



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 25 APRIL 2023

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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| Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth | Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity |
| Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo | Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism |
| Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK | Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology |
| Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo | Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management |
| Hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK | Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade |
| Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy | Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development |
| Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK | Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity |
| Hon. Soomilduth Bholah | Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs |

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| | and Cooperatives |
| Hon. Kavydass Ramano | Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change |
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| Hon. Darsanand Balgobin | Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation |
| Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn | Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection |
| Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal | Minister of Health and Wellness |
| Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo | Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping |

Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah

Minister of Gender Equality and Family
Welfare

Hon. Avinash Teeluck

Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage

Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal

Minister of Public Service, Administrative
and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Mr Speaker | Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK |
| Deputy Speaker | Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally |
| Deputy Chairperson of Committees | Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy |
| Clerk of the National Assembly | Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena |
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 05 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 25 April 2023

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**PARLIAMENT OVERSEAS MISSION - PRACTICE & MECHANISM**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, in the spirit of transparency, I am proposing to make an announcement, not today, but at a later stage with regard to Parliament overseas mission, its practice and mechanism. Thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications
Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):
 - (i) The Caudan Bridges, Port Louis (Authorised Construction) (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2023); and
 - (ii) The Education (Amendment) Bill (No. VI of 2023).
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority for the year ended 30 June 2021.

B. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Independent Police Complaints Commission for the year ended 30 June 2022.

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development+

The Public Procurement (Amendment) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 47 of 2023)

D. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 48 of 2023)

E. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

The Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Women's Council for the year ended 30 June 2019.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**ICAC - CORRUPTION OFFENCES – 2019 TO 2022**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Independent Commission against Corruption, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of convictions secured in relation to corruption offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act for calendar years 2019 to 2022, and
- (b) state whether the contract of Mr N. B. as Director General has been renewed and, if so, indicate –
 - (i) for what period, and
 - (ii) the salary and other benefits drawn.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, let me point out right at the outset that the main object of the Independent Commission Against Corruption is not to secure a conviction at all costs. A conviction is the ultimate outcome of a prosecution process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an elementary principle of the prosecution process is that any decision to prosecute a criminal offence must be grounded in due process and the rule of law. The decision to prosecute is motivated firstly by assessing whether there is enough evidence to justify prosecuting a person for an offence known to the law, and secondly, whether it is in the public interest to prosecute the person.

It is apposite to note that a prosecution for an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act cannot, under section 82(1) of that Act, be instituted except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions. This is in line with a fundamental tenet of our Constitution whereby the ultimate prerogative to institute criminal prosecutions in this country rests with the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is therefore not appropriate to attempt to measure the performance of the ICAC over a given period purportedly by the number of convictions it obtained when it does

not have the ultimate control over whether a criminal process will invariably result in a conviction.

It follows that it is unreasonable to measure the performance of the ICAC based on convictions when a conviction itself is the outcome of a court process initiated by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and any conviction during the reference period of 2019 to 2022 could well have arisen out of a criminal process started before that time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, under Section 20 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, the first five functions of the ICAC are as follows, and I quote –

- “a. educate the public against corruption;
- b. enlist and foster public support in combating corruption;
- c. receive and consider any allegation that a corruption offence has been committed;
- d. detect or investigate any act of corruption, and
- e. investigate the conduct of any public official which, in its opinion, is connected with or conducive to corruption.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, clearly the functions of the ICAC are thus not to secure a conviction at all costs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding this, the disaggregated data obtained from the ICAC for the period 2019 to 2022 is as follows –

- (a) 51 persons were convicted of corruption and money laundering cases;

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. My question relates to corruption and not to money laundering. I would require the Prime Minister to provide the numbers for corruption, as quite clearly stated in the question.

The Prime Minister: Yes. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been provided with these statistics as they are.

Mr X. L. Duval: That is not the question! The question is not money laundering.

The Prime Minister: If I can get the statistics, I shall provide them to you.

Mr Speaker: You continue with your answer!

The Prime Minister: So –

- (b) 177 cases are awaiting trial, and (read 117 instead of 177 as per statement of 09.05.23)
- (c) 41 cases are awaiting advice from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I can further inform the House that for the period 2015 to 2023 –

- (a) 5593 cases were investigated;
- (b) 4492 cases were completed;
- (c) in 601 cases, investigations are ongoing;
- (d) 424 persons were arrested;
- (e) 614 cases were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions;
- (f) 183 cases were lodged;
- (g) 127 cases were successfully prosecuted, and
- (h) 155 persons were convicted.

I am further informed that attachment orders in the sum of Rs2,274,125,877 were effected for the same period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated earlier, the ICAC is mandated not only to perform investigative functions but also to educate the public against corruption, examine the practices and procedures in public bodies to detect corruption-prone areas, advise and assist such bodies in taking anti-corruption measures. In this context, I am informed that the ICAC has since 2015 to date undertaken numerous initiatives including the following –

- (i) conducting focused, sustained and tailor-made empowerment programmes for public officials of all grades including new recruits;
- (ii) development of anti-corruption tools – the ICAC has developed the following main documents to assist public bodies –
 - a. guidelines on gifts and gratifications for public officials;

- b. resource guide for Attorneys;
 - c. code of conduct for councilors;
 - d. code of conduct on procurement;
 - e. best practice guide – management of contract works for public bodies, and
 - f. guidelines on exercise of discretionary powers.
- (iii) strengthening anti-corruption infrastructure in public bodies by conducting corruption risk assessments exercises in numerous public bodies, and
- (iv) conduct of Corruption Prevention Reviews and issue of Corruption Prevention Guidance to public bodies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question concerning the renewal of the contract of the Director General of the ICAC, I would like to refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to my reply to PQ B/998 at our Sitting on 09 November 2021 wherein I informed the House that the contract of employment of the Director General of the ICAC had been renewed on 29 June 2021 for a period of five years with effect from 01 July 2021.

With regard to the salary and other benefits drawn by the Director General of ICAC, I indicated that the Prevention of Corruption Act already provides for a Parliamentary Committee to monitor the operations of the ICAC. The Prevention of Corruption Act also provides for the Members of the Opposition to form part of the Parliamentary Committee and according to Section 61(2)(c) of the Act, the Parliamentary Committee may require the Director General of the ICAC or any officer to furnish any accounting or other records relating directly or indirectly to all financial transactions of the Commission and to answer any question in relation to such financial transactions. Therefore, the Members on the other side of the House have the possibility of obtaining information on the operation of the ICAC through the Parliamentary Committee, to the extent that is allowed by the law.

Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will deal directly with the salary of the Director General. Now, we all know that according to law, it is the Prime Minister, himself, who sets the salary and terms and conditions of the appointment of the Director General and also the Board, etc. This is why this

question is addressed by the Leader of the Opposition to the Prime Minister because the Parliamentary Committee will not call the Prime Minister to answer. So, it is his duty today to reply to the nation as to the decision he took as to the terms and conditions of the Director General, which is his own decision.

And also, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will remind the Prime Minister that when this question was raised at the Parliamentary Committee, the then Director General - all my colleagues are nodding - refused to answer the question. So, in the Parliamentary Committee, they refused to answer the question and this is your own decision and you refuse to give the information. I would like to ask you to confirm whether the salary is not Rs650,000 per month, three times more than the salary of a Judge?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied. The law, PoCA, already provides for a Parliamentary Committee and the Act itself, in fact, defines the role of the Parliamentary Committee, its functions and what it is allowed to do and what it is not allowed to do. So, these matters are best referred to the Parliamentary Committee.

Now, let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that this law dates back from the days of the Labour/PMSD Government, and we all know what kind of reply we had in this very House. I do not want to remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition of the replies made to questions which were asked by Members of the Opposition when he himself was in Government.

Mr X. L. Duval: I learn in the Constitution and the rules of this House where a Minister is answerable to this House for any decision falling under his responsibility and this, under the law, falls squarely under the responsibility of the Prime Minister and he has not denied the figure that I have given.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Committee of Supply, this is what the Prime Minister promised to the House - and that was in 2021 - from a question from hon. Bhagwan –

“What about the monthly salary of the Director?”

And the Prime Minister says, this same Prime Minister –

“The monthly salary? I shall get information”.

