientists call the ‘valley of death’ between research and impact. Mauritius cannot afford such ‘valley of death’ – frankly, no one, not even our patients. The Partnerships and Innovation Division of the NRII is the bridge across that valley.

That is why NRII aims to build the talent base that our economy demands: scientists, engineers, technologists, researchers. It will grow a research intensive, innovative and

entrepreneurial economy. Most importantly, it aims to turn researchers into entrepreneurs through mentorship, through training, through access to funding for research. Because Mauritius does not need more papers on the shelves. Mauritius needs more entrepreneurs in the marketplace. Spin-off, startups and Mauritius companies built on Mauritian research. This is the ambition; this is the deliverable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, section 15 creates the Board of Governors of competence – proven competence in research, science, finance, technology transfer, higher education, entrepreneurship, policy or public administration. Thus, competence, results and accountability are built in from day one.

Section 23 establishes the National Research Institute Coordinating Council. It includes every government research body like FAREI, MCIA, MOI and other public funded agencies, convened by mandate every two months to align efforts and eliminate duplication. Because the hardest problems like climate, food, cities, health sit at the intersection of disciplines, not within any single one. Breakthrough comes from teams and above all, excellence demands convergence.

Section 25 establishes Scientific Advisory Council. Five independent experts from academia, industry and research organisations will form part of that. Their mandate: protect quality, enforce rigor, ensure relevance and ensure that the reports, the biannual reports are tabled on time. This builds transparency and quality into the institution's DNA.

Part V – we have introduced financial discipline from day one. There is a General Fund and the auditor will be the Director of Audit, the independent audit authority of this Republic. Clearly, this is bold but disciplined, ambitious but answerable, strong but properly governed.

Section 31 vests the Institute with the right to patent, licence, sell and generate royalties. We are building a knowledge economy. Intellectual property is its currency.

Sections 43 and 44 ensure a smooth, lawful transition. Every MRIC officer is protected – same terms, conditions, pension rights. No one loses the job, no one loses the pension, no one is left behind. This is clearly not a reckless change. It is a lawful reform but a necessary reform.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is this Bill really about? It is about whether Mauritius is serious about the future. Do we want to remain reactive or become strategic? Do we want fragmented effort or coordinated action? Do we want policy-based assumption or policy

based on evidence? Do we want to keep old structures because they are comfortable or build new structures because the times demand them? The Government has made its choice. We choose science, we choose research, we choose innovation, we choose coordination, we choose the future.

To every researcher, every scientist, every engineer, every doctoral student, every Mauritian who left because they could not see a future here for the work they love, this Bill is for you. The NRII says that your work matters, your discoveries have a home, your career can be built here. Your country needs what you know.

The race is on. The leading nations are pulling away and Mauritius, No. 1 in Africa, one of the fastest climbers on earth, is not going to sit in the stands and watch. Together, we are going to compete. We are going to discover; we are going to build; we are going to win.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the national interest demands modern institution. It demands courage and it demands NRII. We are not merely establishing an institute; we are building the future. It is with full conviction and profound pride that I commend the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill to this august Assembly.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 4.42 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.21 p.m., with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

(5.22 p.m.)

Mr G. Lesjongard (The Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to intervene today on the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill.

Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Minister on the Bill, and allow me to make it very clear from the start. We support stronger research and innovation. We support evidence-based policy, but, Madam Speaker, we do not support

legislation that centralises power, weakens independence, and risks turning science into a tool of political convenience.

This Bill in front of the House today, as stated in the Explanatory Memorandum, repeals the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Act of 2019. In doing so, Madam Speaker, it replaces a coordinating council by a centralised institute. On paper, the change sounds efficient. However, in practice, Madam Speaker, it raises some serious concerns. I shall, during my intervention, Madam Speaker, deal with some of the key clauses of the Bill and explain why they matter and what I said earlier.

Now, let me start with Clause 3, that is, the National centralised body in applied research and innovation. In fact, Madam Speaker, this Clause deals with centralisation without the proper safeguards. The Bill establishes the institute as the National centralized body on applied research. True it is that centralisation can reduce duplication. Nevertheless, that specific Clause gives the institute sweeping powers to conduct research, commission studies, and shape policies without clear limits. And this raises some serious questions. For example, where is the protection for university-led research? What is the guarantee that independent, curiosity-driven science will not be sidelined?

And allow me, Madam Speaker, at this stage, to give you an example. Let us imagine that the University of Mauritius has spent 10 years building expertise, for example, in coral reef restoration, and they have published peer-reviewed studies. They have trained local students. Now, let's say, for example, that under this Bill, a Ministry needs a quick report on coastal resilience. Instead of partnering with the university, the Ministry goes directly to the new institute. And the institute under pressure to deliver fast results, commissions a short-term study using external consultants. The university's long-term work is sidelined; the expertise is ignored. Therefore, their students lose opportunities, Madam Speaker. This is not hypothetical.

Centralisation concentrates commissioning power. It creates a single gatekeeper for research funding, Madam Speaker. In a small country like ours, and we should take note of that, that gatekeeper can easily become a bottleneck or a tool for preference. Madam Speaker, under the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Act, the MRIC model funded diverse actors. This new model, under this present legislation, runs the risk of creating a monopoly on research priorities, and as we all know, monopoly stifles innovation, and we have seen this lesson globally, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Clause 3 also gives the institute power to establish and operate research facilities, laboratories, innovation hubs. Again, this sounds very positive, Madam Speaker. But let me give you two examples. What happens to existing facilities like the Mauritius Oceanography Institute or the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute? Will they be duplicated, Madam Speaker? Will they be defunded in favour of the new institute run labs? This Bill is silent about that.

Madam Speaker, silence creates uncertainty, and uncertainty wastes resources. Let me now come to Clause 4, which deals with the role and responsibilities of the institute. Mission-oriented research is useful, but it can be dangerous if misused. Clause 4 mandates mission-oriented research on climate resilience, food security, digital transformation, and social inequality. Although we do agree that these are urgent challenges, we also note, Madam Speaker, that the Clause also empowers the institute to define what counts as national challenge.

The question, Madam Speaker, today is, who decides? The board? Yes. But who appoints the board? The answer is the Minister. And to explain what I just said, let me share two concrete examples. The first one refers to food security.

The institute, Madam Speaker, could commission a state study favouring high-tech, for example, imported seed varieties, because they promise quick yield gains. But in this case, what about research on traditional climate-resilient crops favoured by small planters? What about agro-ecological methods that protect soil and biodiversity?

Madam Speaker, if the institute leadership prioritises quick wins or aligns with commercial interest, alternative approaches get marginalised. The Bill says research must be evidence-based. But like I said earlier the question, today, is: who decides what counts as evidence? The answer is that if the definition is controlled by a politically appointed board, science becomes selective, Madam Speaker.

Let me share another example with regard to clause 4, which explicitly mentions, for example, gentrification as a national challenge. Good, Madam Speaker. But let us imagine that the institute commissions a study on, for example, housing policy in Port Louis. The research finds that current policies displace low-income families. Let us say the findings are inconvenient under clause 32, which I shall address at a later stage, the hon. Minister could direct the institute to refocus the study, or, Madam Speaker, delay the publication, or commission a counter-study.

What would be the end result then, Madam Speaker? Public policy will not be shaped by independent evidence, but by political comfort.

Madam Speaker, allow me here to refer to clause 15(3), which is very clear. The Minister appoints the Chairperson and seven members. No independent nomination panel, and the appointment will require just proven competence in the various fields, which I stated earlier, under clause 15(3)(a). But what is proven competence? How do we define proven competence, Madam Speaker?

Based on the nomination made by this Government since the beginning of their mandate in November 2024, I'm worried, Madam Speaker, that when it comes to their definition of competence – we know what has happened – in several institutions of our country.

In this specific clause, Madam Speaker, there is clearly no statutory quota for academic or civil society representation. Madam Speaker, what I fear is that this board will be under the control of the Minister.

Why I'm saying that, Madam Speaker? For example, the hon. Minister could appoint board members with strong ties to a particular corporate sector. Say, for example, real estate development. That board, then, will oversee research on gentrification, land use, or housing policy. I put the question, therefore, Madam Speaker: is it realistic to expect them to prioritise studies that challenge their associates' interests?

The Bill, Madam Speaker, relies on goodwill. Good governance requires, as I said, structural safeguards. Madam Speaker, this brings me to clause 32, which deals with the powers of the hon. Minister, or rather, the hon. Minister's overriding power and this is the most dangerous clause of the Bill. It states –

“The Minister may give such directions of a general nature to the Institute, not inconsistent with this Act, as he considers necessary in the national interest and the Institute shall comply with those directions.”

Madam Speaker, national interest is not defined. General nature is not defined. This is merely a blank check to the Minister who can direct the institute to prioritise research that supports a political narrative.

I am going to give two concrete examples to this House, Madam Speaker.

First, let's say we are talking of, in the first instance, on energy policy. Mauritius is debating its energy mix. The institute is asked to study the feasibility of solar micro-grids in rural areas. The research finds that decentralised renewable energy is more cost-effective and equitable than expanding the central grid. But, Madam Speaker, these finding challenges existing utility contracts and investment plans.

Under clause 32, the Minister could direct the institute to reassess, for example, the methodology, or broaden the scope indefinitely. The study, Madam Speaker, never sees the light of the day. Public debate is deprived of independent evidence in that case, Madam Speaker.

Another example, the institute commission research on wage disparities.

Madam Speaker: I'm sorry, these are real cases?

Mr Lesjongard: No.

Madam Speaker: This is what you're saying.

Mr Lesjongard: This can happen with this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, okay. They're not real cases.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, but, then, we should...

Madam Speaker: No, no, go ahead. I just want to understand.

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, the data reveals significant gaps linked to gender, region, and ethnicity. Publishing these findings could fuel public debate or Opposition criticism, Madam Speaker.

The Minister citing what is in the law – national interest – could direct the institute to delay publication, redact key findings, or commission a balanced counter-study. As a result, research, unfortunately, under this Bill, Madam Speaker, becomes a tool for managing perception and not advancing truth, Madam Speaker.

This why I believe this clause will suppress findings that are inconvenient and delay studies on sensitive topics, Madam Speaker. The 2019 Act had no such provision, Madam Speaker. Why add it now?

Scientific integrity requires insulation from political pressure. This clause, unfortunately, removes that insulation.

Now, allow me to come back to clause 15 and also address clause 20.

Board members and the CEO serve three-year terms and are renewable. Madam Speaker, research does not work on three-year cycles. Breakthrough takes time, talent needs of stability. A researcher offered a three-year contract will not commit to a decade-long project, Madam Speaker. You will agree that some of them will leave the country for more secure institutions abroad. We are building a knowledge economy. Yet, were designed governance structures that promote in the short term. The 2019 Act allowed for more flexible tenure arrangements. This Bill locks us into political appointment cycles, unfortunately.

Madam Speaker, allow me to address clause 28, which deals with Estimate of Income and Expenditure. It is stated in the Bill that the institute must submit annual estimates for ministerial approval. There is no statutory guarantee for baseline funding. No multi-year budget framework.

Madam Speaker, research cannot thrive on annual appropriations subject to political whims. The NRIC had clearer grant disbursement mechanisms. This Bill replaces them with a general fund depending on ministerial discretion. Clause 27 stipulates that all money go into this fund and clause 28 says the Minister can approve only part of the estimates. This is not financial autonomy for an institution. This is financial vulnerability, Madam Speaker.

Let me share some views with regard to clause 31, which deals with intellectual property. Clause 31 vests intellectual property rights in the creator. This is positive. It encourages innovation. But the clause also allows the Institute to assign intellectual property to sponsors on such terms and conditions as they may mutually agree. Who negotiates these terms? The Institute's management under whose oversight, a board appointed by the Minister? Madam Speaker, I am afraid that without transparent arm's length negotiation protocols, this provision risks favouring well-connected private interest over public benefit. Where is the requirement for open licencing of publicly funded research? Where is the mandate for public access to findings?

I shall now, Madam Speaker, address clauses 23 and 24, which deals with the Coordinating Council and the role and functions of the Council. The Coordinating Council sounds useful. It brings together CEOs of research agency but unfortunately, clauses 24 gives it only advisory functions – it shall advise; it may facilitate; it can contribute. And these are weak verbs, Madam Speaker, in this Bill.

Meanwhile, the Institute, under clause 4, has executive powers to commission research, build labs, hire staff. The question is what stops the Institute from bypassing existing agencies? What prevents duplication under the pretext of coordination? What this Bill is creating, Madam Speaker, is a new layer of bureaucracy without resolving the fragmentation it claims to fix.

Finally, Madam Speaker, let me come to clause 37, which deals with confidentiality and criminal penalties. Clause 37 imposes strict confidentiality on officers and Board members. Any breach of that clause carries a fine of Rs100,000 and up to two years imprisonment. Therefore, whistleblowers who expose misuse of funds, political interference or flawed research could face jail term. Where is the public interest defence? Where is the protection of those who reveal wrongdoing? Transparency, Madam Speaker, is essential for public trust in science. And this clause chills accountability, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I believe that this piece of legislation requires amendment. Without proper safeguard, this Bill risks creating a research institute that is efficient at delivering political outputs, but ineffective at producing independent transformative science.

Madam Speaker, research is not a service industry for Government. It is about challenging assumption and should be able to question power. It, therefore, requires freedom. Madam Speaker. Let me tell the Government of the day that if they want to serve the country, it is not through a politically motivated institute that this will happen, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Minister of Education.

(5.47 p.m.)

The Minister of Education and Human Resource (Dr. M. Gungapersad): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to intervene on this extremely important Bill. I rise today to offer my unequivocal support for the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill. This is more than a timely piece of legislation; it is a foundational necessity for the future of our Republic.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the mover of the Bill for coming with this piece of legislation. The hon. Minister, who himself comes from academia, knows the pertinence of research and innovation. Mauritius stands at a decisive crossroads. We have reached the limits of traditional growth. Our aspiration to become a high-income, knowledge-driven

economy is bold, but it remains a distant shore until we build a bridge of systematic research and innovation to reach it.

This Bill comes at a crucial time when we have geopolitical upheavals, uncertainties and tensions. Still, our zeal is to harness research and innovation. This should not be dampened by what we have just heard by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Having been part of the academia, hon. Minister, for some time, – humbly, I am saying it, without being pedantic, – I think, if it were a *viva*, it would have got the mention referral. I am not being nasty, but I think, we need to compare likes and likes.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition says he supports research and innovation, but he, I do not know how come, he has been looking for nitty-gritty here and there to cause doubt on the Bill, on the intention of the Bill. Earlier during the day, I told a friend: "jaundiced eyes see yellow everywhere." And the hon. Leader of the Opposition has not left behind his political lens. He is talking like a politician. And the more he talks like a politician, the more he insults academia. He insults the corps of researchers, of scientists, Mauritian academics. By the way, by his approach, he sees yellow everywhere; he sees problems everywhere. And I am really disappointed by the way he has delved into such a piece of legislation. Does he want a status quo? Where, on this side of the House, we are vouching for what? For innovation.

What do we want? We want to leave a legacy for young emerging researchers, but at the same time, for established researchers. We said it. We do not want research to be fragmented. Unfortunately, I will say from academia's perspective, I would say that both, my ears for those who belong to academia, his ontological and epistemological paradigms are erroneous.

And when we do research, we have two words which we should not miss. One is reliability, second one is validity. When we talk about validity, we have dependent validity and independent validity. Now the quality of his analysis, I better not comment more because I have more serious things to do in this House. He is against centralised research and innovation systems. I would ask him to go and look at literature and try to see what are Germany, Japan, United States, Taiwan, Australia doing. Are these countries wrong in bringing a National Institute for Research and Innovation?

Mr Mohamed: Joe, call a friend.

Ms Anquetil: Trop bonne celle-là !

Dr. Gungapersad: Allow me, Madam Speaker, to delve on this Bill. I will not, like him, wear a political lens. Let me look at this Bill from a Small Island Developing State perspective. When we did our research, for our Masters, for our PhD, at least one chapter or paragraph, we have to look at it being Mauritian because for a Small Island Developing State, perspective changes. This is what the hon. Leader of Opposition completely missed in his analysis. And secondly, I will look at it as the Minister of Education and Human Resource. For a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), research and innovation are not just academic pursuits, they are essential tools for building resilience against unique geographical and economic vulnerabilities like we face. By focusing on targeted technological and systemic shifts, we can transform constraints into competitive advantages. This is what we are proposing through the creation of this institute.

Madam Speaker, how do we prepare our country for an economy that is changing faster than ever before? How do we prepare our young people for jobs that do not yet exist? How do we ensure that Mauritius remains competitive in a world where innovation is increasingly determining which countries move forward and which countries fall behind? These are serious national questions. These are not political questions and this Bill responds to those questions.