I can table this, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, from 2021 we are still waiting for the Prime Minister to get the information.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to the first part of the question, I have the information concerning the number of convictions. I can understand why whoever does not want to give this information, because in the last four years ICAC has only secured – and listen to this, Mr Speaker, Sir, – 13 convictions for corruption. Leave money laundering; that is a relatively easy thing to prove, for corruption, only 13. And out of that, one guy was supposed to have taken Rs3,000 and a set of screwdrivers; another person, Rs500; another person, Rs13,000; another...

Mr Speaker: Put your question! Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Be patient!

Mr Speaker: You have to be patient! Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... another person, Rs6,000. So, what I am saying is that out of these 13 cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, most of these are for petty corruption ...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... and not a single case for major corruption. I am asking the Prime Minister, whether he is aware of this. Obviously, he is saying he is not aware of this.

The Prime Minister: Let me come to the first part which was not a question but a statement, and I shall reply to the first part of your statement.

You said that you are quoting from a Committee of Supply. Let me refresh your memory, hon. Leader of the Opposition and refer you to a question put at the sitting of 11 December 2007.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: You were in Government. Were you not?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, I was.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Listen!

(Interruptions)

What aw?

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: When I reply, you exclaim *aw*?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Did I make any noise when you were putting your question? I did not. So, do not exclaim *aw*! Listen! The question was put by hon. Bodha who was then in the Opposition to the hon. Prime Minister, as follows, and I quote –

“...whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Commission Against Corruption, information as to the number of cases reported thereto since July 2007 to date.”

Listen to that, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member is asking about the number of cases reported since July 2007 to date. What was the answer? The Acting Prime Minister replied as follows, and I quote –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that section 81 of the Prevention of Corruption Act imposes restrictions on the disclosure of information by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Moreover, sections 59 and 61 of the Prevention of Corruption Act subject the ICAC to the supervision of the Parliamentary Committee.

It is the Parliamentary Committee which is vested with the power to make reports to the National Assembly on, *inter alia*, the manner in which the Independent Commission Against Corruption is discharging its functions and exercising its powers.

The information requested by the hon. Member will surely be made available in the Annual Report of the Independent Commission Against Corruption.”

Hon. Bodha was not satisfied. He asked a supplementary question, as follows, and I quote –

“...whether the Prime Minister does not consider that the nation at large should know, at least, the number of cases which are being inquired by the ICAC?”

The Acting Prime Minister replied as follows, and I quote –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, superficially, I would say that the request seems to be reasonable. But, on seeking advice, I have been told that if I answer this first question, it will open the door to other questions.”

(Interruptions)

No, I have not finished! I have not finished!

(Interruptions)

I have to reply!

(Interruptions)

Wait! You asked a question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: *To pe pran mo letan!*

The Prime Minister: You want to control my reply now?

An hon. Member: Be patient! Be patient!

The Prime Minister: Your memory is very short-lived, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 08 November 2011, hon. Ganoo then asked a question to the Prime Minister whether, in regard to the inquiries carried out by...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, he is just wasting time!

Mr Ramano: *Ekoute do!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Be patient!

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have to reply! The hon. Leader of the Opposition...

Mr Speaker: Continue with the reply!

The Prime Minister: ... made certain allegations against me and I have to reply. Let me remind him when he was in Government, what kind of replies the Labour-PMSD Government was making to this House, to questions like the following, and I quote –

“... whether in regard to the inquiries carried out by the ICAC, since...”

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. I never asked any question with regard to inquiries, merely convictions and the Prime Minister has provided the figure for

corruption but mixed it up with money laundering. I have never asked any question on inquiries, you are beside the point. Convictions!

The Prime Minister: But, if you listen to what I am saying, you will see that I am relevant!

Mr X. L. Duval: Give the information!

The Prime Minister: I am going to, but you do not want to listen!

Mr Speaker: Be patient, hon. Leader of the Opposition! Be patient!

The Prime Minister: I do not know if you have read the following...

Mr X. L. Duval: We are both patient.

The Prime Minister: So this is the following which I am quoting -

“Whether, in regard to the inquiries carried out by ICAC, since its setting-up to-date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to the number of cases wherein ...”

Okay, I will skip the first part, that is, part (a) which is not relevant. But part (b), and I quote –

“conviction has been secured.”

Conviction! You can hear that word, “conviction”!

What is the reply? Let me quote it –

“As the House is aware, pursuant to section 36 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 2002 as subsequently amended, the annual reports on the activities of the ICAC are laid down before the National Assembly.

The information requested in the Parliamentary Questions is already available in these annual reports.”

Now, let me come to the second part of your question. You have been saying that I am trying to mix cases of money laundering with corruption cases. Yes, one thing that I agree with you, Section 5 of the Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act states the offence of limitation of payment in cash which I just quote so that Members will understand –

“... any person who makes or accepts any payment in cash in excess of 500,000 rupees or an equivalent amount in foreign currency, or such amount as may be prescribed, shall commit an offence.”

And the Leader of the Opposition has just said that this is an offence which probably does not require too much of resources and time to be investigated into, and that eventually, if the suspect is liable, he will be convicted. So, let me give some figures. For the period 2006-2014 - we are mentioning a period of nine years – the number of persons convicted is 154. And out of the 154 persons convicted, 60 have been convicted under section 5 of FIAMLA as compared to the period 2015 to 2023, during which 155 were convicted out of which 22 under FIAMLA.

If you want to compare, you can see for the nine years, if you take 154 minus 60 and 155 minus 22 for the six and a half years. I think that is also very significant contrary to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question relates to one Mr N.B. who took over on 01 July 2016. Do not try to mix it with 2006 and all that. That is the first thing. The second thing is if you look at the website of the ICAC and I remind the Prime Minister that the ICAC stands for Independent Commission Against Corruption and that is the main role of ICAC. You will see that there are only 13 cases amongst which there are cases for Rs500. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to ask the Prime Minister if he has taken note of the *dégringolade* of Mauritius in all the International Indices. Transparency International, we have lost 15 places since 2012. He just talked about the previous Government and under the previous Government, we were ranked 43 in terms of a better rank. Now, 57! Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what the Mo Ibrahim Index said about Mauritius in the 2022 report –

“Mauritius obtains its lowest ever score since 2012”.

When the Index started.

These, Mr Speaker, Sir, indicate clearly with the conviction rates that I have given that there is a major problem at ICAC. And I will come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to my question, whether it is not time now, given this dismal track record which we all agree, whether the Prime Minister agrees or not, to scrap ICAC, to dissolve ICAC in favour of a totally new organisation?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I fail to understand the reasoning of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He is quoting from certain reports, which I must anyway check. I am quoting figures which he, himself, has asked me to provide to this House. When I am providing figures, he is now saying we should not provide figures for the past. Let me repeat again, for the period 2006 to 2014, 84 persons have been convicted for corruption and for the period 2015 to 2023, 133 persons. Again, we are not comparing the same length of period; that is nine years as compared to six and a half years.

But, again, let me say, if we only look at figures, they do not necessarily give a true picture of the situation because investigating into suspicion of corruption is a lengthy process. We have seen this in so many cases where you need to ascertain witnesses' identity, to try to get statements from all parties who are involved and concerned, and to get Judge's Order. In many cases, in fact, you need to start with MLAs because you need to get information and evidence from abroad, and this also takes time. I do not want to restrict a debate only to a figure for one period as compared to the other, although the Leader of the Opposition seems to be restricting it in that way. There are many other factors that have to be taken into consideration before we can ascertain the efficiency of one organisation or the other.

I have also said in my reply that not everything depends on ICAC. The ICAC, after an investigation, at the closure of a case, will send the file to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. And there, it will be considered whether there is need for further enquiry, further evidence to be gathered or whether the file is complete in order to be able to proceed with the prosecution against anybody. The matter is then referred before a court of law. We do know that before a court of law, a case takes time because counsels appear and cases are postponed for one reason or the other. We must take all these into consideration.

Concerning the last part of the question of the Leader of the Opposition, I have said in this House and elsewhere also that there is in preparation the Financial Crime Commission Bill. I know it is being worked right now by the Attorney General's Office. Of course, I am also involved with other Members of Government and eventually, when the Bill is ready, it will be tabled in the House.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, just one last thing. In 2016, there were 35 cases of conviction, but since that time and up to now, the last four years, I have given the figures –

- 2022 - 3 cases;
- 2021- 4 cases;
- 2020 - 2 cases.

Dismal figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, and, of course, no major case!

There is a strong feeling, Mr Speaker, Sir, among the population and I will put it to the Prime Minister, that at the ICAC, it is *deux poids, deux mesures*. For the Opposition Members, of course, there is full force of the law, and for friends of Government, it is absolutely the contrary! That is the feeling of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker: No! I will stop you there, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet! Do not make any insinuation! This is an independent body, whether you like it or not. It has been created by law. You are in Parliament, you are the Leader of the Opposition, and you have to respect institutions!

Mr X. L. Duval: What I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the indices and surveys that we have all show that the population has absolutely no trust in the ICAC and the feeling is that it has *deux poids, deux mesures*.

Mr Speaker: No, again!

Mr X. L. Duval: So, I will ask the Prime Minister...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...whether the solution is...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet!

Mr X. L. Duval: What is it?

Mr Speaker: You do not have the right to say these things: '*Deux poids, deux mesures*. You do not have the right to say these things!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not have the right? Is the situation like this because the law gives power to Government via the Prime Minister himself, not only to appoint the Director General, to set his salary, to appoint the Board of Directors and set the terms, but also, to be involved, Mr

Speaker, Sir, in the appointment of the various sections' heads! The answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not only to get rid of Mr N. B. because he is totally ineffectual, but also, that the law should be changed, a new law comes into effect which gives no power at all to any politician and this power be given to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission as with the appointment of the Electoral Commissioner. Is that question okay for you, Mr Speaker, Sir? Good!

Mr Speaker: You judge yourself.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not true to say that *il y a deux poids, deux mesures*.

Mr Speaker: Judge yourself! You are quite intelligent to know what can be said in the House and what cannot be said.

Intelligence is not the monopoly of the Chair!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Prime Minister, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: Why is everyone laughing, Mr Speaker, Sir? Why is everybody laughing at you?

Mr Speaker: Maybe at you! At you! Maybe at you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Ask yourself!

Mr Speaker: Maybe you are failing somewhere in your duty as Leader of Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Ask yourself!

Mr Speaker: Maybe! Take care of that! Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: First of all, it is not correct to say that there are *deux poids, deux mesures*. Let me rapidly come to the question that has been asked. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, *je n'arrive pas à comprendre le raisonnement de l'honorable membre*.

Il vient de dire que I appoint the Director. But if we go back to history, what has happened? When the Prevention of Corruption Act was legislated in 2002, it provided the Independent Commission Against Corruption with an Appointments Committee, and I quote –

“The Appointments Committee

(1) (...) for the purpose of this Act, (...) shall be composed of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

In the exercise of its functions, the Appointments Committee may –call (...)”

I do not want to go through that. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition is very well aware of this in 2002. Then, what happened? In 2005, Labour-PMSD came to power. What did they do? The first thing, in 2005 itself, they amended the Prevention of Corruption Act, Section 19, Establishment of Commission, as follows, and I quote –

“(4) The Director-General shall be appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and shall be a person (...)”

This is what you did! Now you are telling me why is it that I appoint the Director-General? This is provided by the law and the law has remained as it is. Yes, it has not been amended in that respect.

An hon. Member: *Bizin sanz li!*

The Prime Minister: If you want to make a proposal, you make a proposal that we should amend this. We shall see.

Mr X. L. Duval: My first proposal is that it is the Judicial and Legal Service Commission that takes over all of your functions concerning the ICAC or whatever new organisation there will be. Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the ICAC no longer bothers itself with petty criminal offences of Rs500, a set of screwdrivers, etc. ICAC has, since its creation, cost Rs3 billion and Rs1.1 billion since the last five years. It is not its role to worry about Rs500.

Mr Speaker: Time is already over!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have started a question. You know, like mastermind, you start and you finish the question?

Mr Speaker: Time is already over!

Please, I am giving you the chance of putting your question and so far you haven’t put any question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Be patient!

Mr Speaker: This is my point!

Mr X. L. Duval: Be patient!

Mr Speaker: Put the question now!

Mr X. L. Duval: Be patient!

So, whether in the law that is coming to scrap ICAC, I hope, we will put petty corruption back to the CID of Rs500, Rs1,000 and even up to Rs500,000 and leave the new organisation to deal with real, harmful, nationally important corruption cases.

The Prime Minister: M. le président, l'honorable Leader de l'opposition de 2005 à 2014 n'a pas pensé qu'il fallait faire une proposition pour amender la loi concernant la nomination du directeur général. Pendant tout ce temps, c'était correcte, c'était bien, la loi comme c'était, qu'ils ont eux-mêmes amendée, d'une manière je dirais très transparente, ayant avant un comité avec le président, le Leader de l'opposition et le Premier ministre pour que ce soit dorénavant le Premier ministre qui nomme le directeur général. Donc, pendant tout ce temps, c'était correct, c'était bien. Et en plus, pendant tout ce temps alors qu'à l'époque, eux lorsqu'il y avait des questions au Parlement, voilà les réponses que j'ai citées pour que tout le monde puisse comprendre exactement quel genre de réponse on avait. Moi j'ai quand même donné certaines informations concernant les chiffres mais, M. le président, on peut vraiment comparer la manière de faire de ce gouvernement et la manière de faire de l'ancien gouvernement à l'époque.

Alors le Financial Crime Commission, je peux dire que le projet de loi est en préparation et l'objectif c'est, as a body corporate, the Financial Crime Commission shall be the agency responsible to combat financial crime in Mauritius and abroad. And the Bill will replace the Prevention of Corruption Act and will bring under one structure the different agencies involved in the fight against financial crimes, including corruption offences and money laundering offences, to ensure more effectiveness in the system and better coordination in the fight against financial crimes.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/318 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

Hon. Bodha!

PRISONERS - DRUG TRAFFICKERS

(No. B/296) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the prisoners, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to the number thereof found guilty as drug traffickers and serving sentences of over ten years.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is fully aware that my Government has been dealing with the drug scourge on various fronts. In fact, we have made several amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act, *inter alia*, for better control of dangerous drugs and for the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking.

In fact, in the light of the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, in addition to the Chemistry and Biology Units, a fully serviced and dedicated Drugs Unit was established at the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in September 2021. The Drugs Unit is endowed with a state-of-the-art equipment which is consistent with my Government's strategy to invest in the right tools that enable the FSL to contribute substantially and significantly to the unrelentless fight of my Government against drug trafficking.

The new sampling procedures provided under the Dangerous Drugs Act, as subsequently amended, will enable to fast track forensic analysis of drugs seized.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 41(4) of the Dangerous Drugs Act stipulates and I quote, that –

“(...) a person shall be deemed to be a drug trafficker where the street value of the drugs, the subject matter of the offence, exceeds one million rupees or such other value as may be prescribed.”

Section 41(3) of the Act provides that where it is proven that, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, the person was a drug trafficker, he/she shall be sentenced to a fine not exceeding 2 million rupees together with penal servitude for a term not exceeding 60 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when a person is arrested for drug trafficking, he/she is remanded to police cell and a provisional charge is lodged against him/her. Exhibits are sent to the FSL. The accused appears in court every seven days. After 21 days of detention, he/she is remanded to jail if Police objects to his/her release. Upon completion of the enquiry, the case file is forwarded to

the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice. The time taken by Police to complete enquiries into drug trafficking cases depends on the following factors –

1. Examination of exhibits at FSL;
2. Response to mutual legal assistance by foreign countries in cases where there are international ramifications;
3. Response to Judge's Order by Service Providers/Financial institutions to provide itemized bills, bank statements and other information required for the purpose of investigation;
4. Parallel financial investigations with other investigative authorities are carried out into such cases for establishing cases of money laundering, hence it is time consuming;
5. Statements that have to be recorded from many witnesses and during the course of investigation, the accused parties may incriminate other suspects by providing only nicknames which need to be ascertained and very often they are at large, and
6. Lawyers assisting suspects are at times not readily available for Police investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that to date, 63 prisoners including 28 foreign nationals have been convicted for drug trafficking and are serving sentence of over 10 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since 2015 to 2022, there have been 199 cases reported for drug trafficking. In this context –

1. 401 persons have been arrested;
2. 27 persons have been sentenced;
3. 139 persons are awaiting trial, and
4. enquiry is ongoing in respect of 236 persons.