By establishing the National Research and Innovation Institute, Government is creating a stronger national mechanism to support applied research, innovation, evidence-based policy making, the development of new economic sectors by driving the transition of Mauritius into a resilient, competitive, and knowledge-powered economy. This reform is both practical and forward-looking. It strengthens the country's capacity to use research more effectively in addressing national challenges and preparing Mauritius for future economic opportunities.

Madam Speaker, I refer to section 6 of the Bill where we can read that the National Research and Innovation Institute shall in collaboration with relevant Ministries, Government Agencies, the private sector and international partners conduct strategic research for the identification. It is not the Minister who will be choosing. I do not know how he was completely misled in his reading of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, we are talking about collaboration among different Ministries. I do not think that the hon. Minister will decide what the Minister of Health or Agro will have as policy making. There will be collaboration – feasibility studies, rightly said, market analysis for emerging industries and economic activities, research into the development of the ocean

economy, green economy, public health, digital transformation, creative industries, biotechnology, energy sustainability and sovereignty, social inequality, advanced manufacturing, work-life balance and other sectors of strategic national interest. I cannot find how it is being hijacked politically.

Madam Speaker, let us be clear, this Bill represents a structural reform of profound national importance. It proposes to reduce duplication. This is perhaps what the Leader of the Opposition wanted. It proposes to reduce duplication and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Let that be clear. I also wish to thank and acknowledge all those men and women who have been involved in research and innovation over decades and decades, who have contributed in so many groundbreaking research and innovation despite limited resources and difficult circumstances. The pioneers of research and innovation have to be saluted for their commendable work that they have done so far but today, we are going one step further in our wish to equip our country with a sort of one-stop shop for research and innovation by building a critical mass of researchers and scientists to support knowledge-based economy and this is crucial for a Small Island Developing State. Indeed, Mauritius already possesses significant research capability. The problem is that these efforts are currently fragmented, siloed and underleveraged. We are data rich but insight poor because our research is not always strategically aligned with our national goals.

Section 5(2) of the Bill clearly stipulates that the Institute may, at the request of any Ministry or Government Agency, second research officers to provide technical assistance to support or conduct the research and preparation of evidence policy briefs, analytical reports and impact assessments. The NRII is going to be a game changer. It sets up a centralised, mission-driven powerhouse designed to –

- (i) align research with our highest national priorities;
- (ii) strengthen rigorous evidence into the heart of policy making;
- (iii) coordinate a scattered ecosystem into a unified force, and
- (iv) support the emergence of an entirely new economic sector.

Madam Speaker, a modern state requires robust analytical capacity to navigate global volatility. The NRII is an investment in governance and efficiency. I repeat it, the NRII is an investment in governance, I would add good governance and efficiency. By rooting our decisions in rigorous data rather than institution, we eliminate waste and ensure that every rupee of public resource is directed towards high impact outcomes.

Madam Speaker, as Minister of Education and Human Resource, I see very clearly why this Bill matters so much. Very often, we tell our young people; ‘study hard, work hard, develop yourself, prepare for the future’. But we must also ask ourselves a very important question – are we preparing them to be future ready? A student sitting in a classroom today may enter the labour market in 10 years that will look completely different. Artificial Intelligence is changing industries. Biotechnology is changing industries. Digital transformation is changing industries. Some jobs may disappear; new jobs will emerge. If our education and training systems do not evolve fast enough, we risk preparing young Mauritians for opportunities that may no longer exist. That is why this Bill matters. It will help Mauritius identify future economic sectors and future workforce needs, and once those needs are identified, our schools, technical institutions, universities, and training institutions must respond accordingly. This also requires continued emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education so that our young Mauritians are better positioned to take part in emerging industries and innovation-driven sectors.

Madam Speaker, this Bill also recognises something very important. Research cannot remain confined within universities. Government must work with universities. Universities must work with industry. Industry must work with Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Etwareea: Il s’en va!

Ms Anquetil: Tu pars?

Dr. Gungapersad: If these institutions continue...

(Interruptions)

If these institutions continue operating...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Carry on!

Dr. Gungapersad: ...in isolation, Mauritius loses opportunities.

Madam Speaker: Don’t be distracted!

Dr. Gungapersad: No, I will not.

Without proper coordination, valuable research outcomes may remain underutilised. Innovation may be delayed and important economic opportunities may be lost. This Bill helps create stronger coordination across these institutions. That is exactly what Mauritius needs.

Madam Speaker, let us consider how research can directly solve practical national challenges, for example, in relation to food security. Research can help Mauritius to better determine which crops are best suited for specific regions based on soil condition, climate patterns, and water availability. This can strengthen agricultural planning and improve long-term food resilience. Research can also help Mauritius identify emerging industries and ensure that our education and training institutions are preparing young people for future employment opportunities.

Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Education and Human Resource, it is my duty to work on the human capital development. My Ministry will closely collaborate with NRII to stimulate the brain gain effect that is mentioned there. It is imperative to create a proper ecosystem for retention of Mauritian talent. We must provide high-level career path for the nation's brightest students, preventing them from feeling they must move abroad to pursue a career in science or technology. We must rethink skill transformation with the setting up of the NRII. It must act as a bridge between the education system and the labour market, ensuring that the curriculum evolves alongside global technological shifts.

Madam Speaker, we should not forget that we need to forge our international prestige and ensure international collaboration. For a small island state like Mauritius to punch above its weight on the global stage, we need to reconsider our role as a regional leader. By specialising in a niche, tropical medicine, oceanography, an island can become a regional hub for excellence, attracting international grants and partnerships. Accurate research will allow the State to speak with more authority in international forums, like the UN or COP summits, backed by empirical evidence of their specific challenges.

Madam Speaker, education should move from rote learning to a competency-based curriculum. Research, here, focuses on digital literacy and pedagogical innovations that prepare students for a green and digital economy, ensuring that at-risk learners are not left behind. The Bill proposes to enlist the support of women and youth in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in the field of research and innovation. My Ministry is already

collaborating with Mauritius Telecom and the Ministry of ICT to empower our kids and provide them alternative modes of learning. The NRII can act as the bridge between current educational practices and the evolving needs of a modern economy. For a small island state, where human capital is the most valuable resource, it is important that the education system is agile, data-driven, and future-proof.

Madam Speaker, education systems often struggle with curriculum lag, where the skills taught in schools do not match the requirements of the job market. The institute can address the skill gap by revamping ongoing research into the local and global market trends, shifts towards the blue economy or green energy to inform periodic curriculum updates. We need to opt for tailored pedagogy by researching how our students learn best, considering language, culture, and the environmental factors, to develop teaching methods that improve literacy and numeracy competencies of our children.

Madam Speaker, we need to produce a testing ground for digital tools, ensuring that technology serves the teacher rather than replacing them. Development of interactive pedagogical materials to boost up teaching and learning. Madam Speaker, we need to encourage teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms, helping them identify what works and scaling those successes across the national school network. It is high time that we set up clear, data-backed benchmarks for school performance and teacher efficacy, moving away from subjective assessments towards a standardised culture of excellence.

Education is not just about academics. It is about the well-being of the whole child. Psychosocial research will help to investigate the root causes of indiscipline, bullying, or disengagement within schools to develop preventive frameworks rather than purely punitive ones. Impact of mobile phones and tablets on students' well-being also may be researched.

The institute will help to bridge the gap between secondary school and tertiary institutions as it will ease the transition from secondary school to the workforce or university.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to highlight the issue of talent. Mauritius invests significant resources in education, tertiary development and workforce training. It is, therefore, important that we create sufficient opportunities for highly skilled Mauritians to contribute meaningfully within our economy. We must create an environment where talent can thrive locally, and we must create opportunities for Mauritian researchers and innovators to contribute to national knowledge-based economy.

With these words, Madam Speaker, I commend the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill to the House. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Etwareea! I would appeal to Members to be concise because we have a long list of orators. Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. Etwareea!

(6.09 p.m.)

Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Madame la présidente, je voulais presque vous demander pardon. Tout à l'heure quand le leader de l'opposition était en train de faire son discours, il a parlé du développement des industries basées sur les connaissances traditionnelles. J'ai trouvé cela très intéressant et je n'ai pas pu m'empêcher de lui poser, d'une position assise, des questions. Auxquelles, évidemment, il n'a pas répondu. Peut-être qu'il n'a pas entendu. Mais il n'a pas répondu.

Madam Speaker: Moi, j'ai entendu !

Mr Etwareea: Vous l'avez entendu, mais il n'a pas répondu.

Je suis désolé, Madame la présidente, de dire que le leader de l'opposition, aujourd'hui, a fait un discours que pour faire le discours. Il aurait dû, au fait, dans un débat comme celui d'aujourd'hui, s'abstenir parce qu'il est resté dans les généralités. Il n'a pas apporté des points importants sur un sujet aussi important pour notre croissance et pour notre économie de demain.

Quand j'ai appris qu'on allait débattre de ce projet de loi, je me suis dit, mais pourquoi on ne l'a pas fait auparavant ? Parce que tous les pays de la planète, allons dire tous les pays, peut-être les pays africains un peu moins. Mais même là, il ne faut pas sous-estimer les pays africains ou les pays d'Amérique du Sud qui ont tous établi des centres de recherche et de l'innovation parce qu'ils savent que c'est l'innovation qui sera la matière première qui fera vivre les économies de demain. Comme nous, on a vécu sur la canne à sucre, ensuite sur le textile, la finance, l'immobilier, *what next?*

Peut-être le ministre, aujourd'hui, est en train de poser les premiers jalons pour notre économie de demain. Donc, c'est normal que je le félicite. Je félicite le ministre Dr. Sukon

qui, somme toute, entend donner à la recherche, à l'innovation et à la toute-puissance – parce qu'il reconnaît la toute-puissance intellectuelle mauricienne – leurs lettres de noblesse et leur juste place au sein de l'économie mauricienne. Son message est limpide. Nous ne produisons pas de riz, nous ne produisons pas d'essence, mais nous pouvons produire des idées. Nous ne sommes pas dans la beauté du geste. On est dans l'impératif économique. Les pays qui progressent le plus investissent dans la recherche et l'innovation.

Comme je disais avant, Madame la présidente, je ne comprends pas pourquoi on n'a pas créé une telle instance auparavant. Elle répond pourtant à des aspirations qui ne sont pas nouvelles. Elle renforce la compétitivité, le ministre l'a dit, elle encourage l'innovation et elle soutient l'émergence d'une économie fondée sur la connaissance.

En réalité, le ministre Sukon installe aujourd'hui, une usine à idées. Les idées, oui, Madame la présidente, elles comptent. Nous savons que le plus grand hôtelier du monde n'a pas qu'une seule chambre et que le plus grand service de taxi n'a pas qu'une seule voiture. Bien sûr, je parle de *booking.com* et de Uber, des idées simples mais qui brassent des milliards, aujourd'hui.

Je vais axer le reste de mon discours sur un aspect que je trouve important et pour mettre toutes les chances de notre côté, je pense qu'il faudra accorder une importance à cela. Le projet de loi ne limite pas le champ d'action de cet institut, mais forcément, les recherches se dérouleront dans nos domaines de prédilections : la mer, les nouvelles technologies des communications, les services financiers s'y prêtent à merveille. Mais surtout, notre pays avec sa biodiversité unique et riche – 39% de nos plantes sont endémiques, – ainsi que nos connaissances traditionnelles offrent des perspectives illimitées.

Madame la présidente, qui dit l'innovation dit aussi la propriété intellectuelle. Nous devons protéger l'innovation issue de notre patrimoine unique. Il faut se donner les moyens de gérer les brevets issus des projets financés par l'État. Il faut aussi garantir un partage équitable des bénéfices. Il faut prévenir toute biopiraterie et cela est important car nous savons que la biopiraterie est, aujourd'hui, une forme moderne des pillages des ressources naturelles par les laboratoires européennes et américaines. La biopiraterie menace directement les nations qui, comme la nôtre, possèdent une diversité unique et des riches traditions, bien sûr, médicale et agricole. Nous nous souvenons tous lorsque nous avions de la fièvre ou un peu de toux quand on était gamin, la grand-mère ou la maman nous donnait un peu de sirop de la feuille d'ayapana.

Madam Speaker: “Ti Rober”.

Mr Etwareea: Voilà!

Madame la présidente, vous avez certainement lu des ouvrages de l'ancienne Présidente de la République, Madame Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, en la matière. Notamment, guide illustré de la flore de Maurice et de l'Océan Indien. *Lesser known underutilised crops* ou encore plantes médicinales de Maurice, pharmacognosie, phytochimie et études comparatives des données ethnobotaniques.

L'île Maurice compte, Madame la présidente, 315 plantes endémiques qui ont un potentiel médicinal. Je vais vous donner cette petite information. Selon l'OMS, 25% des médicaments modernes viennent des plantes. Les marchés mondiaux des médicaments pèseront R 100 milliards en 2030. Si Maurice capte 0,0.1 % grâce à ses plantes endémiques, cela nous fera R 5 milliards par année. Il y a une filière, il y a un fil à tirer, Madame la présidente, et ça, on peut seulement le faire grâce à la protection intellectuelle et en combattant de façon efficace la biopiraterie.

La bonne nouvelle, comme je disais, Madame la présidente, nous sommes assis sur une mine d'or, au fait. Quand je parlais de ces 315 plantes aux potentielles médicinales, c'est notre pétrole vert. C'est notre pétrole vert qui peuvent nous apporter de la croissance de demain. Ça c'est la bonne nouvelle, il y a aussi une mauvaise nouvelle, que ce sont des entreprises étrangères qui exploitent nos plantes, nos remèdes et nos connaissances léguées par nos grands-mères, comme je vous ai dit avant. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il n'existe pas des registres centralisés des plantes mauriciennes brevetées. Pourquoi ? Parce que la majorité des travaux de l'université de Maurice, du MSIRI reste au stade académique. L'étape suivante, c'est-à-dire l'isolement du principe actif, le brevet et ensuite le financement, la transformation en produit commercialisable nous manque. Nos chercheurs s'exilent. Résultat, aucun brevet majeur mauricien n'est recensé dans les bases de données de l'OMPI depuis ces 10 dernières années – l'OMPI, étant l'Organisation mondiale pour la protection intellectuelle, basée à Genève. L'IP Office mauricien ne gère rien de la biodiversité locale, alors que nous avons tout ce potentiel.

Et pourtant, et cela est important, des brevets déposés à Londres, Paris, New York, à Genève, des brevets citent des *specimens from Mauritius* sans que l'IP Office mauricien n'ait quelconques traces des *material transfer agreement*. C'est un peu technique, mais nous, nos plantes sont exploitées par des compagnies à l'étranger et nous ne savons même pas qu'elles

ont ce potentiel. En gros, cela veut dire échantillon sorti de Maurice, brevet déposé à l'étranger, zéro retour pour Maurice. Le protocole de Nagoya 2020, si je ne me trompe pas, Nagoya, oblige les détenteurs de brevet à déclarer l'origine de la molécule. Mais voilà, Maurice a signé le protocole de Nagoya, mais il ne l'a pas intégré dans sa loi nationale. Ce qui veut dire que n'importe qui peut breveter un produit dont la matière première est basée à Maurice, mais le produit final sort des laboratoires à l'étranger.

Madam Speaker: Mais faites le lien avec le projet de loi, s'il vous plaît. Faites le lien avec le projet de loi, des recherches.

Mr Etwareea: Je vais y venir, Madame la présidente.

Sans une protection intellectuelle efficace, nous laissons la porte grande ouverte au vol de notre biodiversité. Il y a trop de cas dans l'histoire qui montre que les voleurs sont à l'œuvre, au fait, ils sont à l'œuvre depuis le début. Vous savez, dans les expéditions coloniales, quand il y avait des expéditions qui partaient en Afrique, il y avait toujours des botanistes qui partaient avec pour regarder qu'est-ce qu'il y avait de précieux comme plante.

Pour faire le lien, Madame, je propose que le *National Research and Innovation Institute* agisse comme le gardien de notre biodiversité.

Madam Speaker: Voilà !

Mr Etwareea: Qu'il soit tenu de publier chaque année un rapport, pas seulement de l'audit, des dépenses et des rentrées financières, un rapport d'impact qui soit soumis au Parlement et mis à la disposition du public. Ce rapport devrait présenter les montants investis, les résultats obtenus, les brevets déposés et les partenariats signés car la transparence est la clé de cette confiance et la science publique doit rendre des comptes à la nation.

Je vais terminer, Madame, en disant que nous sommes une petite île et puis nous sommes très riches en biodiversité, mais peut-être nous n'avons pas tous les moyens. Donc, nous devrions nous ouvrir à la coopération internationale. La richesse moderne n'a pas de frontières. L'innovation se nourrit de la coopération entre nations ; le futur institut doit être un pont entre la science mauricienne et le reste du monde. Je vois trois alliances possibles et il ne faut pas faire la fine bouche.

La Chine, première nation au monde au nombre de dépôt de brevet, selon l'Organisation mondiale de la propriété intellectuelle. Collaborer avec la Chine, c'est accéder à une immense capacité technologique, de moyens financiers, mais aussi au super ordinateur chinois.