Furthermore, since January to 22 April 2023, 10 cases of drug trafficking have been reported involving 12 persons. Police enquiry is ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the resources invested by the Police Department in terms of enforcement to curb the problem of drug trafficking as well as better collaboration with national, regional and

international authorities have reinforced the network which has had a positive impact on the amount of drug seizures since 2015. Indeed, the street value of drugs that have been seized for the period January 2015 to date is worth more than Rs14 billion. As I have highlighted time and again, there is an upward trend in the number of drug seizures due to the determination of my Government to combat the drug scourge and the inexorable tracking of drug traffickers by law enforcement agencies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, alongside the idea of a caring Government for victims, we will continue to be ruthless towards drug traffickers. The following measures are being taken by Police in its zero-tolerance approach for the enforcement of the Dangerous Drugs Act –

1. Regular targeted intelligence-based crack down operations are being carried out around the island, particularly in affected areas;
2. optimum use of Safe City Cameras is being made to keep surveillance and track the movements of drug traffickers and drug pedlars;
3. a risk-based approach has been adopted to prevent the entry of dangerous drugs in the country by beefing up security at the airport and port;
4. the movements of pleasure craft are being closely monitored by the National Coast Guard and the Mauritius Tourism Authority and the Mauritius Ports Authority to prevent drug traffickers from using such means to bring illegal drugs in Mauritius;
5. a Striking Team has been set up at the Police Headquarters for prompt response and intervention to public requests concerning illegal drugs transactions;
6. tailor-made training, sophisticated equipment and incentives are being provided to the personnel of Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit Officers to improve their operational capabilities in the fight against dangerous drugs;
7. the Road Traffic Act has been amended and has made provision to prevent drivers/riders from driving under the influence of intoxicating substances;
8. financial parallel investigations are being carried out into drug dealing/trafficking cases in order to prosecute dealers/traffickers for money laundering and to this end, the Police are working in close collaboration with other agencies for these people to forfeit the proceeds of such crime and unexplained wealth;

9. ADSU has established informal contacts with friendly countries for sharing of intelligence on drug traffickers;
10. sea surveillance/patrols are being carried out in the EEZ;
11. Mauritius is a member of the SADC/SARPCO/AFRIPOL and Police Officers are benefiting from training organised at regional level;
12. two Police Officers from National Coast Guard are acting as Liaison Officer at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Seychelles and Madagascar for sharing of intelligence on Maritime Piracy and drug trafficking;
13. the UNODC provides facilities in terms of training and equipment for enhancing the capacity building of Police Officers particularly ADSU personnel to effectively combat drugs;
14. the NCG carries out maritime surveillance using No. 1 Squadron PVS ships and various craft located around the island. In addition, coastal areas and lagoons are also monitored by afloat patrols and beach patrols by NCG area personnel. Continuous surveillance is carried out by Coastal Surveillance Radar Stations around the island;
15. the Maritime Air Squadron carries out aerial surveillance of the maritime areas. Information from aerial surveillance is passed to the National Coast Guard operations room, which investigates illicit activities at sea by deploying suitable NCG ships and crafts, and
16. the NCG conducts intelligence-based operations using the Maritime Intelligence Cell. The Maritime Intelligence Cell in close collaboration with other agencies, is generating actionable inputs for ships and crafts to carry out interception at sea.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the Mauritius Revenue Authority and its Customs Department have put in place a Drug Interdiction Programme with a series of measures to prevent the smuggling of illicit drugs including synthetic drugs at the various points of entry. These measures include the following –

- (i) use of two Fast Interceptor Boats, two Rigid Hull Interceptor Boats and one Patrol boat for patrols along the coast and outside the harbour;

- (ii) a Vessel Tracking System for gathering of information regarding vessels real-time positioning, better targeting and scheduling of appropriate actions essential for enforcement;
- (iii) acquisition and use of hi-tech equipment for the scanning of parcels, containers, luggage and even people who are carrying suspicious luggage, and
- (iv) deployment of 18 sniffer dogs of the MRA K-9 Unit for detection of illicit drugs at the Port, Airport, Parcel Post, Courier Services, and Container Terminal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to sensitisation campaigns by the Police and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology conducts extensive prevention programmes at the educational institutions through the Get Connected Programme. To enhance the drug prevention programme, a community-based approach has also been initiated through the implementation of the Youth Empowerment Programme against Drugs since February 2021 by the Ministry of Health and Wellness in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, the Police, the National Drug Secretariat (NDS) and the NGO partners targeting different regions of the country. The NDS has also launched the Community Welfare Taskforce in order to enlist the participation of community leaders and the civil society organisations in addressing the drug problem in their respective regions. The NDS also partners with the Citizen Support Unit in the live radio programme “*Ansam kont la drog*” on MBC Kool FM.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Office, in collaboration with the Indian Ocean Commission, is organising a Conference on Substance Abuse for Countries of the Western Indian Ocean Region from 26 to 28 April 2023 in order to come up with a common strategy covering intelligence sharing, supply reduction, harm reduction as well as demand reduction to address the drug problem in the region.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have an important point of order. The Prime Minister has been misinformed; has misinformed the House I presume as to the number of cases of convictions he suggested since 2015. He said it was 155 minus 22 under Money Laundering, Section 5 of FIAMLA. But money laundering is not only Section 5 of FIAMLA, it is also Sections 3, 4 and 5.

Mr Speaker: So

Mr X. L. Duval: No, that information is important, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: No, excuse me, this is important also! I am on my feet!

Mr X. L. Duval: You are!

Mr Speaker: You have to listen to me!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Is it a point of order or are you explaining something?

Mr X. L. Duval: It is not a point of explanation; it is a point of order. The Prime Minister has given information and - I am being very kind - has been misinformed. So, it is now up to him, at some later stage, I will wait for him

Mr Speaker: This is not a point of order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...to come with the actual information.

Mr Speaker: This is not a point of order!

Mr X. L. Duval: The Prime Minister has a responsibility to give accurate information to the House!

Mr Speaker: Don't mislead the House! This is not a point of order! Excuse me.

Mr X. L. Duval: What is it then?

Mr Speaker: Prime Minister, did you finish with your....

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have finished.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

(Interruptions)

There is no point of order!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Al koze deor!*

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have three supplementary questions and I will focus on the prisons. In view of the fact there is an Intelligence Squad within prisons, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, he is aware that the drug barons within the prisons are corrupting officials and guards to introduce weapons, smart phones and drugs within the prisons?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is, of course, a protocol for the prison officers in delivering in accordance with their responsibility and their duty, and there are regular checks that are made. I am aware that especially those who have been convicted, the so-called dangerous drug barons are under specific surveillance. And if the hon. Member has a case – he is making a general statement to say that these drug barons have this and that - yes, if they have, if he can provide me with specific information, we shall, of course, relay it to the concerned authorities for them to look into the concerned cases.

Mr Bodha: I have done my homework, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he is aware that the prisons have become the control tower of drug trafficking, involving the drug barons he mentioned, serving a sentence with gangs operating inside and outside and the latest has been last week; delivery of heroine by drones at the prison of Beau Bassin. So, I am asking the Prime Minister whether he is aware of these things happening within the prisons.

The Prime Minister: M. le président, effectivement je suis au courant qu'il y a eu tentative de livrer certains produits par des drones et d'ailleurs, dans deux cas - *if my memory serves me right* - les drones ont été interceptés et les drones ainsi que les produits ont été saisis.

If you have other specific cases, you can indeed let me know about them. But I have mentioned, I can have the information about the drones and I know they have been intercepted.

Mr Bodha: My last question is about the seizure of assets of these drug barons. Since they have been there for a number of years, may I ask what has happened after the seizure of their assets and whether they have been the forfeiture of those assets?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a specific question. I hope the hon. Member will understand that he has put a question with regard to prisoners and those who are serving sentences over 10 years. Now, with regard to their assets, definitely, I shall find out. I do not have the information with me right now, but the hon. Member must come with a specific

question with regard to seizure of assets and what has been the outcome of those seizures and what has happened to those assets. I shall certainly get the information and provide it to the House.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to foreign prisoners who have been convicted for drug trafficking, can the hon. Prime Minister state the provision in place for transfer of such detainees to their countries of origin?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with Section 3 of the Transfer of Prisoners Act of 2001, a transfer of foreign convicted prisoners may be effected in the following ways –

- (i) between Mauritius and 54 other countries which are party to the Strasbourg Convention on transfer of sentenced persons by virtue of the Transfer of Prisoners Convention Regulations 2005;
- (ii) between Mauritius and 22 other Commonwealth countries by virtue of the Transfer of Prisoners Commonwealth Countries Regulations 2002, and
- (iii) by way of bilateral agreements with other countries and subsequent regulations that are made pursuant to Section 3 of the Transfer of Prisoners Act.

As at date, Mauritius has bilateral transfer agreements with the following countries –

- (i) the Republic of Guinea;
- (ii) the Republic of Madagascar;
- (iii) the Republic of India;
- (iv) the Republic of Mozambique;
- (v) the Republic of Seychelles, and
- (vi) the Republic of Uganda.

On 25 June 2021, following Government's approval, the relevant regulations were promulgated with effect from 01 August 2021 to provide for a foreign detainee to be eligible for transfer to his country of origin after having served one third of his sentence in Mauritius instead of two thirds previously. This is the information that I can provide to the House.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can we get to the next question?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer, you asked for the floor.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister gave a very detailed reply as to the steps and actions taken by his Government to protect our sea borders from illegal drug trafficking. He will surely know that rogue skippers form a major link in that illegal business. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will ask the relevant authorities to have an intense scrutiny on those skippers who are given a licence to venture outside the 12 nautical miles and subject also to an asset declaration, so that they can be earmarked as those having an illegal business? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: With regard to skippers, I take note of the observation of the hon. Member. It is a fact that we have had quite a number of cases where people have tried to introduce illicit drugs in the island through that route, that is, by sea, especially using those small fast boats. In fact, we have a case now where one boat has been seized by the authorities in Reunion Island. I think two or three Mauritians have been arrested. I am not saying more than that, I am just saying as a fact that this has happened.

I take note of the proposal of the hon. Member about scrutinising those who have had their licences. It is, of course, according to law what they can do, where they can move and how they can operate. We will definitely be more vigilant. We are already, but we will do more in order to ensure that no one for that matter – not only those people – goes against the law.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/297, B/303, B/306, and B/307 have been withdrawn. Next question!

WAKASHIO OIL SPILL – INQUIRY

(No. B/297) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Wakashio Oil Spill in Pointe d’Esny in 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

MR A. N. A. – TRAVEL TO MAURITIUS – VIP LOUNGE ACCESS

(No. B/298) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to one Mr A. N., alias N. I. M., he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Passport and Immigration Office, information as to the number of times he came to Mauritius, and
- (b) state if VIP Lounge Access facilities were extended thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of Immigration that Mr. A. N., alias N. I. M., is not borne on the records of the Passport and Immigration Office. It is therefore assumed that the hon. Member is, in fact, referring to one, Mr. A.N.A., a national of Côte D'Ivoire aged 23. According to the Director General of Immigration, Mr. A.N.A. has travelled to Mauritius on two occasions in 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to records at the Passport and Immigration Office, Mr. A.N.A., came to Mauritius for the first time on Wednesday 16 March 2022 from Turkey and declared being on holiday for a period of 30 days. As he fulfilled all immigration requirements, he was allowed to stay in the country for the period indicated by him. He subsequently left the country on Friday 15 April 2022.

He travelled to Mauritius anew on Sunday 26 June 2022 from Nairobi and declared being on holiday for a period of 30 days. As he satisfied all immigration requirements, he was again allowed to stay in Mauritius for the period indicated by him.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Friday 22 July 2022, Mr. A.N.A. submitted an application for the extension of his stay until Thursday 25 August 2022. As he fulfilled the requirements of regulation 25 (5) of the Passports Regulations 1969, his application was granted.

Following extension of his stay, Mr. A.N.A. travelled to Rodrigues on Sunday 24 July 2022 and returned to Mauritius on Wednesday 27 July 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Director General of Immigration that following subsequent applications for extension, his stay was extended for a second time on

Tuesday 23 August 2022 until Friday 23 September 2022, and for a third time on Tuesday 13 September 2022 until Wednesday 05 October 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Director General of Immigration that Mr. A.N.A. left the country on Wednesday 05 October 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that VIP Lounge Access facilities were not extended to him during any of his visits to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that access to the VIP Lounge is granted to an established category of persons. These persons are required to follow all procedures at the airport, both on arrival and departure, such as check-in, immigration formalities and security checks, as is the case for all other passengers travelling through the normal channel.

Mr Nagalingum: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister who invited Mr A. N. A. and is it true that he paid a visit to the Police Post of Rivière Noire? Can we know the purpose of his visit and if the responsible Police Officer at that Post was transferred after his visit?

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know who has invited Mr A. N. A. and I am not aware whether he has called at the Rivière Noire Police Station.

Mr Nagalingum: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, being given that Mr A. N. A. is very close to Mr F., has he been contacted by the ICAC in the Franklin affairs?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of the relationship of Mr A. N. A. You are saying that he is close to him, can you tell me if he is involved in any offence that he might have committed? When you say you are close to somebody but so many people meet so many other people. Now, I do not know whether he is close first of all. But for me what is important is whether there is a case, and is there an act, is there anything that Mr A. N. A. has done in Mauritius which would justify that an enquiry be conducted? If you can tell me, then I can answer.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/342 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. PQ B/345 and B/374 will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. PQ B/390 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

MP Ameer Meea!

**CENTRAL MARKET, PORT LOUIS – FISH, MEAT & POULTRY SECTION –
UNHYGIENIC CONDITIONS**

(No. B/310) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Fish, Meat and Poultry section of the Central Market of Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to –

- (a) if unhygienic conditions prevail thereat, accounting to a considerable decrease in the number of consumers, indicating the urgent remedial measures that will be taken, and
- (b) where matters stand as to the renovation project thereof, indicating the expected start and completion dates thereof.

The Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the Lower Section of the Central Market which, comprise the Fish, Meat and the Poultry Sections, are cleaned on a daily basis by the manual grade workers posted thereat.

The wastes generated on a daily basis are collected and disposed of into a trailer and carted away accordingly. I am further informed that a team of Health Inspectors is permanently posted at the Central Market.

Frequent inspections are also carried out on a daily basis by the Health Inspectors to ensure that the premises are maintained in a satisfactory state of cleanliness despite the fact that the premises are very old.

Furthermore, the drains found thereat are being washed daily with water and detergents after closure of the market to ensure that same are kept in a clean and hygienic state. Pest control is presently being carried out on a weekly basis by a contractor, namely, Eradicators.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Port Louis that it had sought the clearance of the National Heritage Fund for the upgrading of the

Fish, Meat and Poultry Sections of the Central Market as the latter is listed as a National Monument and is also governed by the National Heritage Fund Act.

Moreover, given that the Central Market is situated in the buffer zone of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Property, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage has enlisted the services of EcoAfrica Environment Consultant Private Ltd for the preparation of an overarching Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) report with regard to developments in the buffer zone. The Consultant has already submitted the HIA and VIA report to the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage and a technical team would be sent soon to UNESCO to discuss the recommendations.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have three supplementary questions. I will ask one by one with your permission.

Mr Speaker: I will allow only two.

Mr Ameer Meea: Why? What?

Mr Speaker: Because of the number of questions on board. Please!

Mr Ameer Meea: I hope it will be applied to everyone in this House.

Mr Speaker: Of course! Definitely!

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of regret that year after year, I have to put a PQ on this matter because of the unhygienic condition of the *Bazaar Central*, *Bazaar Port Louis* as we call it.

The first question that I have asked in relation to this matter dates back to July 2016 and since then, every year I have been asking questions on this matter. I must say that I am a bit surprised by the answer given by the hon. Minister because recently there has been a *reportage*, an article by *Défi Quotidien*, which dates back to 18 April this year, of two pages with photos on it; it is accessible to everyone, whereby I will quote quickly, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: No, you are not going to quote and all.

Mr Ameer Meea: No, I will not quote extensively, just one or two lines.

Mr Speaker: No, no, put your question!

Mr Ameer Meea: It is coming but I have to quote from what has been said publicly in this paper!

Mr Speaker: You told me you have three supplementary questions. I am allowing the first one. Up to now, you have not asked your supplementary question. The Standing Orders provide that the way to put supplementary questions is clarification, elucidation. Put your question directly!