L'Inde, partenaire historique et culturel majeur de Maurice, ce grand pays a su développer des modèles d'innovation frugale, adaptés aux pays en voie de développement comme le nôtre. Enfin, on ne peut pas oublier nos partenaires africains avec qui nous partageons des défis communs. Et cela est important, santé, résilience climatique, énergie propre. Mais toute cette coopération doit être équilibrée. Nous devons veiller, et cela est important, à un transfert réciproque des compétences et une reconnaissance mutuelle des droits des propriétés intellectuelles.

Ce nouvel institut ne doit pas être un lieu clos réservé à quelques experts. Il doit devenir un catalyseur des créativité nationales, un pont entre chercheurs, entrepreneurs, agriculteurs, artistes, jeunes parce que l'innovation ce n'est pas seulement inventer...

Madam Speaker : Oui, vous vous égarez un peu dans les papiers là.

Mr Etwareea: L'innovation, Madame la présidente, ce n'est pas seulement un produit qui a travaillé les laboratoires. Il faut, en fin de compte, trouver des solutions à nos problèmes quotidiens, sinon l'innovation ne sert à rien.

Je dirais qu'on a raté la révolution industrielle au 19^{ème} siècle. On n'y était même pas là. On a raté la révolution numérique, on n'était pas assez développé. Nous n'avons pas le droit de rater la révolution de brevet au 21^{ème} siècle car le brevet et la protection de ce brevet sont bien les fruits de la recherche et de l'innovation et la source de notre future croissance économique.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie, c'était très intéressant.

Hon. François !

(6.23 p.m.)

Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before proceeding with my intervention of this National Research Innovation Institute Bill (No. IV of 2026), as I have a floor, allow me on behalf of the OPR Party and the people of Rodrigues to extend officially our warm congratulations on the symbolic nomination of the

first female Deputy Prime Minister and today acting Prime Minister, hon. Ms Arianne Navarre-Marie, following the Prime Minister's choice.

This marks a meaningful new chapter for our Republic, reflecting the growing role of women in leadership and serving as an inspiration to women and young girls who aspire to higher responsibilities in politics, public service and national leadership. We have moved from dream to reality for women in our Republic. I wish the hon. DPM, as she continues to serve our Republic and beyond her commitment to national unity, may she champion reconciliation and support women in facing the climate crisis and its multifaceted impacts. May her new responsibilities be marked by progress, success and continued positive impact on our Republic. Thank you.

Madam Speaker, coming back to the Bill, in his last budget speech on strategic economic renewal, the hon. Prime Minister prioritised shaping an innovative Mauritius in the government program. The ambition of this Bill to establish a National Research and Innovation Institute as presented by hon. Dr. Sukon, whom I congratulate, to replace the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, is sound and in principle a good Bill.

Mauritius needs a centralised mission-oriented research body if it is to transition from a service economy to a genuine knowledge-powered economy. I acknowledge that intent must translate into delivery and it is delivery that this House must scrutinise.

So, my question is, how will this Bill's ambitions translate into on the ground research delivery in Mauritius and critically in Rodrigues?

Architecturally, the Bill is elegant with five divisions, a scientific advisory council and a coordinating council. Now, let me comment on a few clauses to seek greater clarity.

Clause 2 – Interpretation. The word innovation is not defined anywhere in the Bill as this is a national institute. Innovation drives four key divisions as listed in Clause 8(b) to (e), which define responsibilities in their respective clauses –

- Partnership and Innovation Division, Clause 12;
- Strategy Division, Clause 10;
- Capacity Building and Talent Development Division, Clause 13, and
- The Intellectual Property Framework, Clause 31.

Yet, the term innovation has no statutory definition. Without a definition, any activity could be labelled innovative and funded accordingly with no accountability framework. Clauses around mission-oriented research and national research and innovation priorities should be transparent about how priorities are set to avoid a drift towards narrow sector specific priorities.

My question is – who decides which mission-oriented research projects take priority each year? Is it the institute, the board or the Minister?

Clause 30 – Powers of a Minister, grants sweeping general directive powers as this is standard in our legislation. However, we must ensure this does not compromise the scientific independence of the institute to preserve integrity and objectivity.

Clause 16(e) requires the board to monitor and commission independent evaluations every five years. Madam Speaker, in our fast-changing society, five years may be too long to detect underperformance. Can Mauritius and Rodrigues afford to wait half a decade not to embark in what the hon. Dr. Sukon said, valley of death gap, like development of penicillin?

Madam Speaker, Key Performance Indicators are crucial. I propose the hon. Minister to introduce an obligation to publish annual KPIs including number of research outputs published per year, Rodrigues specific research and engagement met per annum, private sector partnerships and co-funding arrangement activated.

Madam Speaker, Clause 31 on Intellectual Property is the most commercially consequential and requires robust expansion. The Bill should clearly outline how IP generated by the institute or by researchers using its resources will be commercially exploited so that Mauritius can capture the economic value. We should look to effective international models. For example, Ireland's research commercialisation framework and Singapore's A*STAR which pushes science towards real world outcomes and contribute significantly to GDP and employment.

Intellectual property is not just a legal right; it is a revenue stream and FDI magnet and a driver of high skilled job creation. I hope the institute will bridge the gap between science and market ready solution from lab to start-up and from lab to market.

Clause 2 (d) mentions co-funding arrangement and tax incentive programs, but these are functions, not entitlements. The framework for tax benefits must be laid out in the Income Tax Act or in the Investment Promotion Act, not left to regulatory discretion.

And my question is – will the Ministry of Finance commit to amending the Tax Framework to create research and development incentives and a patent commercialisation regime that give this institute intellectual property outputs real economic teeth?

Singapore and Ireland generate hundreds of millions from IP commercialisation annually. Mauritius, as rightly mentioned by hon. Dr. Sukon, is ranked 53rd on global innovation index and number one in Sub-Saharan Africa. And Mauritius has the legal framework to begin this journey if the Ministry of Finance aligns with what this Bill promises, which can be addressed in the next budget itself.

Madam Speaker, I now address Rodrigues specifically. Rodrigues represent an ideal territory to serve as a national sustainable island living laboratory as it is itself a natural laboratory for research. I will elaborate during my speech on how innovative solutions addressing climate resilience, food security, sustainable tourism, ocean economy development, water and renewable energy transition can be piloted in Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, I note that there is no specific definition for Rodrigues or outer islands, nor any geographic scope in the Bill. The Bill is silent on whether the institute mandate extends to Rodrigues, Agalega or outer islands despite mentions of collaboration with government agencies. This omission, I believe, may affect funding, research coverage and whether Rodrigues' specific challenges fall within the statute's scope. A definition of national that explicitly includes Rodrigues and outer islands would be a step forward.

Madam Speaker, during budget debates 2025-2026, I noted Mauritius' new culture of innovation as a policy priority. This is in line with my party OPR's vision of Rodrinnovation, Rodrigues new innovation culture, a model of innovation, technology and modernity.

Rodrigues has strong potential in priority sectors such as –

- Rodrigues blue and economy innovation;
- Rodrigues sustainable food system;
- Rodrigues climate innovation and resilience;
- Rodrigues circular economy;
- Rodrigues community and grassroots innovation, and
- Rodrigues supporting grassroots and youth innovation.

Madam Speaker, Rodrigues social fabric provides a solid foundation for social innovation where social needs meet environmental sustainability and prosperity. I propose that Government should establish alongside the institute what I call a social innovation driving unit with appropriate budgetary support and resources.

Development research for Rodrigues social innovations reflecting local culture remains a fertile area of future research while we pursue *le rêve Rodriguais*. Health issues, including cancer and NCDs and demographic changes, are important avenues for Rodrigues focus research.

To strengthen Rodrigues presence, the NRII Bill should empower the new NRII research branch with greater capacity, facilities and staffing following the 2024 fire that destroyed the MRIC Office thereat.

Madam Speaker, I propose an amendment to the Bill to create a Rodrigues Research and Innovation Centre or a directorate with necessary staffing in collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. This would integrate Rodrigues specificity, challenges and opportunities into the national innovation system in a concrete and actionable way.

This inclusion will officially recognise Rodrigues as a distinctive component of the institute with a defined mission and responsibilities for Rodrigues specific programs, coordinating activities and supporting the Regional Assembly policy needs under the guidance and collaborations of the institute and the Regional Assembly.

Madam Speaker, I strongly believe that this Bill offers a strategic opportunity for Mauritius to position Rodrigues as a sustainable island innovation demonstration territory and national innovation priority by strengthening the NRII Rodrigues branch. As it aligns with OPR's New Horizon Vision 2051 for Rodrigues, moving towards excellence in all what we do, fostering an inclusive research community and delivering benefits for the people of Rodrigues and Rodrigues society at large.

This Bill must explicitly enable a Rodrigues branch or directorate with clear, I mentioned it again, clear staffing, budgetary autonomy and a mandate to co-design programs in collaboration with the Regional Assembly. I propose also the creation of a Rodrigues Research and Innovation Fund within the budget framework to finance pilot projects, capacity buildings and public private partnership in Rodrigues.

Such a structure will empower Rodrigues to pilot climate resilience, blue economy solutions, sustainable tourism and youth led innovation in a way that scales nationally.

It will also ensure transparent accountability with dedicated reporting on Rodrigues research outputs and impact. Madam Speaker, to conclude, I urge the House to consider amendments that define Rodrigues within the geographic scope of NRII and to set binding mechanism for collaboration between the institute, the Regional Assembly and the new NRII Branch, Rodrigues.

I urge thoughtful consideration of proposed amendments to ensure that Rodrigues is explicitly, again, included, adequately funded and empowered to act as a national hub for innovation and sustainable development. These amendments will cement Rodrigues role as a strategic innovation demonstration territory within the Republic of Mauritius and help realise the OPR Rodrinnovation vision.

I have to mention OPR, I love it! Madam Speaker, I commend the hon. Minister Dr. Sukon for introducing this, Bill. Mauritius can harness the full potential of NRII to drive inclusive growth, protect our environment and unlock opportunities especially for our youth through a non-fragmented and coordinated approach to build a better future for our Republic.

With these words, I thank you for your kind attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you for keeping good time.

Yes, hon. Baboolall!

(6.37 p.m.)

Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To allow me to intervene on the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill. While this Bill seeks to bury the Innovation Council Act of 2019, we must ask ourselves, are we burying a failed system or simply redressing its ghost in a new uniform?

Madam Speaker, we are told this is a landmark step towards a resilient knowledge-powered economy. We heard those same soaring adjectives in 2019. Yet, here we are again. If we do not fix the engine of our institutional design, then in 2099, a new Government will bring a new Bill to repeal this one, to innovate again.

Madam Speaker, the Republic cannot afford to move in circles while the rest of the world moves forward. Madam Speaker, we embrace the ambition of this Bill, that desire to harness the ocean, green and digital economies. However, the concerns raised today strike at the heart of our national dilemma. The cavernous gap between legislative intent and

operational reality, structural integrity is rarely achieved through the next through the text of a law alone.

Madam Speaker, to determine if this Bill can truly eradicate systematic underperformance, we must look for the specific teeth within the legislation. Does the Bill move beyond simply noting failures? Does it introduce personal consequences for accounting officers who oversee wasted expenditure?

Does it provide for independent mid-project audits that can halt a failing project before billions are lost, rather than relying on a postmortem from the Auditor General? Does it bridge the administrative capacity gap by mandating specific qualifications for project managers? Or does it leave appointment to the same system that produced these nil results?

Madam Speaker, history suggests that without a fundamental shift in accountability, new laws become mere paperwork, masking recurring failures. The Republic cannot afford for noble intentions to be the only thing on our ledger. Under the 2019 Act, the Minister appointed the chairpersons. Billions in taxpayers' money were lost.

Now again, the hon. Minister will appoint the CEO and the chairperson. If we do not change the system, why should we expect a different result? Madam Speaker, the Bill suffers from the vanguard of centralisation. By granting the hon. Minister total dominion over the appointment of the board and the CEO, we are not building a sanctuary for science. We are building a playground for patronage.

When research follows the preferences of power rather than the pursuit of truth, it ceases to be innovation. It becomes propaganda. Madam Speaker, let us look at clause 34, protection from liability –

“No liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to the Institute, the Board, a board member, a Committee, a committee member or any officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his functions under this Act.”

It offers a blanket of immunity for good faith actions. Madam Speaker, good faith must not become a sanctuary for incompetence.

Clause 34 should be revisited, as protection from liability must never extend to gross negligence, wilful misconduct, or fraud. Without this line in the sand, accountability is an illusion. Vouching for innovation with taxpayers' money needs accountability.

Madam Speaker, the Director of Audit has warned us repeatedly. Our State has eyes, but no muscles. More than 50% of audit recommendations are ignored. This is the mechanical reality we must face. If the system is a broken engine, changing the driver will not make the car go faster. Without mechanisms to penalise non-results, this Bill is merely a performative announcement. It is all noise and no motion.

Madam Speaker, innovation is not a solitary act. It is a collaborative one. Yet, this Bill excludes civil society and industry from the boardroom, creating a dangerous echo chamber. We do not need insularity; we need an ecosystem. Madam Speaker, Mauritius does not suffer from a lack of intelligence. It suffers from lack of institutional change.

Madam Speaker, as long as we prefer the loudness of political outrage over the precision of structural analysis, we will continue to witness failures with remarkable accuracy. We must prove beyond political tribalism towards institutional literacy. We need an independent appointment committee, not just for this institute, but for the soul of our public service to ensure transparency is the rule, not the exception.

Madam Speaker, unless we move from rhetoric to reality, we are not innovating. We are merely recycling promises.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Parapen.

(6.44 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr K. Parapen): Madame la présidente, le ministre, l'honorable Sukon, nous a ramené plus tôt en 1928 à la découverte de la pénicilline. Je propose de ramener la Chambre à 1945 avec un certain Percy Spencer. Américain, ingénieur autodidacte, il travaille à l'époque pour la compagnie Raytheon, une grande entreprise américaine de la défense qui à l'époque a innové en créant le radar, une des grandes avancées de la Seconde guerre mondiale, peut-être la seconde plus grande avancée derrière la fission nucléaire et l'arme nucléaire.

Et Percy Spencer est debout devant un magnétron actif, un engin qui émet des micro-ondes. Et à ce moment-là, il va être témoin de d'un phénomène assez bizarre. La barre chocolatée qu'il a dans sa poche a fondu. Et au lieu d'être en colère, voilà que sa curiosité est éveillée. Il ramène du pop-corn et le rapproche du magnétron. Et voilà que le pop-corn aussi se transforme immédiatement. Le lendemain, il ramène un œuf et l'œuf éclate au visage de

son collègue. Voilà à peu près comment le four à micro-ondes a été inventé, Madame la présidente. Il faut se rappeler qu'on est dans une période très sombre de l'histoire, en 1945, et que cette découverte, qui va ensuite devenir le four à micro-ondes, est faite dans un local destiné à la recherche militaire.

Il y a beaucoup de Mauriciens et de Mauriciennes avec qui j'ai la chance d'interchanger et qui me demandent souvent quelles sont les solutions pour le futur de notre pays, surtout dans les conditions actuelles. Et bien sûr, comme tout le monde ici, je suis sûr qu'on a des idées qu'on voudrait implémenter pour l'avenir de ce pays. Mais, j'ai une réponse constante à cela : il faut donner à notre pays un environnement propice à l'innovation. Mais la culture de l'innovation, elle ne s'improvise pas. Pour que l'innovation puisse se produire, il y a tout un écosystème à mettre en place. Et c'est pour cela que la découverte du four à micro-ondes par Percy Spencer nous rappelle que cet écosystème ne vient pas du jour au lendemain.

On ne peut pas parler d'innovation sans parler de la recherche et du développement, le *R&D*. Et quand on fait un constat à travers le monde par rapport à la recherche et le développement, on voit quand même que différents pays sont à différents stades en termes de dépenses par rapport à la recherche et le développement.

Là, j'ai avec moi une liste de 10 pays qui investissent au moins 3% de leur PIB dans la recherche et le développement – l'Allemagne, l'Autriche, la Belgique, la Suisse, le Japon, les États-Unis, la Suède, Taïwan, la Corée du Sud et Israël. Et je pense que tout le monde sera d'accord pour dire que ces pays sont véritablement en avance sur beaucoup d'autres pays à travers le monde en ce qu'il s'agit d'innovation.

Et à Maurice, le budget dépensé pour la recherche et le développement est à peine de 0.25% du PIB. Donc, le projet de loi du ministre, l'honorable Sukon, est un excellent projet de loi. Il a le mérite d'orienter la recherche nationale ainsi que l'innovation vers des enjeux réels, chose qui était complètement absente de la précédente législation.

C'est une excellente initiative de lier la recherche et l'innovation à des problématiques récurrentes de notre société – souveraineté alimentaire, souveraineté énergétique, résilience climatique, économie océan, économie verte, biotechnologie et j'en passe. Ce sont des problèmes récurrents et ce sont des enjeux où on a un retard considérable. Donc, lier ce nouveau projet de loi à ces problématiques ou à ces enjeux, est salutaire parce qu'on ne fait pas de la recherche que pour faire de la recherche et pour épater la galerie. On

fait de la recherche parce qu'on recherche et on a envie de trouver des solutions concrètes à des problèmes récurrents.

Sauf que, malgré toute la bonne volonté du ministre, même si ce projet de loi est un excellent projet de loi, si on ne donne pas les moyens de faire de ce projet de loi un succès, la recherche et l'innovation seront que sur papier. Parce que vouloir innover sans s'en donner les moyens, c'est un peu comme vouloir gagner une compétition sans y avoir participé. C'est très compliqué.

Et, c'est dans cet esprit que je pense qu'il est grand temps que le pays, le gouvernement, l'État se donne les moyens de ses ambitions. Et aujourd'hui, en tant que député de ce gouvernement, mais surtout citoyen, ayant à cœur l'avancement de notre pays, je fais un plaidoyer pour qu'au moins 1% du PIB de la République soit investi dans la recherche et le développement annuellement. Et bien sûr, je ne demande pas à ce que cet argent provienne uniquement des caisses de l'État, mais comme une société, comme une économie avec des partenariats avec le privé et des collaborateurs internationaux. 1% du PIB représente à peu près R 7 milliards. Avec R 7 milliards, on a quand même un budget suffisant pour faire des projets pilotes à moyenne échelle parce que l'innovation est souvent accompagnée d'échecs – les entrepreneurs le savent mieux que d'autres – toutes les idées n'aboutissent pas à un succès retentissant.

Mais la beauté de l'innovation, c'est que du moment qu'on a un succès, cela peut facilement effacer neuf échecs. Et c'est dans cet état d'esprit que ce projet de loi doit être vu. Je suis sûr que cet institut va venir de l'avant avec plein d'idées, avec beaucoup de recommandations. Mais si on n'arrive pas à les mettre en pratique, à au moins essayer de voir qu'est-ce que cela va donner dans la République de Maurice, incluant chez nos frères et sœurs Rodriguais, c'est un peu un coup d'épée dans l'eau.

Les innovateurs sont des perturbateurs du statu quo parce qu'ils posent deux questions fondamentales ; pourquoi faisons-nous les choses de cette façon et que se passerait-il si on faisait les choses différemment ? Et bien sûr, quand on parle d'innovation, pour la majorité des personnes, l'innovation est souvent rattachée à la technologie. Quand on parle d'innovation, on pense à l'intelligence artificielle, on pense au *large language models*, on pense à la technologie informatique, aux microprocesseurs et tout, mais on ne peut réduire l'innovation seulement à la technologie. Il y a d'autres innovations qui sont extrêmement

importantes pour une société, et là pour conclure, j'aurai envie de parler de l'innovation sociétale.

Maurice est prisonnier du statu quo par rapport à son modèle de gouvernance, son système électoral depuis bientôt 60 ans, et aujourd'hui quand on pense à innover, à venir de l'avant avec un nouveau modèle, un nouveau contrat, certains qui n'aspirent pas probablement au changement mettent de l'avant la loi de Murphy – *Murphy's Law* –

“Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong”.

D'ailleurs, cette loi, elle n'est basée sur aucun fondement scientifique, mais cela rassure ceux qui ne veulent pas que l'innovation sociétale aboutisse parce que, quand on veut de l'innovation sociétale, il faut se donner les moyens et les moyens à cette question, ce ne sont pas des moyens financiers, mais uniquement une question de courage politique.

Donc, pour terminer je vais reprendre deux phrases que le ministre, l'honorable Dr. Sukon a mentionné. Il a dit –

“What we want to achieve is not what Mauritius has been but what Mauritius should now become.”

Et il a aussi dit –

“Do we want to keep the old structures because they keep us comfortable?”

Vive l'innovation, vive les nouveaux modèles, vive le nouveau monde, vive le mauricianisme. Merci.

Madam Speaker: *Merci.* Yes, hon. Narsinghen!

(6.56 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr H. Narsinghen): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is a very important Bill and I will comment on seven points. I have to explain the context of this Bill and my second point, I will deal with the reality of developing countries where the Minister and the Ministry of Higher Education has chosen pragmatism over prestige and I think that with all due respect, the Leader of the Opposition is not trying to make that distinction between what is known as fundamental research as opposed to applied research.

Now, Madam Speaker, this Bill is also trying to bridge the chasm, that is, we know about the Triple Helix Model and this Bill, with my colleague, Minister Dr. Sukon, we are shifting from the Triple Helix Model to a better model, what I would call a Multiple Helix Model. And then, Madam Speaker, this Bill is also trying to do away with red tapism and whereby we are trying to empower researchers, but also to rope in civil servants. And also, very important, I heard my learned friend, hon. Baboolall mentioning that civil society is not being involved. Then, Madam Speaker, who is a researcher? Is a researcher not part of civil society? And also, very important in the Bill, the Minister and members of the staff of the Ministry have not forgotten the diaspora. We are going to make appeal to members of the diaspora because we got a number of researchers in US, in France and in many other countries, and we need these people. And also, I will deal if I have time, about the financial accountability, a point which was raised by my learned friend, hon. Baboolall.

Madame la présidente, nous vivons dans une période, je dirais très difficile de notre histoire ; très difficile, mais en même temps une période exaltante. Aujourd'hui, nous parlons beaucoup d'*AI*, l'intelligence artificielle. Nous parlons de la biotechnologie, nous parlons de la numérisation. Nous parlons de recherches médicales, nous parlons de l'environnement.

So, today, we stand at a very critical juncture in the economic and social history of our republic. And therefore, my colleague, hon. Minister, Dr. Sukon, is right. Either we adapt or we perish and with this Bill, we have chosen to adapt, Madam Speaker. The global economy does not wait for latecomers and technological advancement does not pause for nations tangled in bureaucratic inertia. We do not have natural resources, the Minister mentioned – we do not have oil, we do not have gold, we do not have other minerals. And at the same time, we cannot have a labour-intensive economy, especially with the demographic crisis with the declining population. So, we do not have any choice than to have a knowledge-based economy. And the Explanatory Memorandum, well drafted, hammers on innovation, mission-oriented research and not only abstract or theoretical research as it used to be.

Furthermore, what is important now with this Bill is that there will be coordination and no duplication. So, when you compare the previous Act of Parliament, where we had approximately 25 sections, whereas with this Bill, we have approximately 45 sections. In the previous Bill, we had only four substantive sections, whereas with this Bill, we have approximately 24 substantive sections. If this is not progress, what is progress, Madam Speaker?

So, we are moving away from a theoretical and purely academic research to pragmatic and mission-oriented research. This is very important. It is a significant shift. This is not merely a procedural replacement of the repealed Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill. It is a fundamental rewiring of our national intellect. By establishing the National Research and Innovation Institute as a centralised body, dedicated to advancing scientific discovery, applied research and evidence-based policy making, we are laying down the infrastructure to transition Mauritius into a resilient, competitive and knowledge-powered economy.

The Leader of the Opposition, and to certain extent, my learned friend, Mr Baboolall, were referring to over-centralisation. Madam Speaker, this Bill will not preclude other research centres, like the University of Mauritius, the UTM and other private universities, to continue to do research. Both my learned friend, Mr Baboolall and the Leader of the Opposition failed to understand that, as a developing country, we do not have unlimited resources. This is why it is very, very important to make a distinction between applied research as opposed to fundamental research. In the US, UK, France, and to certain extent, even South Africa, they can afford to make fundamental research.

As an ex-academic, I am not saying that we should not do at all fundamental research. According to me, we have to filter. Possibly, there are a few geniuses, where we can allow fundamental research. But at the same time, if we have funding, this funding has to be destined to applied research, to mission-oriented research, as pointed out in the Bill.

Madam Speaker, at the same time, I think it is important to also understand that we are choosing a model which is pragmatic. Fundamental research seeks knowledge for its own sake, as mentioned by my colleague, my neighbour. It asks why. Applied research, contrastingly with this Bill, defines as original investigation directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective and asks how. While developed nations with multi-billion-dollar budgets can afford to spend heavily on open-ended research, Mauritius cannot do that.

As an academic, I can say that some of my colleagues in the field of science, a few among them, have done good research. But, unfortunately, I have to confess also – nothing wrong to confess – that many academics are engaged in a pursuit of promotion, and at times, some universities become like a sort of paper mills. I think the Minister mentioned that we are shelving all these research papers, collecting dust, and there are no practical results.

Madam Speaker, with a deficiency in funding, we have to choose – and this is what the Minister and this Bill are doing – to make a choice.

If we look at the trajectory of nations like China, and I think the Minister and some other colleagues mentioned about South Korea, India and Singapore in their developmental phases, these countries did not necessarily re-invent the wheel. They mastered what is known as reverse engineering. Madam Speaker, just an anecdote. When I was an academic at the university, and also, at one time, I was based in Geneva, I asked WIPO to come to Mauritius. Madam Speaker, did you know that patents get spent after 20 years? As a developing country, with the new institution which we are setting up, of course, with the collaboration of the University of Mauritius and other private universities, we can do that reverse engineering. This is what we have to do, and this is what is good with this Bill.

Universities and the new Research Institute can scour expired patents, understand the mechanics and adapt foreign technologies to the local context. What we were doing before, not only in pure science, but also in social science, here also, I have noticed this. During the early stage of my career when I was at the university, I was also doing research just for the sake of research. But when I joined the Law Reform Commission – I have been a member of the Law Reform Commission for nearly 10 years – with my learned friends, Mr Daniel Focan, and my very good friend, who was an excellent researcher and excellent academic, Mr Rosario Domingue, this is where I learned how to transform that pure academic research into practical research. The Attorney General, who is here, will agree with me on how many important papers this Law Reform Commission has produced. This is what needs to be done. We have to be practical.

Madam Speaker, another very important point, which this Bill is trying to do is to bring together the industry, the academia, and not only that. Up to now, we have been adopting what I would call a sort of silos approach, which is not good. This is what this Bill is purposely doing. That is to bring on board not only the academia and the universities, but this time, making the civil servants themselves becoming researchers, where civil servants cannot, capriciously, bring a new Bill. They have to get a sort of evidence-based research before bringing a new legislation. Even Ministers should not bring Bills capriciously. They have to rely on evidence-based research, Madam Speaker. So, this is what the Bill is doing.

Over and above that, as I mentioned, the Bill is also trying to rope in our researchers from abroad, members of the diaspora. This is very, very important also. This partnership, what I call shifting from the Triple Helix model to the Multiple Helix model, the Minister has to be congratulated for that. We must not forget that the Minister was an expert in statistics and knows what research is. He has also understood what were the shortcomings of traditional research, fundamental research, when they are being done. While keeping to a certain extent fundamental research, at the same time, we have to put more focus, more emphasis on practical research, and this is important.

For many, many years, a lot of good work has been done at the University of Mauritius. But unfortunately, at that point in time, there was no incubation centres, and researchers could not be at the same time entrepreneurs. Whereas, with this Bill, the new Institute will have a possibility, I am sure, to recruit people with expertise, to commercialise. At the end of the day, what is important, we have to commercialise what we are trying to bring during our research; otherwise, it remains abstract. Rightly, I would say wrongly, academics are very often qualified as being in an ivory tower and we don't need our academics and new researchers to be in an ivory tower.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, I think, it is important that we get rid of red tapism. Just to give you another anecdote, it has been seven months; I approached one Italian University and I spoke with my colleague. After more than seven months, Madam Speaker, an MoU has not been signed because unfortunately, some of these works end up in a drawer and no work is being done. And, I am sure this time with the new Institute, the work will be done.

But at the same time, I will take a last point, Madam Speaker, and I think, my friend hinted at that. In spite of all the good intention of the Minister, which is a very important Bill, I think, it has sought a lot of inspiration from the best models that we have in Singapore, in South Africa – don't underestimate South African Universities – in spite of that, if we don't put in funding, for example, during the last budget, I think, we had earmarked Rs200 million. I am just wondering whether people involved in research have been able to use that Rs200 million. Not only Rs200 million, I think, we have to, if we really want, to make Mauritius a little sort of like South Korea or Singapore, we have to spend more on research. But also, a very important point, Madam Speaker, which I want to drive is we need a collaboration from

the private sector and this is where, I would suggest, that we have to impose a levy on the big banks, on the big hotels to put that money for research.

Last point, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, the treatment which is meted to academics and researchers is shameful. I will take the initiative, and I hope that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Tertiary Education will do the same, because the salary of a researcher at the University of Mauritius, and even at MRIC for the time being – you will be shocked. The salary of a starting lecturer or a starting researcher at the University of Mauritius, and other universities, is only Rs33,000 or Rs36,000, ending with a sum of Rs60,000.

So, if we mean business, and this is where I agree with my colleague, hon. Parapen, we have to chip in money, we have to do the necessary efforts, because this is a sort of exemplary Bill, this is why I strongly commend it, but at the same time, we have to make things happen. For things to happen, we need to work in collaboration: the private sector, the public sector, civil servants, researchers, everybody, this is where we will make Mauritius progress, and this is where there would be a real paradigm shift. On that, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Yes, hon. Minister Ramtohul!

(7.15 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Dr. A. Ramtohul): Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill 2026. I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague minister for coming up with this initiative and this Bill. It was really high time for the ecosystem for innovation to be reviewed in this country. It is good we go back. I think, we went back to 1945 earlier. I would like to take you a few years a little later than 1945. That was 1969, in the US with the establishment of what we called as ARPANET that was the seed of the internet. On 29 October 1969, the first electronic message was exchanged between Stanford Research Institute and the University of California, Los Angeles. In 1973, they managed to connect that small network with the Department of Defence in the UK. That was the first trans-Atlantic electronic connection but that connection was driven by British universities. It is good we

remember, we recall and we respect the role that universities have played in the development of all technologies and I will focus on internet technologies.

There are moments in life, Madam Speaker, of a nation when legislation is not merely administrative. It is directional. Moments when a Bill does not simply organise institutions, it redefines ambition. Today, this House is called upon to consider one such moment. Because what we are debating is not only the establishment of a new institution, it is the deliberate construction of the intellectual engine that will power Mauritius into its next economic era.

For far too long, Madam Speaker, research in this country has existed in fragments and silos. Ideas were produced, reports were written, consultations were held, but too often, again, impact remained elusive. We had knowledge, but not always direction. We had ambition, but not always coordination. Our youth in this country deserve better than what we are able to provide to them at the moment. Not a single groundbreaking research that we have seen emanating from Mauritius that make a global impact. Not a single unicorn that has come out of this country. My colleague, hon. Baboolall, was talking about changing the way we are doing things. He is absolutely right, and this is what we are trying to do. I would refer you to the famous definition of what Einstein called as insanity. We keep on doing the same things over, and over again while expecting the results to be different.

In the current model, the results will not be different. This is why it is time for change. This is precisely what my colleague minister is trying to do, and this Bill corrects that issue. It establishes a national centralised body for research and many countries have followed this example. China, which is leading research globally, today, has that very model for research. This is designed to align efforts, to eliminate duplication, to make more judicious use of public funds and to ensure that knowledge translates into policy and economic value. It institutionalises evidence-based policy making, ensuring that decisions are grounded not in guesswork, but in data, analysis and foresight. I am sad that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not here. I would have loved for him to listen to me here. This is not a cosmetic reform.

Madam Speaker: Maybe he is listening.

Dr. Ramtohul: Probably, yes. I hope he is. This is not a cosmetic reform. This is structural. We heard about the political lens which the Leader of the Opposition used to look at this Bill. He mentioned the powers of the Minister with regards to directions of the research and I would refer here to the MDPA Bill of 2023. In that Bill, there was this section with regards to employment of officers in the MDPA back then. Those are the changes that

were made by the MSM government, of which the current Leader of the Opposition was an active member. And that read section 16, Powers of the Minister, in the MDPA Bill and Act –

“The Minister may give such written directions of general nature to the Agency”.

So, MDPA is Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency. I will repeat –

“The Minister may give such written directions of a general nature to the Agency, not inconsistent with the Act, as he considers necessary in public interest and the Agency shall comply with these directions.”

Madam Speaker, and the very same person, today, is challenging the powers that are being given to the Minister with regards to the operation and the direction of this Institute that is being established. In the current Bill, with regard to the employment of staff in this new institution, the Minister has no power. The power is delegated to the Board and this is proper governance.

The Board will actually decide with regard to the employment of people. And he might also have missed another element with regard to the role that universities would be playing. He presented a hypothetical situation whereby people would actually overlook universities, they ignore universities to go and do the research themselves but section 4(1) subsection (g) actually makes provision for universities to be fully involved in the research work that will be carried out by this new institution.

Madam Speaker, allow me to place this Bill in its true context now because this legislation is not an isolated initiative; it is a cornerstone of a much larger transformation. Our projected transition from a digital state to an intelligent state and under Clause 4, the institute is mandated not only to promote innovation, but to conduct mission-oriented research, addressing digital transformation and national challenges.