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Standing Orders also provide that I introduce my supplementary question. I have been in this House since 2010...

Mr Speaker: But introduce...

Mr Ameer Meea: ...and I know my Standing Orders!

Mr Speaker: I am not going to discuss with you. I am applying the Standing Orders and you know fully well what the Standing Orders say. Put your question directly!

Mr Ameer Meea: I can introduce the matter of my question. It is in the Standing Orders and I maintain it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that *les inspecteurs sanitaires et les inspecteurs de la municipalité ne font pas leur travail convenablement comme c'est répertorié dans l'article parce que les bouchers de...*

Mr Speaker: No, now, excuse me. Supplementary question means supplementary question. It is not that I am teaching you but you should have been teaching me instead. You should not introduce new subject in your supplementary question.

Mr Ameer Meea: It is not a new subject!

Mr Speaker: Anyway, you put your question directly!

Mr Ameer Meea: Anyway, I do not agree with your interpretation because it is the same subject that I am talking about.

Mr Speaker: But there is only one Chair. This is what you have to agree to.

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, but your interpretation is wrong. There can be only one Chair but ...

Mr Speaker: Whatever! Whatever!

Mr Ameer Meea: ... your interpretation is wrong!

Mr Speaker: But the interpretation of the Chair is the final interpretation!

Mr Ameer Meea: But, it is wrong!

Mr Speaker: You are not going to invent the wheel or invent Parliament!

Mr Ameer Meea: Anyway! Mr Speaker, Sir, my question to the hon. Minister is that the *bazaar central* is in an unhygienic condition - it is in the Press, everybody knows it - so what action does the hon. Minister propose to take because in his answer he stated that the Council is looking for a clearance from the UNESCO? This has been announced since 2018. It has been five years now since this has been announced in the House. So, will the hon. Minister...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr Ameer Meea: ...agree with me that in relation to the...

Mr Speaker: No, put your question!

Mr Ameer Meea: ...renovation...

Mr Speaker: You ask for clarification and elucidation. One question, give him time to answer it. You put the second question; it is like ABCD. Please, answer the question!

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is well aware that the Central Market is 180 years old. I repeat, 180 years old. Obviously, with a building like that, you are going to have a lot of problems. This building with time has been severely affected.

It is situated near the sea. You have a lot of sea water that seep through underground to even reach Royal Road. It has been affected for a long time. The fact that it is listed as a National Heritage and found in the buffer zone of the Aapravasi Ghat, we had to get the permission of the UNESCO before we do anything. This Government has been working on it since April 2018 but we could not just go and do the work. We had to get the 'Okay' from UNESCO.

Now, before getting the green light from UNESCO, we had to do a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA). We contacted a consultant to do that. They are from overseas and it took some time to get them. When we got them in 2020, it was

during the COVID-19 period. The Consultants were from South Africa and they could not come to Mauritius. They would come to Mauritius; it would be a couple of years later. They have one or two local consultants working here; so that is why it took a lot of time.

Finally, the report was ready and we got it only a couple of months ago. Yes, I repeat it – the final report was obtained a couple of months ago from the consultant and we have already sent it to UNESCO. So, you are saying we are not doing anything?

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not only the *Bazaar Central* which is situated in the Aapravasi Ghat section. Recently, there has been the Metro Station, which was extended. This is not found up to *la rue Royal*, it is situated on the sea, *sur la rade de Port Louis*. How come that we have been able to build the Metro and you have not even been able to renovate the *Bazaar Central*?

Dr. Husnoo: Because you don't know...

Mr Ameer Meea: There are so many buildings which...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Husnoo: The hon. Member...

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is not aware where the buffer zone ends. The Metro is situated outside the buffer zone of the Aapravasi Ghat.

Mr Ameer Meea: *5 an to pe dormi!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Al get bazaar la!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: *Mo'nn ale, mo'nn gete!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: *Mo'nn fer visit!*

Mr Speaker: Order, Minister!

Dr. Husnoo: *Pa twa ki pou montre mwa! Mo konn bazaar la plis ki twa. Pa twa ki pou montre mwa !*

Mr Speaker: Vice-Prime Minister and hon. Member!

(Interruptions)

Vice-Prime Minister! I am on my feet!

PQ B/305 has been withdrawn. Next question!

BABY S. - SSRN HOSPITAL – SHELTER PLACEMENT

(No. B/311) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether she will state why Baby S., who is in good health, is still admitted at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital in Pamplemousses and is still awaiting placement in a shelter.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ B/27 during the Sitting of the National Assembly on 28 March of this year, I informed the House that Baby S. was still admitted to the hospital in view of her needs for targeted treatment and medical intervention in order to support her specific health concerns.

I am informed that since her admission to hospital, Baby S. has been benefiting from a one-to-one support on a daily basis from caregivers of the National Children's Council so that we can ensure that the child is not alienated to stimulation from parental figures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has received a detailed report on the medical status of the child as well as advice on her *Prise-en-Charge*. Officers of my Ministry are working to ensure that the discharge of Baby S. takes place smoothly. Once she is discharged from hospital, Baby S. will be temporarily taken care of by a Residential Care Institution that looks after children of that age group and following her discharge, a matching exercise with foster parents will be carried out and, if the matching exercise is a successful one, the child will be placed in foster care. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, je suis en présence d'un rapport officiel du ministère de la Santé.

Mr Speaker: No, you asked for elucidation! You know the meaning of supplementary question. So, put your question, ask for clarification and elucidation from the answer of the Minister. Don't invent !

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, je suis en présence d'un document officiel, un rapport officiel du ministère de la Santé concernant le bébé S...

Mr Speaker: Tender the document!

Ms Anquetil: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Let us check the document first.

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: Okay. Le document n'est pas fabriqué.

Mr Speaker: Good.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Merci beaucoup.

Mr Speaker: Yes, this is the rule! This is the rule. I appreciate that the hon. Member has brought an official document. This applies to all hon. Members. Bring official document! No private document!

Ms Anquetil: I thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Je suis donc en présence d'un rapport officiel du ministère de la Santé datant du 27 mars qui contredit les propos de la ministre et confirme que le bébé S. est en bonne santé et attend un *placement* dans un *shelter*. La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre pour quelle raison ce bébé qui est en bonne et parfaite santé ne peut pas quitter l'hôpital ? Est-ce que son ministère a refusé de reprendre le nourrisson ? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I note with a lot of concern that such a confidential document happens to land in the possession of the Member of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let's listen to the reply.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply, I have never indicated that the baby is not in good health. The baby was born with some serious congenital defects that require specific

and targeted medical attention, which means even when she will be discharged and in the care of whether it is an RCI or a foster care family, will require frequent visits to the hospital to obtain such targeted treatment. Therefore, it is very misleading for ‘Doctor’ Anquetil to say that the baby is in perfect health.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Ms Anquetil: Enfin...

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Minister has no right to impute motives.

Mr Speaker: No, in these circumstances, you are a seasoned politician, raise a point of order. Why don’t you do that?

An hon. Member: Throw him back! Throw him back! Throw him back!

Mr Speaker: No, he just came back. He just came back. I can’t do that! I welcome him.

An hon. Member: *Arvin inn pran to titre inn donne li.*

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, alors que la *Children’s Court* n’a pas été informée que bébé S. n’est plus sous la responsabilité de la *National Children’s Council*, la ministre peut-elle nous expliquer comment des employés d’un autre *shelter*, je fais référence au *Shelter La Cigogne* situé à Floréal, ont veillé sur ce nourrisson à l’hôpital SSR à deux reprises, sachant qu’ils ne sont pas des employés de la *NCC* ? Merci.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I provided...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: ...to the main question whereby I did say that once the baby will be discharged, she will be placed temporarily in a dedicated Residential Care Institution in order for the baby to familiarise herself – because she is actually an infant; with the said caregivers of the institution where she will be temporarily placed. There have been arrangements made under the

guidance of the Ministry of Health and the National Children's Council to have the caregivers of that RCI attend to the baby so that they can have some kind of bonding with a minor. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Doolub!

MAHEBOURG YOUTH CENTRE - REVAMPING

(No. B/312) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the proposed revamping of the Mahebourg Youth Centre, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Member for this question. We are all aware of the important role played by Youth Centres in the social, physical, and psychological development and empowerment of our young people since the construction of the very first Youth Centre as far back as in 1989 in Souillac.