If all the people working in government and all our institutions start operating in a mission mode, Madam Speaker, the results will be palpable. It will not just be continuous but measured and continual improvement that we will achieve. And in fact, this is where my Ministry steps in, not as a spectator, but as a catalyst of the change for the research and innovation that is being aimed at by this institution, and this is guided by our national AI strategy and the FAIR guidelines. Fair standing for Fairness, Accountability, Inclusiveness and Responsibility that was launched on April 9 of this year. Through this AI strategy, we will ensure that AI is not just imported blindly, but augmented locally and also developed

through applied research programs. Government data is actually not underutilised, but it becomes the foundation of AI models that are actually built in Mauritius, obviously within the data protection norms.

Public services are not digitised in isolation, but augmented with AI and integrated end to end. The AI unit established within my Ministry is very purposeful with regard to the research that will be carried out in the institution. Those areas will touch upon healthcare challenges. Once the e-health system constructs the electronic medical records, based on research, it will be able to implement the bracelets for patients who demand immediate care. And that takes research for food security, climate resilience, digital transformation and social inequality. AI trained models on Mauritian data developed by Mauritian researchers are what we are aiming at, and this will be our sovereignty in the age of AI.

This Bill goes even further. Under Clause 12, the institute will bridge the gap between academia and industry and this aligns directly with what we are aiming at implementing. The innovation lab under the AI unit and the National AI marketplace that we have established under the Ministry. We will work with the institute to complete the ecosystem for research and innovation in AI. This institute actually aims at coordinating with universities, reducing duplication and accelerating collaboration. Therefore, this speaks to our AI strategy which is built on the four Ps: Public, People, Private, Partnership because innovation does not happen in silos; it takes ecosystems.

Behind every clause of this Bill, there is a human story. Under Clause 6, this institute is mandated to identify and develop new economic sectors, including the digital economy and advanced technologies. Hon. Narsinghen mentioned that a lot of research work is done in Mauritius. However, a lot of those research works remain in drawers. And I would strongly call for a central repository for all those research work to be published so that people can actually leverage those research ideas and try the commercial viability of same. This is where Mauritius has a historic opportunity as well.

The Bill is about the young Mauritian who does not want to leave the country, but to build here. It is about the startup founder who has ideas, but he needs to rely on an ecosystem. It is about the student who dreams not just of using technology, but of creating it. It is about the farmer who can benefit from predictive analysis, the patient who can benefit from the AI assisted diagnostics, the citizen who deserves smarter, faster, and more responsive public services.

Hon. Ministers, it is also about the fisherman who takes risks and navigates to actually bring back seafood that he is going to put on the market. He should be able to navigate safely, but surely to pre-identified fishing grounds. These are the kinds of research that needs to take place and this institution guarantees this. Through AI, through data, through innovation, we can position Mauritius as a regional leader for AI services. We can export digital solutions, not just consume them. We can create high value jobs for our youth and our AI strategy points into that direction.

We must also recognise where we are coming from. There was a time when digital transformation was spoken about, but not fully executed. When innovation was announced, but not always delivered. When structures existed, but ecosystems did not. Let me put it this way, because I believe in being fair, but also in being honest. The previous government sometimes treated innovation as an event. We are treating it as a system. They focused on visibility; we focus on viability. They focused on short-term announcements, but we focus on long-term architecture and economic reconstruction which is sustainable.

And history, Madam Speaker, does not judge intentions. It judges outcomes. We are not planting a seed today and expecting a tree by next week. Research, innovation, and the building of knowledge-economy require time, consistency, and patience. I have gone through that cycle and I know what it takes but what we are doing right here, right now is far more important. We are laying solid foundations. Foundations upon which future industries will emerge, new jobs will be created, and a new generation of Mauritians will thrive. Those who only look for immediate results may miss the significance of this moment but those who understand nation building will recognise this for what it is – an investment in future stability, competitiveness, sovereignty of Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, this Bill ensures that Mauritius no longer operates in fragments. The world is entering an era where AI is programmable, data is strategic, and innovation determines competitiveness and Mauritius has made its choice. We will create, we will innovate, we will lead, but responsibly, intelligently and inclusively. This is not just a Bill for today. It is a framework for the next generation; a generation that will not ask what Mauritius adopted, but what Mauritius created. Let us give them that foundation and move from ambition to impact.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Perfect timing for us to break for dinner.

At 7.30 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.23 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Minister of Financial Services!

(8.23 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning (Dr. Ms J. Jeetun): Madam Speaker, Mauritius has beaten all predictions of doom at the time of independence. Our economic and social progress is recognised internationally. But as our colleague Minister said earlier, the success of our nation was not built on oil, gas, minerals, or vast land resources. Our greatest and most enduring natural resource has been our people.

Yes, our people, their intelligence, their resilience, and talent. Five decades ago, in 1976, we got free secondary education, which changed the lives of countless citizens up and down the country, especially for girls from villages. Free education laid the foundation that led to economic and social mobility of its people. Today, we are at the dawn of yet another frontier.

In a Small Island State like Mauritius, research and innovation are not mere wish list. They are economic necessities. They are the pathway through which we create high-value jobs, improve productivity, strengthen competitiveness, and most importantly, expand social mobility so that every young Mauritian, regardless of background, can rise through knowledge, creativity and opportunity.

I, therefore, commend my colleague, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research, for bringing forward the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill. Through this National Research and Innovation Institute Bill, we are making a strategic choice.

A choice to rise to the next level of our country's destiny. A choice to build on the foundation of five decades of investments in education, learning, and become a nation that innovates, creates, and exports to the world. As my Ministry develops Vision 2050 and the National Development Plan 2035, the establishment of the NRII could not be more timely.

Data-driven research, innovation, and policy-making is at the heart of planning. I would even argue that an institution like the NRII has been long overdue. Singapore's National Research Foundation links economic competitiveness with innovation and the creation of an

enabling ecosystem. The push for greater competitiveness is something we have been missing for some time.

This could well explain the slowdown in growth that we have witnessed in recent years. The challenges of our growth model are well documented. Post-independence, our economic development was boosted by preferential market access and guaranteed prices. This allowed our sugar and textile sectors to develop. In the process, benefiting from a demographic dividend by leveraging on youthful population.

Decades later, the factors that drove our economic growth are mostly gone. Our traditional economic pillars are facing existential challenges, and we face a declining workforce and population. Under these circumstances, Madam Speaker, we need to redefine our growth path. Our future growth will no longer be based on the quantity of our labour, but more importantly, on its quality. Growth will be driven by how much we invest in our talent through better education, vocational training, reskilling, and upskilling.

How we leverage technology to be more productive and regain competitiveness. Growth will be driven by R&D, how we develop cutting-edge technologies to adapt to the defining challenges and harness the opportunities technology and AI are creating.

We are facing these policy choices as we seek to boost our growth and accelerate our economic development. Traditional sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing need to move up the value chain if they are to survive. Sugar production has declined from a peak of around 700,000 tonnes to reach around 225,000 tonnes.

Labour shortages, rising costs, climate risk are forcing planters to abandon their land, contributing to the worsening of our food security. Manufacturing is also facing a similar fate. Nearly 60 years after independence, Madam Speaker, our nation stands at crossroads.

We stay still; we decay. We move forward with ambition; we unleash a new era of economic development and social mobility for the people of our country. Unleashing this new growth model requires more research and innovation. We are currently under-investing in R&D at 0.23% of GDP. In contrast, Singapore spends closer to 1.85% of GDP.

During the launch of the national consultations for Vision 2050, the hon. Prime Minister set up the challenge of becoming an advanced economy by 2050. His new year's message highlighted that 2026 is the year of the economy. To achieve these ambitions, we need to move from business as usual.

The NRII is the right vehicle to advance this agenda. It has been entrusted with 11 objectives. Let me focus on four of direct relevance to economic planning and delivering a growth path to take us in the future –

- (i) Evidence-based policymaking;
- (ii) coordination and interdisciplinary collaboration;
- (iii) high-impact applied research for public and private sectors,
- (iv) partnerships and talent.

First, I cannot, but fully endorse the need for strengthening evidence-based policymaking. We need to better leverage data and analysis in informing policy decisions to maximize their impact and effectiveness.

In a context where budget constraints are binding, we need to ensure we are informing our policies on data. Where will we get the biggest impact for every rupee we spend? As my Ministry has been conducting the consultations for Vision 2050, common questions are: why have we been facing water shortages for decades? Why are we so close to an energy crisis? Why labour shortages? Why did we not see all this coming?

Evidence-based policy decisions and planning would have averted this crisis situation and the fire-fighting that we are having to manage on a daily basis.

Second, Madam Speaker, I also support the case for strengthening coordination and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration as we aim to develop new sectors. As I noted earlier, there are sectors that we have been trying to develop for the best part of a decade. Results have been encouraging.

For instance, the blue economy, as it stands, contributes to close to 10% to our GDP but a vast potential remains untapped. Part of the reason has to do with the fact that policies are too often designed in silos as my hon. colleague said earlier. The future economy is not siloed, it is integrated. The Blue Economy, for instance, is not just a matter of fishing and of ports, it is also about the broader food chain. We need different expertise, we need different skills, we need the cross-fertilisation of ideas. It will not be developed just on the oceans. It will be developed in our port, at our universities and our laboratories, and in new export markets. Same for the development of life sciences and pharma. We need better collaboration between the academia, researchers, and the industry.

Third, I fully support the case for high-impact applied research for public and private sector. In fact, last year, my Ministry commissioned a study from the University of Mauritius,

an economic impact assessment study of the financial services sector. The findings were utterly revealing and is driving policy and future direction of the sector. Some say the sector makes too much profit. The report revealed that sector is also the largest corporate and PAYE tax contributor to the treasury. Now, whatever angle you look at, one cannot but agree that more collaboration is needed between academia, industry, and government.

Fourth, and this will be my final point, Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the case for stronger partnerships and attracting talent. Foreign partners can bring technologies that we do not readily have access to. They can also bring financing.

At the same time, we need to ensure we are training the graduates that the new industries require. In many countries, universities provide the intellectual and entrepreneurial backbone to business hubs. They support the creation of startups, technology, commercialisation, and innovation. This was the case for Silicon Valley and Stanford University. Similarly, the University of Cambridge acts as the anchor institution for a large biotech and tech cluster around the Cambridge area in the UK, with around 60 global firms leveraging the University's talent pool.

So, as we speak of new industries, we have to clearly acknowledge that we will require talent at scale. Talent that we do not readily have. Where do we source these talents from? How do we incentivise them to choose Mauritius? These are important questions for us to think as we embark on developing new industries.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, let me say, we have the seeds for what it takes to be an innovation-driven economy. Being small comes with some constraints, but it also means we can move fast. We have an opportunity to chart a new path with the NRII. We need to seize that opportunity. Once again, I commend this Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. Yes, hon. Minister Gunness.

(8.36 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure (Mr A. Gunness): Madam Speaker, at the outset, let me congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research, for introducing this Bill, today, in the House.

The presentation of this Bill coincides with the Africa Forward Summit co-hosted by Kenya and France in Nairobi, where our hon. Prime Minister is attending actually, and where

one of the key themes is innovation and growth. Therefore, this Bill comes at an opportune moment and marks an important milestone in the field of innovation and research, which are vital for our society.

As we are all aware, our country stands at a critical crossroad. We are facing rising economic vulnerability, increasing climate risks, considerable food insecurity, and rapid technological disruption. Our economy remains highly vulnerable to external shocks, such as the tension and instability arising from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. At present, we have to import about 70% of our food, while climate change continues to threaten our coastlines and the future sustainability of our tourism industry.

At the same time, the world is undergoing rapid technological transformation. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing techniques are redefining global competitiveness. In this global race, Madam Speaker, countries that invest in research and innovation take the lead, those that do not are left behind.

Mauritius currently invests less than 0.5% of GDP in research and development, far below the 2-3% benchmark observed in innovation-driven economies. Therefore, it is imperative for us to take immediate remedial action to boost up research and development, and I totally concur with my colleague, the hon. Junior Minister, Parapen, who also emphasised on this, that we need to invest more on research and development. Jointly, with the private sector and the government, we have to find means to invest in research and development, or else we will be left behind countries which are investing in innovation and development.

Madam Speaker, research is not a luxury. It is a necessity for survival, for building resilience and for economic transformation. It is, therefore, timely that this Bill is introduced in order to establish a National Research and Innovation Institute to spearhead research, strengthen our national ecosystem, promote the adoption of innovative practices and support the economic development of our country.

The Bill presents several commendable and forward-looking elements. It appropriately positions research and innovation as key drivers of economic transformation, particularly in emerging sectors that are critical for the diversification and resilience of our country. Streamlining research efforts, currently dispersed across multiple ministries and agencies, is a strategic necessity to improve efficiency, maximise impact and ensure better alignment with national goals. By coordinating these efforts, institutions can pool expertise, share data and

avoid the redundant studies or siloed findings that often occur in fragmented systems. This integrated approach not only reduces costs and accelerates the production of high-quality actionable insights, but also fosters the interdisciplinary collaboration needed to address complex challenges like climate change and economic resilience. Ultimately, a unified framework enhances accountability and accessibility, ensuring that limited resources contribute meaningfully to national progress and evidence-based policy making.

Madam Speaker, this Bill marks a significant departure from traditional policy making by empowering public officers to actively conduct, commission and utilise research to ensure decisions are grounded in evidence and strategic foresight. By institutionalising research as a core function and providing continuous professional development in data analysis and innovation management, the law bridges the gap between research and implementation. This initiative recognises that effective governance in a rapidly changing world must be supported by robust, timely and relevant research embedded within the Public Service. Ultimately, this reform will strengthen institutional capacity and foster a culture of critical thinking, positioning public officers to design forward-looking solutions that enhance service delivery, and national development.

Madam Speaker, I have no doubt the introduction of this new law marks a decisive step in shaping a resilient, inclusive and modern Mauritius. As a Small Island Developing State, Mauritius faces unique vulnerabilities that require a comprehensive and forward-looking legislative response. This Bill addresses through research, a wide range of critical issues, including climate resilience, food security, public health, digital transformation, ocean economy development and energy sustainability. Climate resilience is essential to safeguard our communities, our infrastructure and our economy from the increasing threats of climate change, including rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Food security remains a national priority. It will ensure that our population has reliable access to safe and nutritious food while reducing dependency on imports. A strengthening public health system is equally vital to enhance preparedness and protect our citizens against emerging health risks.

This Bill, Madam Speaker, also embraces digital transformation as a key driver of innovation, efficiency and economic diversification. In parallel, it promotes the sustainable development of the ocean economy, recognising the vast potential of marine resources. Energy sustainability is being addressed to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and transition towards cleaner renewable sources. Furthermore, the Bill tackles pressing social challenges such as gentrification and social inequality, ensuring that development remains inclusive and

equitable. It also acknowledges the importance of work-life balance in improving productivity and overall well-being. This holistic and integrated approach contained in this Bill reflects a bold vision for Mauritius, one that balances economic growth with environmental stewardship and social progress for the present and the future generations.

Madam Speaker, strengthening cooperation between Government institutions, research centres and universities represent a valuable opportunity for Mauritius. Such partnership promotes the exchange of knowledge and ensures that academic research is aligned with national priorities and public policy objectives. This enables more informed decision-making while allowing researchers to address practical national challenges. These collaborations also encourage innovation by bringing together expertise, resources and institutional capacities. With effective Government support, research and technological advancements can be translated into practical solutions that contribute to economic development, public health, environmental sustainability and digital transformation. At the same time, stronger institutional ties will support human capital development by providing students and professionals with greater exposure to interdisciplinary learning and practical experience, better preparing them for the evolving demands of the labour market. For a small developing nation like Mauritius, such coordination will optimise limited resources, strengthen national resilience and support the development of a sustainable knowledge-driven economy that benefits all citizens.

I note with great satisfaction, Madam Speaker, that this Bill makes provision for such types of partnership. Another landmark feature contained in this Bill is that it provides for the identification and growth of new economic sector and pillars to enhance our competitiveness and diversify our economy. Identifying new economic sectors and pillars for growth is highly essential to ensure long-term resilience and the sustainable development of our economy. In a rapidly changing global environment, marked by technological disruption, reliance on a narrow range of traditional sectors exposes economies to significant risk. Diversification is therefore a strategic necessity rather than an option. I have no doubt the development of new economic pillars will create fresh avenues for investment, innovation and employment creation. These sectors will not only generate higher productivity, but will also encourage knowledge and skills development, strengthening the overall capacity of our workforce.

Moreover, identifying emerging sectors will enable Government to design forward-looking policies that attract foreign direct investment and stimulate local entrepreneurship. It will also foster greater resilience by reducing dependency on vulnerable industries and

external shocks. Countries that proactively invest in diversification are better positioned to withstand global economic downturns and adapt to technological advancement. Long-term economic diversification also supports inclusive growth by opening opportunities for small, medium enterprises and promoting regional development. Ultimately, the continuous identification and nurturing of new economic pillars is key to building a dynamic, competitive economy capable of sustaining success and prosperity to generations to come.

Madam Speaker, emphasis on mobilising diverse funding sources is a positive step towards expanding the research and development and innovation financing base. Importantly, the Bill seeks to better connect research with policy, which can enhance evidence-based decision making. Equally important will be the establishment of a strong governance, accountability and inter-institutional collaboration mechanism to ensure that research outcomes are effectively translated into practical policy actions and measurable national benefits.

Madam Speaker, the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill 2026 is a transformative piece of legislation that will fundamentally reshape the future of Mauritius. This Bill is not merely about the setting up of a new institution. It is about preparing our country for the future. It is about building a resilient, innovation-driven and knowledge-based economy capable of competing in a rapidly changing global environment.

Madam Speaker, the economic implications of this Bill are profound and far-reaching. By strengthening our national research and innovation ecosystem, Mauritius will be able to stimulate sustainable economic growth through the emergence of high value-added sectors, attract both local and foreign investment and create quality employment opportunities for our people, particularly for our youth.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the construction sector which falls under the purview of my Ministry and which has for long been an important pillar of our economy, must now evolve to meet the demands of the future. We are no longer building solely for today. We are building for the next 30 to 50 years. This requires transition from traditional labour-intensive approaches towards a modern, innovative-led and technology driven construction model. The future of our construction sector lies in innovation across the entire value chain. In design, we must embrace digital modelling, simulation technologies and building information modelling to optimise structures, reduce waste, improve planning efficiency and lower long-term costs. In construction methods, we must encourage modular and prefabricated system, automation,

robotics and advanced technologies that reduce construction time improve quality control, strengthen safety standards and increase productivity.

In project management, we must increasingly rely on real-time digital monitoring system, predictive maintenance technologies, data-driven planning, and intelligent infrastructure management systems, to ensure that infrastructure is not only efficiently built, but also efficiently managed through its entire life cycle.

Madam Speaker, traditionally infrastructure development relied heavily on conventional methods and imported expertise. Today, however, we are entering a new era. One where infrastructure must become smarter, greener, more resilient, more sustainable, and more technologically advanced.

First, it will enable targeted research on construction material, techniques and technologies suited to Mauritius' specific conditions such as cyclonic risks, coastal erosion and climate change impacts. This will lead to the development of more resilient and sustainable infrastructure, improving the durability and safety of buildings and public works.

Second, the Bill promotes stronger coordination between government, academia and industry. This will allow universities and research institutions to work more closely with contractors, engineers and planners, ensuring that innovations are rapidly translated into practical construction solution. For example, advances in green building technologies, energy efficient designs and low carbon materials can be more easily adopted across the sector.

Third, by encouraging mission-oriented research, the proposed institute will support cost effective construction methods and better project planning. This is particularly important for Mauritius, where infrastructure investment must be efficient due to limited resources and high import dependence for materials.

Fourth, the Bill will enable the strengthening of skills development and capacity building within the construction workforce. Research outputs will enhance training programmes for engineers, architects and technicians, ensuring that this sector keeps pace with global standards and emerging technologies such as digital construction methods and smart infrastructure system.

Finally, the focus on innovation will enhance the sector's competitiveness, enabling Mauritian firms to adopt advanced construction practices and to expand regionally.

Madam Speaker, in practical terms, this means that our roads, bridges, drainage system, public buildings and transport network will be better designed, more durable, more cost efficient, and more aligned with the long-term development needs of our country. I am just finishing, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Gunness: I am just finishing.

An hon. Member: *To sir?*

Mr Gunness: Yes.

Madam Speaker, ultimately, the Bill is not solely about research, it is about the future direction of our economy. It is about modernising our institutions. It is about strengthening national resilience, and it is about equipping Mauritius with the tools necessary to confront the challenges of the 21st century with confidence and ambition. It challenges us to rethink how we should innovate, how we should build, how we should modernise, and how we should prepare our nation for the future generation.

With vision, innovation and collective national commitment, we can transform Mauritius into smarter, greener, more resilient and globally competitive nation. Overall, the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill will act as a catalyst for a smarter, safer and more sustainable construction industry, aligning infrastructure development with long-term national resilience and economic growth.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I would like, once again, to congratulate the Minister. Well done on bringing this important Bill to the House as an important milestone for the sustainable development of our country.

I, therefore, reiterate my full support to this Bill. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Minister! It is very difficult for me sometimes. I do not want to stop you, but sometimes, it is difficult.

Please, Dr. Boolell.

(8.57 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you.

Madam Speaker: I am sure you will try and keep the time!

Dr. Boolell: I will try my level best! It is not always easy.

Madam Speaker, I am rather appalled that there is no one on the Opposition bench...

Madam Speaker: Yes, yes!

Dr. Boolell: ...to listen to what we have to say. It is such an important Bill. Since I am the last one to intervene before my good friend makes his concluding remarks, I will be like Speedy Gonzales, referring copiously to my notes and rushing through it.

Let me congratulate the hon. Minister for moving, what I will call, a cutting-edge Bill. The National Research and Innovation Institution Bill is a bill that will bring fundamental changes. He has conveyed a message and come up with the solution. Time, Madam Speaker, is of an essence, and no one owes us a living.

There was a time when we were an overcrowded barracoon, of course, in the 60s and 70s, and the ambition of many, out of necessity, was to enrol in a teaching hospital in the UK to be a nursing officer. Then, use the savings from working as a nursing officer to go to university to be professional in their respective fields. They have contributed or had contributed enormously to the socio-economic development of our country. As I say, they have done well in their professional careers.

Today, we have an ageing workforce and demographic changes is a daunting challenge to sustain our standard of living. Japan, many European countries, in contrast to Africa and India, have an inherent demographic problem. It is, Madam Speaker, a conveyor belt with a weak link. But how to address the pernicious problems? One of the several solutions, notwithstanding circular migration or selective migration, is investment in research, development and innovation.

As I have stated earlier, no one owes us a living. The days of preference are over. Market access with reciprocity without guaranteed price is our way of life. We have to reinvent ourselves and we cannot relax and enjoy on sheer comfortability. As a Small Island Developing State, which has the legitimate ambition to be a knowledge-based Big Ocean State, applied research, development, innovation and creativity should be our new paradigm.

When I look at the Bill and refer to the clauses, one of the outstanding clauses is Clause 4 (1) (d) and (j). I am not going to highlight what they are, but they are there, and they look at us, as we say, smartingly. But then, words are there; actions matter most.

The Applied Research and Commissioned Studies Division of Section 11 shall be responsible to acquire research tools, including AI-enabled ones, and e-library. This is amazing! This is knowledge. This is the powerhouse. If we want to stay one step ahead or to be at par, we have no choice than to widen our circle of opportunities and increase our vista of knowledge. I say it because there are miles to go, and I say it to our good friend, because this is the harsh reality. Our ranking and global innovative index has to improve. We all have to do it. The mindset has to be new. We have to shift the paradigm. Otherwise, we will be a lightweight. Not only should we shift the paradigm, but we have to re-engineer the process.

Madam Speaker, the National Research and Innovation Institute will be the national oversight to advance scientific discovery, research, innovation and evidence base. We have, as I have said, to turn Mauritius into a resilient, competitive and knowledge-based economy. It is not a sound bite, but has to be evidence-based with scientific data and re-engineering process; it is the way of life in Estonia, Netherlands and South Korea.

Let me state, there will be no encroachment and the Minister said it. I am sure it didn't fly like a cuckoo's nest over one's head, but he said it, there will be no encroachment on any research organisation. Collaboration and synergistic partnership are the way to level up research, development and innovation. The bedrock of our national development. It is pervasive and will permeate to bring positive changes at the Sugar Research Institute, the Mauritius Oceanographic Institute and Albion Fisheries Research Centre. These research organisations are delivering and the findings in the recent reports on blue economy and agriculture are the outcome of applied research.

MSI is a wealth of research of information. I would like to pay tribute to late Mr Guého, who was instrumental to do thorough research work in sugar cane industry but there

is no protection of intellectual property rights of the research carried out. It is a wealth lying idle and a relevant data of public research and development has to be established.

Section 24 clearly defines the role and function of the Coordinating Council. It is a facilitator and an enabler of existing organisation in research, development and innovation.

Section 23 provides effective coordination across the government ecosystem. We are also looking at emerging sectors. But we have to be more innovative, more creative, to have startup and to have the startup of new sectors. There is no brain drain and I call it brain gain, because when you go overseas, when you work in reputed institutions, research has been carried out and you have contributed to make things better. These are experience acquired overseas in the best centre and they can easily be transferred today with constant breakthrough in research and technology.

Our skilled Mauritian workforce, they would be willing to come. India is doing it, a Maveric in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. EU hired the services of a prominent Mauritian professional in the field of medical science to strengthen our Institute of Biotechnology and I deliberately won't drop his name. So, it shows what we Mauritians can do and when we do it, we do it well because we are inspiring. We are committed and when we deliver, we deliver with the strength and skills acquired in our local institutions right from the early days. That's why we have to put a premium on education, the best investment in life.

Earlier we were talking of an idea, but an idea is worth every penny if it is matured through research, development and innovation and has the potential as a startup to be commercially viable. My friends were right to say, it does not happen overnight. I think, it was hon. Narsinghen who said it. You invest, you allow the idea to mature through research and development and you need to give it a commercial dimension. You have not only commercial but it has to be viable. It has to be sustained and value has to be added to it. But then we have to look at the level of our preparedness because the only thing that remain constant in life is change. And we have to change for the better and constantly improve the well-being of our people, our best resource.

Against, Madam Speaker, a background of financial uncertainty, an oil crisis, as I have stated earlier, we need to have a culture focused aggressively on innovation, research and development. From renewable energy to alternative urea fertilizer, applied research and development and innovation and AI have to be our way of life. AI is a set of tools that make us more efficient, but sometimes at the cost of redundancy. Workers are released to be

redeployed in other sectors, and we have to live with the harsh realities, but we constantly need to give them the skills and reskill them. Research in relation to social impact of redundancy as I have stated has to be conducted.

The debate can be endless as to whom should be on the Council. What the Minister has done, I will call it an early harvest of the low hanging fruits. But if amendments have to be brought to bring in representatives from the Higher Education Commission or University of Mauritius or University of Technology or the private sector, it will be given due consideration.

After all, Madam Speaker, the law is an ass. The provisions of the Bill pave the way to walk the talk. Let me reinforce what the Minister of Tertiary Education has stated. There would be no overlap, no overlapping and no duplication. This is a strong signal being sent to all research institutions. These are signals that have been conveyed and we need to collaborate and we need to cluster our strength and look ahead and define what is the object of what we have to achieve.

As Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries, I am setting up an integrated blue green circular food infrastructure platform aligned with Mauritius strategic priorities in food security, blue economy, execution and climate resilience. But research and development, and innovation remain the cornerstone. Smart with precision and have impressed upon Civil Aviation Department to allow agricultural sector to use a bigger drone for use of precision agriculture, a valuable tool in research, development and innovation.

Our EEZ, Madam Speaker, is the biggest in Africa and 20th in the world. The Mauritius Oceanographic Institute, the Albion Fisheries Research Centre have data which is sought after by the Ocean Economy AI Lab launched by Mr George Chung Tick Kan.

A collaboration, public private partnership should not be ruled out. As SIDS, we are world in miniature, with different soil types and micro climate, indeed an attractive destination for research and development, which reminds me of people, the Americans who went to Madagascar, collected a flower called periwinkle, which was turned into pharmaceutical produce and used in to treat cancers, especially Hodgkin disease. But what was given to the Madagascans? Nothing. This is why it is important that as a Small Island Developing State, which nurture the ambition to be a big ocean state, we collaborate, we work together with countries in the region and we convey strong signals to the appropriate

forum to impress upon them that intellectual property rights and patency as of rights are our rights also, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: To big pharma.

Dr. Boolell: Sorry?

Madam Speaker: To big pharma.

Dr. Boolell: That's right. You're always right when you say the good things.

Concern has been expressed in some quarters over potential fundamental conflict and the Minister has dispelled the myth and highlighted the importance of applied research. Mobilising resources to have a coordinated trust – Albion Fisheries Research Centre, the Oceanic Institute, the University of Mauritius, NGO with funding from UN bodies need to have a coordinated trust.

We cannot, Madam Speaker, be like headless chicken running all over the place, and I don't want to sound like a cobbler who judge the research bodies by the shoes they wear. The perception of judge, jury and executioner should be dispelled and that has been dispelled without the Minister saying much, but the signals were sent. Can there be free, distinct, and opposing rules under one roof? A legitimate question.

A single institute simply can fund, work together with relevant institution to implement research simultaneously, but the coordinated thrust remains the backbone. There should be no inherent conflict of interest. Let me examine the Bill from three perspective. As a funder, there will be equitable sharing without any compromise on funding from specific relevant Ministry but the project-based budgeting of each project should be the cornerstone. As an implementer, no duplication silo approach, but synergistic coordination to allow the specific body to boost its project. As a training institute, various clauses of the Bill allure to the role of the National Research Innovation Institute in training of public officers in research and there will be streamlining of resource for better outcome.

The roles are clearly defined, be it the Higher Education Commission or the Polytechnic as implementers of research and training student, the Civil Service College already mandated to train their public officers. The Ministry which coordinates agricultural and ocean research through various institutions is fully on board.

Madam Speaker, international best practices dictate clear separation from those who set the strategy, the coordinators, those who provide money, the funders and those who do the

work. And as a responsible government, the Minister has said it, none of us will depart from best practices. The Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries oversees the foremost vital research of our nation which I have highlighted.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, other key ministries will be fully on board. We have heard the speech delivered by the Minister responsible for ICT and all other ministers who have intervened, it is relevant also that we are faithful to documents which are published by specific ministry.

The Minister, hon. Gunness, spoke lengthily on the merits of his Ministry and despite financial resources are not allocated to him, sometimes we are unduly penalised in our Constituency but he's doing his level best and has a hands up approach.

Let me conclude, Madam Speaker. Various international reports highlight that the major problem of Mauritius is the lack of business-driven research and development. Traditional sectors are stagnating because the private sector is not investing enough in research and development. The problem with our private sector is that like Oliver Twist, they ask for more and more but when it comes to make their contribution and to act in unison with policy defined by government, sometimes they choose to stay far away. This goes against the policies defined by government to take everybody on board. They cannot simply ask for more and do less, Madam Speaker. We all have to live up to our responsibility.

The Minister of Tertiary Education, as a good professor, will prepare the scientific roadmap with clear goals and broad objectives to avoid administrative pitfalls.

Let me conclude by saying, Singapore and Finland came with the relevant policy to address national research and innovation. Notwithstanding our own specificity, there are lessons to be learned and drawn. Both have lean structures with clear vision on the sectors that they wish to develop, solid interministerial coordination, public and private partnership platform and high degree of accountability.

Madam Speaker, the Minister has opted for constructive dialogue. He has presented a Bill which is as good as gold. It's up to us now to live up to expectation, to be on the march and to deliver forcefully and in a meaningful manner.

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research, your concluding speech, please.

(9.18 p.m.)

Dr. Sukon: Madam Speaker, let me start by thanking everyone for their intervention. Let me particularly thank the acting Prime Minister, yourself, and the Chief Whip for getting my energy back, and let me thank everybody for their intervention.

Madam Speaker: C'est très féministe. Allez-y.

Dr. Sukon: Everybody has contributed and has talked about various sectors, whether it is plant, financial planning, ICT, education; everybody has shown how research can play a pivotal role in ensuring that we achieve the goal.

The Leader of the Opposition, saying it in the research language that my colleague Dr. Gungapersad said, he is totally confused. He has the right ontological stance by saying – “yes, we are for evidence-based research, we would like more policies to be crafted based on evidence and research” but his epistemological stance was completely wrong. How can he have an epistemological stance that doesn't match his ontological stance? So, he's talking about centralisation.

Let me give you the picture of how things are today. He took the example of University of Mauritius. I have a lot of respect for the academics there; they are brilliant researchers. But what's happening now? You have researchers in one department not talking to another department. You have researchers within one university. That's why as soon as this government came, we started the national research, bringing them together.

When we have a national problem, I take Mare Chicose. Where are our researchers? Did you hear our researchers? When we have the problem of Chikungunya, communicable diseases; where are they? Who is advising on what are the different methods available? When the country is facing issues of drain after the cyclone or flash flood, where are they? They are very good. I repeat it, we have very good researchers doing very well, but they are happy to do research, publish in high impact factor journal and get promoted.

I am making an appeal to them. I have been making an appeal since I became a Minister. Please do not stop at impact factor journal research. We need that research to be applied. We need you to find solutions to our national problem. What is happening now?

If you want me to summarise this Bill in one word, it is coherence. It is not centralisation. It's like the brain. The brain can synchronise, but it will not do the work of the

heart. It will not do the work of the lung. It ensures that everybody's working in harmony and ensures that we remain alive.