This is why, as soon as I assumed office as Minister in 2017, I decided, as a matter of priority, to visit all the Youth Centres around the island. The objectives of these site visits were as follows –

- (i) to take cognizance of the status of the Ministry's infrastructures and to see how to make optimum use thereof;
- (ii) to take stock of the activities/programmes being proposed to our young citizens and what improvements can be brought thereto, and
- (iii) to meet youth leaders, *Force Vives*, and representatives of youth organisations to listen to their proposals and to seek their collaboration for the benefit of the youth.

The site visits revealed that our Youth Centres have served their purpose for nearly three decades. However, they were no more relevant to the aspirations of our younger generation of today. The number of youths attending the youth centres has considerably decreased. There was, therefore, an urgent need to take action so as to attract our youth to the centres. However, this would require a review of the facilities being offered at Youth Centres and how they operate. Thus, a project for the revamping of Youth Centres was proposed.

Accordingly, an amount of Rs165 m., spanning over three consecutive financial years, was announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022, to transform our existing Youth Centres into

modern Youth Hubs. This clearly denotes the commitment of Government to invest in the empowerment of our youth.

The National Youth Council, a parastatal body operating under the aegis of my Ministry, was entrusted with the responsibility to revamp the Youth Centres. In order to enable the implementation of this project so as to match the needs of our young people, four main areas were identified under the revamping project, namely –

- (i) facilities and infrastructure;
- (ii) programmes and activities being offered;
- (iii) mode and time of operation of the youth hubs, and
- (iv) human resource requirements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to where matters stand with respect to the revamping of the Mahebourg Youth Centre, I am informed by the National Youth Council that renovation works in the building has been completed. Moreover, works are still ongoing in respect to the adjoining of the sports complex. Thank you.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Minister in his reply just mentioned that works are still ongoing in adjoining sports facilities around. Can we have more details about these adjoining sports facilities?

Mr Toussaint: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the Youth Centre of Mahebourg, we have an outdoor sports complex where mini-football, handball, basketball and volleyball also can be played. So, there is actually a contractor working on the revamping of this sports complex which is just beside the Youth Centre of Mahebourg.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we have from the Minister the final completion date of the Mahebourg Youth Hub?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, donc, comme je l'ai dit, nous allons terminer le complexe qui se trouve à l'extérieur. Cependant, il nous reste à acheter les nouveaux meubles pour mettre à la disposition du staff et de toutes les personnes concernées, et donc, cela va nous prendre encore quelques temps. Malheureusement, je ne pourrais donner de date spécifique en ce qu'il s'agit de quand les travaux à Mahebourg seront complétés.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/341, B/345, B/347, B/367, B/378, B/383, B/389 and B/393.

Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one and a half hour.

At 1.03 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.37 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

GRA – HORSE RACING COMMITTEE

(No. B/313) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Personal Management Licence (PML), he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority/Horse Racing Committee, information as to –

- (a) who should hold a PML Licence, indicating the procedure for obtaining same;
- (b) the names of registered PML Licence holders, and
- (c) who are those who are exempted for holding a PML Licence.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question. En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, je suis informé par la *Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA)* et la *Horse Racing Division*, que l'objectif d'une *Personal Management Licence (PML)* est de s'assurer qu'un titulaire de licence de la *GRA* et le personnel du titulaire de licence est une personne apte et appropriée.

Selon la section 93B de la *GRA Act 2007*, nul ne peut agir en tant que directeur, gérant ou responsable d'un titulaire de licence de la *GRA* s'il n'est pas titulaire d'une *Personal Management Licence (PML)*.

Les *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) (Amendment) Regulations 2019* prévoient la liste des personnes nécessitant une *PML* en ce qui concerne l'organisation de courses de chevaux, qui comprend un jockey, un entraîneur, un gérant d'écurie, un propriétaire de chevaux, entre autres.

En outre, les *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) Regulations* ont été modifiées en 2021 pour inclure une liste de dirigeants titulaires de licences, autres que les courses hippiques, nécessitant une *PML*, tels que le *Chief Executive Officer*, le *General Manager*, le directeur de l'audit et du risque, entre autres.

La procédure d'obtention d'une licence *PML* a été définie et prescrite dans les *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) Regulations 2018* qui prévoient que la demande doit être faite sous une forme prescrite et doit être accompagnée d'un certificat de caractère délivré au plus tard 3 mois avant la date de la demande.

La demande doit être adressée à la *GRA* et le formulaire de demande doit être accompagné des documents suivants –

- (i) Une carte d'identité nationale ou un passeport en cours de validité avec photographie visible ;
- (ii) Un acte de naissance ;
- (iii) Un justificatif de domicile datant de moins de trois mois ;
- (iv) Les documents attestant de l'expérience du candidat ;
- (v) Un permis d'occupation ou permis de travail (pour les non-résidents) ;
- (vi) Une référence bancaire d'une institution bancaire reconnue indiquant que le compte a été tenue de manière satisfaisante (la référence bancaire ne doit pas dater de plus de 6 mois), et
- (vii) Une photo d'identité.

En outre, en ce qui concerne la *PML* pour un propriétaire de chevaux, le demandeur doit soumettre les documents supplémentaires suivants –

- (i) Une preuve de la source de financement du cheval ;
- (ii) Une preuve de l'origine des fonds ;
- (iii) La profession ;
- (iv) Le revenu mensuel moyen, et
- (v) La preuve de paiement pour l'acquisition de chevaux.

Au niveau de la *HRD* de la *GRA*, les documents soumis par le demandeur sont examinés minutieusement et un contrôle préalable approfondi ainsi qu'un exercice de *KYC* sont effectués et des autorisations sont demandées aux autorités compétentes, à savoir la police, l'*ICAC* et la *MRA*.

Ensuite, une *PML* est délivrée au demandeur s'il est établi qu'il –

- (i) Ne fait pas l'objet d'une enquête sur un délit de meurtre, d'homicide involontaire, de fraude et de malhonnêteté, de trafic de stupéfiants ou de délit sexuel ;
- (ii) Ne fait pas l'objet d'une procédure judiciaire concernant une infraction de meurtre, d'homicide involontaire, de fraude et de malhonnêteté, de drogue et d'infraction sexuelle ;
- (iii) Ne fait pas l'objet d'une procédure de faillite ;
- (iv) N'a pas été déclaré en faillite, et
- (v) Ne fait pas l'objet d'une procédure, d'une enquête ou d'une procédure en vertu de la législation douanière ou fiscale.

La *PML* est délivrée moyennant le paiement d'une taxe de R 15,000 pour une période de trois ans.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, vu qu'il y a plus de 700 noms, je propose de déposer la liste à la Chambre pour consultation.

M. le président, pour ce qui est de la partie (c) de la question, je suis informé que, conformément aux *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) (Amendment) Regulations 2023*, une personne qui a loué des chevaux (le preneur) auprès d'un centre équestre dûment enregistré et licencié par la *HRD* (le bailleur), est exemptée de *PML*.

M. le président, la *HRD* a soumis cette proposition au conseil d'administration de la *GRA* en avril 2023 pour modifier le *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) Regulations 2018* pour exempter les preneurs de l'exigence d'une *PML* parce que légalement parlant ils ne sont pas propriétaires de chevaux et ne sont pas impliqués dans les procédures d'acquisition, d'importation et de quarantaine et ne participent à aucune de ces transactions connexes.

En outre, le bailleur doit être un licencié de la *HRD* respectant toutes les exigences d'honorabilité et de compétences requises et ainsi détenir une *PML*.

Même si le preneur est exempté de l'exigence d'une *PML*, il est toujours soumis aux exigences de la *Horse Racing Division*, à savoir la soumission des documents suivants –

- (i) un certificat de moralité délivré par le bureau du Directeur des poursuites publiques ;
- (ii) un certificat de bonne réputation délivré par la banque, et
- (iii) une copie du contrat de bail.