So, there will be no duplication. There will be no encroachment, as hon. Dr. Boolell said, but there needs to be synchronisation. We cannot continue like that. Colleagues have said about the low investment in research and development. So, with that low investment in R&D, we cannot afford duplication.

That is why Section 23 brings everybody; all ministries conducting research together, let them sit down. Hon. François asked who sets the National Research Institute priorities? It is that committee. The national research priorities will change. For example, we have an outbreak of communicable diseases. What do we do? We got to have the team. The Bill makes it clear that when we do not have local expertise, we have got to have people from abroad and we have got to have expert and researchers coming from abroad working together.

So, this Bill is about coherence convergence. The examples taken by the hon. Leader of the Opposition; well, they were hypothetical examples, but let me reassure everybody. I have said it to the academics and the researchers; your research needs to be valued. Your research needs to be applied. Your research needs to solve the national challenges we are facing. This is what we want. We do not want that research to remain in that research journal or to remain at the university. So, their research will be valued. He does not have to worry about.

Second, he talked about governance. Section 15 (4) of the Bill makes it clear—

“No person shall be qualified as a board member where he is —

- (a) a member of the National Assembly;
- (b) a member of a local authority; or
- (c) otherwise actively engaged in any political activity.”

It goes beyond and describes the board members referred to here will comprise —

- (a) be persons who have proven competence in research, science, finance, technology transfer, higher education, entrepreneurship, policy development, management of research or public administration;

The first thing that NRII will be doing is looking at a diabetes research centre. and who will leading that? Professor Froguel from Imperial College. He is the one who has the highest publication in this field. He is someone who is respected in this field. My colleagues can read

about him. There was an article yesterday in *Le Défi* and he was here for the research week. Why?

We want to find possible solutions to this problem. He has a data bank of markers that will help to do the DNA sequencing, identify those markers and help people have a better life. So, we want things to change. Section 23, when it talks about the council, brings everybody together. If you are in the field of agriculture, there is a problem there, then, we will all collaborate. Because what is happening now?

Research and agriculture are done only by the person expert in agriculture. But we need economists there. We would need the person from the sociology background because it has impact on the lives of people.

So, we need multi-disciplinary research. This is what this Bill is bringing. Regarding Rodrigues, let me reassure hon. François that MRIC already has a unit in Rodrigues that will continue to function. So, he does not have to worry at all. Concerning the definition of innovation, we were hesitant to have it there because why confine innovation in a definition? When you look at the definition of innovation in the MRIC Act, it talks about augmentation, increase. That is not innovation! Innovation is about letting people come up with ideas! This is what the Bill is about: having a bank of ideas.

Mr François: Innovation is innovating!

Dr. Sukon: *Voilà!*

Regarding the finance issue, it is very clearly specified that there will be a general fund. I will not only produce financial report, as hon. François, again, requested. It is going to produce those reports that will solve the issues. You talked about the findings to be made available, hon. Baboolall talked about financial reports, so, those reports are mandatory. That is why apart from the council, we are also having a group of people to look at the rigour of the research.

We are not going to do research for the sake of research. The Scientific Advisory Council will ensure that there is rigour, quality and that we are able to achieve the goals.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like, again, to thank everybody for supporting this Bill. Let me reassure them that Bill is to ensure that the future of Mauritius is brighter. We need new sectors. We need new economic pillars. This can only emanate from this research.

To end, Madam Speaker, let me tell you, *Maurice ne peut pas bâtir l'économie de demain avec les outils d'hier. Cet institut donnera à notre pays la force de recherches nécessaire pour rivaliser, s'adapter et prendre les devants.*

On this note, I commend this Bill to the House. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

THE NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INSTITUTE BILL

(NO. IV OF 2026)

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

Clauses 1 to 22 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 23 (Coordinating Council)

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

Dr. Sukon: Madam Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 23 –

“in clause 23, in subclause (2) –

- (i) by deleting paragraph (a) and replacing it by the following paragraph –
 - (a) a chairperson, to be appointed by the Minister;
- (ii) by inserting, after paragraph (a), the following new paragraph, the existing paragraphs (b) to (e) being relettered as paragraphs (c) to (f), respectively;
 - (b) the Chief Executive Officer;”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 23, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 24 to 42 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 43 (Transfer of officers of MRIC to Institute)

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

Dr. Sukon: Madam Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 43 –

“clause 43, by deleting subclause (6) and replacing it by the following subclause –

(6) Notwithstanding this section, the Executive Director of the MRIC shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for a period of 12 months as from the date of the commencement of section 41.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 43, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 44 and 45 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the National Research and Innovation Institute Bill (No. IV of 2026) was read a third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ag. Prime Minister!

ADJOURNMENT

The Ag. Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 11.30 a.m.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. The House stands adjourned! I have one adjournment matter.

MATTER RAISED

(9.36 p.m.)

RODRIGUES MEDICAL APPEAL TRIBUNAL - PENDING CASES & NEF BENEFICIARIES

Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Rapidly, the issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the hon. Minister of Social Security, Social Integration and National Solidarity with regard to the non-scheduled sittings of Medical Appeal Tribunal delayed and non-renewal of contract of NEF beneficiaries in Rodrigues.

I am informed that the last sitting of the Medical Tribunal in Rodrigues dated back more than a year ago, precisely since March 2025, and there are few pending cases amongst which are cases of Schizophrenia. One will understand that these vulnerable persons cannot even apply for any other support at the Social Security, for a normal BIP after 6 months, and they are penalised twice until their cases are attended by the Tribunal.

The Tribunal used to sit on a quarterly basis, that is, 4 times a year to attend appeal for Basic Invalidity Pension (BIP) and Basic Retirement pension, severely handicapped, BRP-SH cases in Rodrigues.

In addition, there also a problem with beneficiaries of NEF whose contracts have terminated and awaiting visit. I understand that there is an administrative and coordination issue with regard to the lengthy process of application and visit at the level of Regional Assembly, then signature of NEF contract by NEF, and delays in payment thereof. In the meantime, while awaiting renewal of their contracts, the potential beneficiaries and their school children are being penalised and life is becoming a misery for them.

In that regard, I will humbly request the hon. Minister to see to it for urgent remedial actions by his Ministry, the Medical Tribunal and NEF in collaboration with the Regional Assembly *pour kapav ed rapidement sa bann dimounn vulnerab ek pou plis efikacite ek zistis dan sa procesis de verifikasyon.*

I thank you.

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron): I thank the hon. Member. Let me say, I am outraged since this morning because I have just confirmed that the Medical Tribunal, effectively, did not have any session since March 2025. There were, in October 2025, 42 people awaiting, 31 March 2026, 81 people awaiting. This is blatant discrimination. This is blatant disrespect to the people of Rodrigues. So, I will, as from tomorrow look into the matter and take appropriate actions. This is just unacceptable.

On the second issue, let me inform you that there is a coordination problem. But the whole NEF issue, integration and empowerment are being discussed right now. There are several meetings with the Ministry of Finance but I must inform the House of one important thing. Most of the of the support under the National Empowerment Foundation goes to the Rodriguan population. It is more than 40% and 16% of the population of Rodrigues are under the National Empowerment Foundation. I think, it is very, very important to understand at

this moment that had it not been the case, we would have a massive migration in Mauritius. We know the impact of this migration because many of the people are our compatriots coming from Rodrigues, they live in precarious condition. So, the experience of Rodrigues will be taken into consideration, when we will be reviewing the NEF and the poverty threshold, as well as the integration and empowerment dimension of the National Empowerment Foundation.

Thank you, hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Minister.

Yes, I thank everybody. I thank all those who have been working this evening.

At 9.39 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

DETAINEE J.A.P'S DEATH – 01 MAY 2026 – JUDICIAL ENQUIRY

(No. B/638) Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the death of detainee, late Mr J. A. P., on or about 01 May 2026, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand regarding the inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating –

- (a) the circumstances of death, and
- (b) whether a Judicial Enquiry has been instituted thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENCES – ARRESTED/SUSPENDED POLICE OFFICERS

(No. B/639) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to drug trafficking offences, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of Police Officers arrested and/or

suspended in connection therewith since 2014 to date, indicating the number thereof convicted and where matters stand regarding the remaining cases.

(Withdrawn)

BEAU BASSIN CENTRAL PRISON – DETAINEES – DEATH

(No. B/640) Mrs D. Henriette-Manan (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Beau Bassin Central Prison, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to the –

- (a) number of detainees having passed away since December 2025 to date thereat, indicating the number of such death attributed to –
 - (i) natural causes, and
 - (ii) suspicious causes or otherwise, and
- (b) measures being taken and/or envisaged to ensure that same and other detention and correctional institutions operate within the legal framework and respect of the dignity of detainees.

(Withdrawn)

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL – PROPOSED INTRODUCTION

(No. B/642) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Freedom of Information Bill in the Assembly, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

BANK OF MAURITIUS – CENTRAL BANK DIGITAL CURRENCY – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/643) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the implementation of the Central Bank Digital Currency initiative, he will, for the benefit of the

House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to where matters stand, indicating the commercial bank chosen in January 2024 for the launching thereof on a pilot basis and the progress achieved as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

TOURISTS – INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMIT – VALIDITY PERIOD

(No. B/644) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the International Driving Permit for tourists in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether consideration is being given for the adoption of the three years validity period therefor and, if so, indicate where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

ST. FELIX PUBLIC BEACH – ALLEGED MURDER CASE – SECURITY MEASURES

(No. B/645) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the St. Felix Public Beach, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) where matters stand regarding the alleged murder committed thereat on or about 14 April 2026, indicating the number of arrests effected in connection therewith, if any, and
- (b) the measures being contemplated to enhance safety and security thereat, particularly during weekends and public holidays.

(Withdrawn)

BEAU BASSIN CENTRAL PRISON – LATE D. S. DEATH – INQUIRY

(No. B/646) Dr. Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the death of detainee, late D. S., at the Beau Bassin Central Prison on or about 05

May 2026, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand regarding the inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating –

- (a) the circumstances and cause of death, and
- (b) whether –
 - (i) any prison officer has been suspended in connection therewith, and
 - (ii) all relevant evidence, including CCTV footage, medical records and duty logs have been secured.

(Withdrawn)

MR A.C.P. & TWIN BROTHER – ARREST REASONS

(No. B/647) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Mr A.C.P. arrested on or about 03 April 2026 and the subsequent arrest of his twin brother, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the reasons therefor and circumstances thereof, indicating the items seized in the course thereof and whether same include illicit drugs and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (b) whether they are currently subjected to objections to departure.

(Withdrawn)

PRIVATE SECURITY SERVICE PROVIDER LICENCE – REGISTERED HOLDERS – APPLICATIONS

(No. B/648) Dr. Ms R. Daureawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Private Security Service Provider Licence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the current number of registered holders thereof, indicating the –

- (a) number of new and renewal applications for the issue thereof –
 - (i) pending over the past five years, and

- (ii) approved over the past two years, and
- (b) average time taken for the processing of applications for the issue of new or for the renewal thereof, indicating the reasons for delays, if any, in the processing thereof.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL MARITIME ZONE – MONITORING & SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

(No. B/649) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the national maritime zone, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) systems currently in place for the monitoring thereof, indicating whether same are deemed adequate, and
- (b) number of existing National Coast Guard stations, indicating their respective locations and in each case, the number of personnel posted thereat and helicopters and vessels at the disposal thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC SERVICE – MEDICAL & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS –RECRUITMENT, RETENTION & DISCIPLINE

(No. B/675) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the recruitment, retention and discipline of medical and health professionals in the public service, he will –

- (a) give details of the existing arrangements governing same, and
- (b) state whether consideration is being given for the setting up of a dedicated Medical and Health Services Commission along the lines of existing service commissions with a view to strengthening efficiency, governance and accountability therein.

(Withdrawn)

**RODRIGUES & MAURITIUS – MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKERS – POSTING &
SCHEME OF DUTIES**

(No. B/677) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Medical Social Workers, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof posted in public hospitals in mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues Island, respectively, and
- (b) scheme of duties thereof.

(Withdrawn)

TRIANON JUNCTION-RIPAILLES ROUNDABOUT – SPEED CAMERAS

(No. B/678) Mr G. P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the installation of speed cameras along the M3 Motorway, from the Trianon junction to the Ripailles Roundabout, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, information as to whether a survey has been carried out thereat and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

PUNGANUR DWARF COW – IMPORTATION – IMPLICATIONS & CONDITIONS

(No. B/679) Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the importation of cattle, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether the importation of the Punganur dwarf cow is being envisaged, indicating the implications thereof, and the conditions and requirements therefor.

(Withdrawn)

**MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT – WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP – ENHANCEMENT
& STRENGTHENING**

(No. B/680) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to women entrepreneurship, she will state the vision of her Ministry for the enhancement and strengthening thereof amid the current Middle East conflict.

(Withdrawn)

FERTILISER SUBSIDY SCHEME – BENEFICIARIES & FUNDING

(No. B/681) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Fertiliser Subsidy Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Small Farmers Welfare Fund, information as to the total –

- (a) amount earmarked thereunder during the current financial year, indicating the amount thereof disbursed as at to date, and
- (b) number of requests received from small planters, indicating the number of beneficiaries and number of requests pending as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS – ADOLESCENTS’ ADMISSIONS –
DRUG-RELATED CONDITIONS**

(No. B/682) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to drug-related health conditions, he will state the number of adolescents admitted to public health institutions therefor over the past five years, on a yearly basis, indicating if an assessment of the drug-addiction level of adolescents in Mauritius has been carried out and, if so, indicate the measures being implemented or envisaged to address same.

(Withdrawn)

**CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS – MAURITIAN CANDIDATES’
PERFORMANCE – REMEDIAL MEASURES**

(No. B/683) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the performance of Mauritian candidates in the last Cambridge International Examinations, he will state the –

- (a) remedial measures being envisaged to address same, and
- (b) responsibility of the different authorities, particularly, the Quality Assurance and Inspection Division, in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

**YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH – SOCIAL MEDIA’S IMPACT – CONTROL
MEASURES**

(No. B/684) Ms D. Henriette-Manan (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the concerns expressed as to the adverse effects of social media on the mental health of the youth, he will state whether consideration is being given for the implementation of stricter controls, including mandatory age-verification measures, in respect of access to social media platforms for minors under the age of 16 years.

(Withdrawn)

**RODRIGUES ISLAND – NATIONAL PENSION FUND – FISHERMEN
CONTRIBUTION**

(No. B/685) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to fishermen in Rodrigues Island who have contributed in the National Pension Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number thereof;
- (b) benefits accruing from the said contributions, and
- (c) number thereof who are not in receipt of any pension, indicating the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/686) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the elaboration of a Solid Waste Management Strategy, he will state where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) expected implementation date thereof, and
- (b) measures being envisaged to encourage –
 - (i) waste segregation at source, and
 - (ii) composting of market waste by local authorities.

(Withdrawn)

**TAMARIN PUBLIC BEACH – SEVERE EROSION & EXCAVATION WORKS –
INQUIRY**

(No. B/687) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the severe erosion occurring at the Tamarin public beach and recent excavation works allegedly carried out in the vicinity thereof, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) whether an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof and remedial actions taken, if any
- (b) the extent of the damage caused, and
- (c) the emergency and long-term measures being implemented or envisaged to address the situation.

(Withdrawn)

BLACK RIVER DISTRICT – SCAVENGING SERVICES – CONTRACTOR/S

(No. B/688) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to scavenging services in the Black River District, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) name of the contractor/s;
- (b) value thereof;
- (c) number of lorries available;
- (d) number of staff deployed, and
- (e) areas covered.

(Withdrawn)

**CONSTITUENCY NO. 10 – MODERN SPORTS COMPLEX – SSS BEL AIR
GYMNASIUM – INTERIM MEASURE**

(No. B/689) Dr. R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the provision of sports infrastructure in Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sports Council, information as to whether consideration will be given for the –

- (a) construction of a modern and fully-equipped sports complex thereat in accordance with international standards, and
- (b) opening, as an interim measure, of the gymnasium at the SSS Bel Air to the public, including the provision of qualified coaching facilities, free of charge, during weekends and after school hours.

(Withdrawn)

POLYTECHNICS (MAURITIUS) LTD – ADMINISTRATIVE & OPERATIONAL REFORMS

(No. B/690) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research whether, in regard to administrative and operational reforms undertaken by Polytechnics (Mauritius) Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) nature thereof;
- (b) reasons therefor;
- (c) number of contracts not renewed, indicating the posts concerned therewith, and
- (d) current financial situation thereof, indicating the estimated anticipated savings therefrom.

(Withdrawn)

SCAVENGING LORRIES SERVICING – REPAIR/REPLACEMENT

(No. B/691) Mr C. Lukeeram (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the scavenging lorries servicing the southern region, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number thereof currently out of service, indicating the estimated timeframe for the repair and/or replacement thereof, and
- (b) immediate and long-term measures being envisaged to ensure the timely repair of the existing fleet thereof and the procurement of new ones.

(Withdrawn)

CEB – SECURITY SERVICES CONTRACT

(No. B/692) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the security services, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the company/companies to which the provision thereof have been contracted since 2015 to date.

(Withdrawn)

CEB – ELECTRICITY TARIFFS 15% INCREASE – REVENUE & FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/693) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the announced 15 percent increase in electricity tariffs as from May 2026, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to the –

- (a) additional revenue expected to be generated on a yearly basis as a result thereof, and
- (b) financial situation thereof as at 31 December 2024.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/657)

VACOAS-PHOENIX – DRAINS CONSTRUCTION – APPROVED PROJECTS & FUNDING STATUS

(No. B/694) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the construction of new drains within the township of Vacoas-Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of approved projects since September 2025 to date, indicating the number thereof in respect of which funds have been allocated, further indicating in each case, the date of contract allocation.

(Withdrawn)

OVERSEAS MEDICAL TREATMENT – FINANCIAL & LOGISTICAL ASSISTANCE – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/695) Dr. R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to overseas medical treatment, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Overseas Treatment Unit of his

Ministry, information as to the eligibility criteria for the provision of financial and logistical assistance to patients applying therefor, indicating the mechanisms in place to ensure fairness, accountability and proper monitoring thereof.

(Withdrawn)

FIU – MRS L.P., CURRENT DIRECTOR – APPOINTMENT TERMS & CONDITIONS

(No. B/696) Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the current Director of the Financial Intelligence Unit, Mrs L.P., she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) her terms and conditions of appointment, including salary and other allowances drawn, and
- (b) the number of overseas missions undertaken as at to date, indicating, in each case, the expenditure incurred in terms of air tickets, per diem and other allowances.

(Withdrawn)

CWA FINANCIAL SITUATION – LOANS & OUTSTANDING CONTRACTORS LIABILITIES

(No. B/697) Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Water Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the financial situation thereof –

- (a) giving details of loans entered into by the authority and currently being repaid, and
- (b) indicating the amounts owed to contractors as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

GOODLANDS BY-PASS ROUNDABOUT – PEAK HOURS TRAFFIC – DECONGESTION MEASURES

(No. B/698) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to heavy traffic congestion occurring along the By-Pass from the Goodlands Roundabout to the level of Espace Maison/Rouillard Roundabout between 7 00 a.m. to 9 00 a.m. and between 3 30 p.m to 7 00

p.m., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to whether consideration will be given for the construction of –

- (a) an additional lane along same, and
- (b) a separate stretch of road at the appropriate roundabout for commuters converging towards the Vale and Petit Raffray.

(Withdrawn)

**DAGOTIERE, RESIDENCE LAVANDE HOUSING COMPLEX – MANAGEMENT
& MAINTENANCE**

(No. B/699) Mr G. P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Residence Lavande Housing complex at Dagotiere, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to –

- (a) whether the site has been vested in the Moka District Council and, if not, why not, and
- (b) the measures in place for the regular maintenance of the green spaces and amenities thereat.

(Withdrawn)

**REHABILITATION YOUTH CENTRE – PROPOSED TRANSFER &
LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS**

(No. B/700) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the issue of the transfer of the Rehabilitation Youth Centre from under the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office to her Ministry, she will state whether the committee set up to look thereinto has recommended same and, if so, indicate the expected implementation date thereof and whether amendments to the Children's Act 2020 or to any other relevant legislation are being contemplated to facilitate same and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

**FISHERMAN REGISTRATION CARD – SUSPENSION & REVOCATION
(2023-2024) – ISSUANCE EXERCISE**

(No. B/703) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in

regard to the Fisherman Registration Card, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the number thereof suspended or revoked over the period 2023 to 2024, and
- (b) when the next exercise for the issuance thereof will be conducted, indicating whether any change in the eligibility criteria therefor is being envisaged.

(Withdrawn)

**STATE & PRIVATE SCHOOLS – STAFF SHORTAGES – SUPPLY TEACHERS’
APPOINTMENT**

(No. B/704) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to shortages of teaching and non-teaching staff in primary State schools, secondary State schools and private secondary schools, he will state –

- (a) the extent thereof in each category since the resumption of school in January 2026, and
- (b) whether consideration will be given to the regularisation of all supply teachers and to their appointment on a permanent basis.

(Withdrawn)

**NCE EXAMINATIONS – ABOLITION – ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS &
MEASURES**

(No. B/705) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the National Certificate of Education Examinations, he will state whether same will be abolished after the holding of the 2026 edition thereof and, if so, indicate the alternative pathways and measures being envisaged for students thereafter.

(Withdrawn)

**ALALILA PLATFORM – TAXI OPERATORS’ REPRESENTATIONS &
APPROVAL**

(No. B/706) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the introduction of the Alalila platform powered by Uber in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to whether –

- (a) it is in presence of representations from some taxis operators regarding same, and

- (b) the approval of the Authority was sought and obtained prior thereto and, if so, indicate the conditions attached thereto and, if not, indicate the actions that will be taken in relation thereto, if any.

(Withdrawn)

**M4 MOTORWAY – RIVIÈRE DU REMPART-FLACQ-GRAND PORT–
BENEFITS & IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

(No. B/707) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether in regard to the M4 Motorway linking the Rivière du Rempart District to the Grand Port District via the Flacq District Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to –

- (a) the main beneficiaries thereof;
- (b) whether prior economic, social and financial impact assessments thereof were carried out and, if so, indicate the main findings thereof, and
- (c) the reasons for the prioritisation thereof over other urgent road works in villages and localities facing severe daily traffic congestion.

(Withdrawn)

**SUPERMARKETS LEVYING CHARGES – REMISES DE FIN D'ANNÉE &
MARKETING FEES – IMPACT**

(No. B/708) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the practice of supermarkets levying charges, including '*remises de fin d'année*' and marketing fees on their suppliers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether the impact thereof on retail prices and consumer purchasing power has been assessed and, if so, indicate the findings thereof.

(Withdrawn)

WOLMAR – STATE LAND – DEVELOPMENT & PRESERVATION MEASURES

(No. A/34) Dr. Ms B. Thannoo (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the plot of State land of an extent of some 200 acres situated at Wolmar recently being the centre of significant development, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the current legal status thereof, and
- (b) state the measures being envisaged to ensure that same is preserved for sound long-term ecological purposes.

Reply (The Minister of Housing and Lands): I am informed that, according to records available at my Ministry, there is no State Land of the extent of 200 acres at Wolmar which has recently been, or is in the process of being, the centre of significant development.

MOUNTAIN SLOPES – ECOLOGICALLY & ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS – SAFEGUARD MEASURES

(No. A/37) Dr. Ms B. Thannoo (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to mountain slopes classified as ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the measures taken through natural protection and bioengineering to safeguard same, indicating any physical and structural reinforcement carried out for drainage and water control and soil stabilisation, and
- (b) whether collaboration with the Geotechnical Engineering Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure is envisaged to formulate an ecologically-informed soil stabilisation plan.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, mountain reserves, including freehold mountain reserves, are protected under the Forests and Reserves Act 1983. The mountain reserve lines are described in section 2 of the First Schedule of the Act. Trees play a crucial role in slope stabilisation by physically reinforcing soil with roots, reducing water content through transpiration and protecting the surface against erosion. These combined effects help to prevent landslides, reduce soil loss and maintain slope integrity, especially on mountains. Forest Officers are empowered to survey reserves, plant trees, control access and prevent illegal logging or removal of forest produce from mountain reserves.

The Forestry Service of the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries, plays a central role in protecting and restoring mountain reserves and slopes, through reforestation and forest restoration activities and collaborates with other organisations, including private sector and conservation groups, such as the Ebony Forest, to rehabilitate degraded mountain reserves. Firebreaks on Signal Mountain are also being

maintained to protect forest plantation against wildfires. The Forestry Service is integrating Nature-based Solutions (NbS) approaches for mountain slope protection/restoration such as the restoration efforts on Signal Mountain. It also actively encourages the implementation of NbS on slopes, thus, allowing the combination of ecological restoration with engineering resilience, through the use of vegetation, ecosystems and natural processes to stabilise slopes while enhancing biodiversity and community benefits.

Moreover, tracks and trails established on the mountain ranges are regularly maintained to prevent soil erosion caused by heavy rains. The process involves the digging of ditch drains along tracks found on slopes, shaping of trails so that water goes off the lower side thereof, repairing damaged trails, removing invasive plant species and planting native species to hold soil.

The Environment Act 2024 makes provisions for a mechanism to ensure sustainable management and protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas. As per the First Schedule of the Act, steep slopes are classified as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs).

The Act also makes provision for the development of policies for the protection and conservation of ESAs in addition to recommendations to reduce the degradation of ESAs, maintain their integrity and preserve their ecosystem. The Minister may make regulations as may be necessary for managing, protecting and enhancing ESAs as well their restoration and rehabilitation. In order to exercise control on development in or on ESAs, section 25 of the Environment Act 2024 provides that no person shall, except for undertakings listed in the Sixth Schedule, undertake any land clearing or development in or on any ESAs without a licence or approval.

As regards part (b) of the question, steep slopes are defined as lands in their natural state that have a slope angle of 20% or greater for a minimum horizontal distance of 10 metres according to the Planning Policy Guidance 9 of the Ministry of Housing and Lands (MHL) - 'Development on Sloping Sites and Landslide Hazard Areas'.

Furthermore, as per Part B of the Sixth Schedule of the Environment Act 2024, 'Land clearing and development in or on environmentally sensitive areas' is a scheduled undertaking warranting an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Licence. As per the First Schedule of the said Act, 'steep slope' is an ESA.

Any development on steep slopes above 20%, requires an Environment Impact Assessment report, which should be accompanied by a geotechnical investigation report, incorporating a slope stability analysis to assess the natural slope with a view to determining the feasibility of the project. During the processing of EIA applications, the views from

relevant institutions, including the Geotechnical Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure (MNI) and the local authority, are sought. The Geotechnical Unit, in most cases, imposes a specific condition that the Authority should be informed of any anomaly/unforeseen ground condition that may arise on the basis of daily inspections/monitoring of excavation and foundation works during the construction phase. In addition, all liability associated with the appropriate design and implementation of the proposed development with respect to safety shall rest with the proponent/consultant.

A Landslide Hazard Map for Mauritius identifying suspected risk-prone and sensitive areas, including those found on mountainous regions, has been prepared at the level of the Geotechnical Unit. Some 62 earmarked sites considered as critical ones were surveyed with a view to formulating a Landslide Management Plan. The Plan would contain monitoring exercises, proposed countermeasure works and early warning protocols for the sites found hazardous, post the surveys. It is only after finalisation and validation of the Plan that the Geotechnical Unit would be in a position to work on specific countermeasures or other protection systems required at each landslide-prone area, including the development of any soil stabilisation plan.

According to the Land Drainage Authority, certain houses at Rivière Profonde, Moka, had been identified as being located within a high-risk area. As an interim measure, the District Council of Moka was requested to relocate the affected households.

In parallel, a site visit/coordination meeting was conducted by the Task Force comprising representatives of the Geotechnical Unit, Ministry of Local Government, the Land Drainage Authority, and other relevant stakeholders with a view to assessing the situation and identifying appropriate remedial measures. The report from the Geotechnical Unit is awaited by the Land Drainage Authority.

PUBLIC OFFICERS – RETIREMENT AGE – SERVICE IN HIGHER POSITIONS – PROMOTION SCOPE

(No. A/38) Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms whether, in regard to public officers nearing retirement age and having been serving higher positions for prolonged periods, he will state whether –

- (a) consideration is being given for the promotion thereof prior to retirement and, if so, indicate the modalities applicable therefor, and

(b) any review is being envisaged to ensure fairness in the career progression thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that appointment and promotion to higher posts in the Public Service is vested in the Public Service Commission by virtue of Section 89 of the Constitution.

Promotions are effected by the Service Commissions, subject to vacancies existing in the grade concerned, availability of funds, the prescribed qualifications and experience as laid down in the relevant Scheme of Service, satisfactory performance and conduct of the officer to be promoted as well as the recommendation of the Responsible Officer.

In this regard, regulation 14 of the Public Service Commission Regulations provides that, in exercising its powers of appointment or promotion, the Commission shall have regard to merit, qualifications, experience and suitability before seniority, with due consideration to the maintenance of a high standard of efficiency in the Public Service.

In line with regulation 19 of the Public Service Commission Regulations, it is the responsibility of the Responsible Officer of a Ministry/Department concerned to report to the Commission any existing vacant post on the establishment of his Ministry and to make recommendations on the manner in which the vacancy should be filled.

Where the Responsible Officer is unable to recommend that the vacancy should be filled immediately, he is required to inform the Secretary, Public Service Commission and state the reasons therefor and the temporary arrangements he is making for the performance of the duties of the vacant office. Acting appointments are normally resorted to in such cases especially where substantive holders are on prolonged leave.

Age factor is not a criteria for the promotion of Public Officers to higher posts in the Public Service. Promotion can only be made in line with the qualifications prescribed in the relevant Scheme of Service. In this respect, my Ministry is closely following up with all Ministries/Departments to ensure that Schemes of Service are kept updated and are reviewed/amended at the earliest to ensure the timely filling of vacancies.

I may further wish to inform the House that Schemes of Service governing promotion in the Public Service are prescribed under regulation 15 of the Public Service Commission Regulations.

The Pay Research Bureau Report further provides for two types of promotion, namely class-to-class promotion and grade-to-grade promotion. Class-to-class promotion is invariably made on the basis of selection through a competitive examination, an interview or a combination of both, whereas grade-to-grade promotion is made either strictly on the basis of seniority ranking of the officer or by selection from among serving officers.

Accordingly, promotion cannot be granted solely on the basis that an officer is nearing retirement age or has acted in a higher position for a prolonged period. Besides, all letters appointing officers to act in a higher capacity clearly specify that the acting appointment does not give the incumbent any claim to permanent appointment in the higher capacity.

Nevertheless, where an officer has been assigned the duties of a higher office and, for any reason, he cannot be promoted to the higher office by the appropriate Service Commission, and he retires or is subsequently reverted to his substantive office, his pension benefits are computed on the basis of the annual pensionable emoluments attached to the higher office, subject to the following criteria –

- (a) he has performed the duties of the higher office for a continuous period of at least 2 years or an aggregate period of at least 2 years within a period of 3 years;
- (b) he has not been reverted to his substantive office on ground of inefficiency or misconduct or at his own request, and
- (c) at the time of retirement or reversion, he has performed the duties of the higher office and reached the age of 55.

As regards part (b), I wish to inform the House that, any review of the modalities for promotion of Public Officers in the Public Service rests with the appropriate Service Commissions in line with their Constitutional prerogatives.

CERTIFICATE OF CHARACTER ACT 2026 – IMPLEMENTATION – TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

(No. A/39) Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to the transitional arrangements following the coming into force of the Certificate of Character Act 2026, he will state the situation of the persons –

- (a) who recently collected their Certificates of Character under the previous legal framework;
- (b) whose Certificates of Character have already been prepared and are awaiting collection, and
- (c) whose applications therefor are currently being processed.

Reply: Let me inform the House that the Certificate of Character Bill 2026 has not yet obtained the assent of the President and is therefore not yet in force. The question as to transitional arrangements does not arise at this stage.

Be that as it may, Clause 13(1) of the Bill provides that ‘any certificate of character issued under the repealed enactment and which is valid on the commencement of this Act shall be deemed to have been issued under this Act’ and at Clause 13(2) of the Bill, it is provided that ‘any application for a certificate of character made under the repealed enactment (Certificate of Character Act...) and which is pending on the commencement of this Act shall be dealt in accordance with this Act’.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS TRIBUNAL – SPECIALISTS/SENIOR SPECIALISTS – 24/7 SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION – LEGAL ADVICE

(No. A/40) Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Attorney General whether, in regard to the recent award of the Employment Relations Tribunal concerning the implementation of the 24/7 specialised services for Specialists/Senior Specialists in the fields of Gynaecology, Anaesthesia and Paediatrics, he will state –

- (a) whether legal advice has been tendered to the Ministry of Health and Wellness in respect of compliance therewith, and
- (b) the legal measures being envisaged to ensure fair, lawful and sustainable working conditions for the Specialists/Senior Specialists concerned, whilst safeguarding patient care and public health services.

Reply: Lawyer-client privilege protects confidential communications between a lawyer and his client that relate to the seeking of legal advice or services. This protection extends to any information exchanged during these privileged communications encompassing written

correspondence and other forms of communication. The privilege belongs to the client, meaning that they have the authority to waive or invoke it.

In this PQ, I, as the principal legal adviser to the Government, have been asked to disclose whether the client (Ministry of Health) has sought legal advice from my office, and what is the tenor of that advice. As I have stated earlier, the authority to waive this privilege lies with the client (Ministry of Health), and I cannot disclose any confidential information relating to any request for advice or advice itself.