Mr R. Duval: Merci, M. le ministre. Si l'introduction du *PML* est d'assurer que ce sont les personnes intègres qui fassent partie des courses, le ministre, peut-il de ce fait nous expliquer pourquoi ceux qui vont *lease* des chevaux chez Global Equestrian Ltd n'ont pas besoin d'avoir un *PML* et quelle garantie peut-il donner à la Chambre que cet argent ne provienne pas du commerce illégal ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, pour ce qu'il s'agit de cette question supplémentaire, je ne suis pas en possession d'informations que cette compagnie possède une *PML*. Donc, ceux qui sont en train d'acquérir les chevaux, vont devoir faire une demande pour pouvoir utiliser ces chevaux.

Mr R. Duval: Et en sa capacité de ministre des Finances, peut-il nous dire quelle structure a-t-il ou compte-t-il mettre en place pour s'assurer que l'argent sale n'envahisse pas les écuries ?

Dr. Padayachy: C'est la structure qu'on est en train de mettre. Toutes ces exigences qu'on est en train de faire concernant les *regulations* pour la *GRA*, c'est pour enlever les risques liés aux problèmes d'*AML-CFT*. Nous avons fait toutes ces procédures suites à l'inclusion de Maurice sur la liste de *FATF*, la liste grise et suite à cela, nous avons procédé à de nombreux amendements dans nos règles, dans notre cadre juridique pour éviter les risques liés à l'*AML-CFT*.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

CWA – WATER PIPES BURSTING - MEASURES

(No. B/314) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the water pipes, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the measures being undertaken to reduce the bursting thereof and the time taken for the carrying out of remedial measures in case thereof.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that potable water is supplied to the population through a water distribution network comprising pipelines of a total length of 5,300 kms.

The existing network of pipelines consists of polyethylene, ductile iron, asbestos cement, cast iron, galvanised iron, steel and PVC pipes.

I am further informed that the pipelines in several regions are very old and obsolete and are subject to frequent pipe bursts. Out of the 5,300 kms of pipelines, the CWA has identified approximately 1,500 kms of pipes, which are between 60 to 80 years old with a high level of encrustation and which present deficiencies in terms of losses, bursts and carrying capacity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset, it has to be outlined that maintenance of the pipe network is an ongoing and regular activity of any water utility body. To this end, the CWA has in place several intervention teams at the level of each water supply zone equipped with appropriate tools and equipment to effect repairs as required on the network.

In addition, staff has been recruited on a roster basis in the grades of General Worker, Operatives, Heavy Vehicle Driver and Assistant Inspector in order to work after normal working hours. The services of Flying Squad Officers have also been enlisted to attend to problems in the water supply zones beyond normal hours of work. I am informed that the CWA is envisaging to acquire new equipment and strengthen its intervention team so as to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations on the field.

It must, however, be reckoned, Mr Speaker, Sir, that some parts of the network which are relatively more aged and older would be more prone to burst; as such necessitating more frequent interventions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am moreover informed that in view of reducing frequent bursts in the network, the Non-Revenue Team of the Central Water Authority undertakes pressure management exercises whereby pressure loggers are being installed at strategic locations to monitor the pressure within the water network. Where required, Pressure Reducing Valves are

installed to reduce upstream pressure to permissible limits. In other cases of drop in pressure, active leak detection exercises are carried out in areas to identify the leaks with the help of electronic leak detection equipment. Once the location for potential leaks is identified, repair works are undertaken to restore the water supply as well as the pressure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that intervention time following a complaint relating to “broken pipe” is classified based on its severity. Thus, the response time to repair a broken main pipe is one day. However, after intervention, the water supply may be restored to normal after 1 to 2 days, depending on the scale of the water distribution network and topography of the regions affected. Every effort is made by the CWA to attend to repairs as promptly as possible. While repairs are carried out, Mr Speaker, Sir, water tankers are deployed to supply the inhabitants of the affected regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to routine maintenance and fault interventions, CWA also undertakes regularly the improvement of its water network through the upgrading and replacement of defective and old pipelines. As I have already informed the House in previous replies, replacement of old and defective pipes is an ongoing programme. Pipe replacement works are normally carried out by the CWA under its capital projects and its Framework Agreement for minor works. Other such pipe replacement works are also undertaken by the Wastewater Management Authority under its sewerage projects, by the National Development Unit under road infrastructure projects or by the Metro Express Ltd.

I am informed that the CWA has identified some 500 km of pipes in the six water supply zones which need to be replaced as a matter of priority based on age of pipe, history of pipe bursts, leakages and detection through leak detection equipment.

In its endeavour to fast track the replacement of these 500 km pipelines, the CWA has prepared a pipe replacement programme for calendar years 2023 and 2024. This is expected to considerably improve the efficiency of the network and reduce leakages in the future.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister laid much emphasis on the bursting due to the age of the pipe. However, there are some damages caused by some Contractors who work on the roads employed by authorities other than the CWA. And I

understand that those Contractors have got the obligation to repair the damages that they cause. So, can the hon. Minister inform the House if the CWA has got some mechanism to identify those damages and eventually track the repairs? Thank you.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that whenever there are works being carried out by private contractors, we face these problems but, like I said in my reply, necessary actions are taken immediately as the CWA is made aware of any leakages in any place around the island.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, because like I have stated in my reply, there are works which – that is, pipe replacement works – are undertaken either by the Wastewater Management Authority or the NDU or the Metro Express by private contractors, there are arrangements between those entities so that whenever leakages are reported, this is brought to the attention of the CWA so that they can attend to those leakages.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

WATER DISTRIBUTION – QUALITY & SAFETY – CHLORINE DOSAGE

(No. B/315) Mrs K. Foo Kune Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to water distributed island-wide, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to how the quality and safety thereof is ensured, and
- (b) state the risks to public health of wrongly calibrated chlorine dosage thereof, if any.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that in regard to water distribution across the island, surface water from impounding reservoirs, is treated through treatment plants, the main treatment processes being coagulation, filtration, sedimentation and disinfection to render the water both chemically and microbiologically safe. Underground water abstracted through boreholes is treated through a chlorination process.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that it operates and manages a laboratory, accredited to ISO 17025 standard. The main function of the laboratory is to monitor the quality and safety of water supplied across the island by the Authority and to ensure compliance with the World Health Organisation guidelines and to

Drinking Water Standards under the Environment Protection Act 1991. Microbiological and Physico-Chemical tests are thus, carried out on a routine basis, as per an established Sampling and Monitoring Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Central Water Authority that there are 150 sampling points islandwide for the monitoring of water quality and safety and the frequency is at least once monthly. Additional monitoring and follow up are effected in case of any non-compliance or complaint received from consumers.

Furthermore, the raw water sources such as boreholes and reservoirs used for domestic supply are monitored in order to establish trends in water quality and detect pollution, if any. Tests for pesticides and heavy metals are outsourced to independent laboratories on an *ad hoc* basis or for suspected pollution.

In addition to the above, the Central Water Authority advises the public to regularly clean their water tanks at least twice yearly. The Ministry of Health and Wellness, being the enforcing agency under the Environment Protection Act, also monitors the quality of drinking water in the Central Water Authority networks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Central Water Authority has informed that as per the latest water quality tests performed by the ISO Certified CWA Laboratory during the month of March 2023, the microbiological and physico-chemical parameters are compliant with approved drinking water standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that as per the World Health Organisation guidelines, a residual chlorine dosage in the range of 0.3-0.5 mg/l is required to maintain the microbiological safety of the filtered water. Wrongly calibrated chlorine dosage may result in the absence of residual chlorine and which may in turn give rise to the presence of pathogenic bacteria.

The Chlorine Installation Units at the level of the CWA are equipped with up to standard equipment such as vacuum regulators to ensure that the chlorine dosage is well maintained at all times. A dedicated team of chlorine technicians intervene during and after office hours in case there is an anomaly detected in the dosage of chlorine.

Furthermore, there is a coordination mechanism amongst the various departments of the CWA which are involved in the treatment and supply of water to ensure that safe water is provided to the population.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: D'après l'*Environmental Performance Index* de 2022 du Yale University, dans la catégorie *Quality of Drinking Water* qui mesure la capacité d'un pays à protéger la santé de sa population contre la mauvaise qualité de l'eau potable, Maurice a un score de seulement 63,6. À titre de comparaison, le score des Royaumes Unis est de 100. Je dépose une copie de cet *Environmental Performance Index*. Je demande à l'honorable ministre, s'il est courant que l'index de la qualité de l'eau potable de Maurice est aussi bas, pouvant nuire et avoir un impact dangereux sur la santé de la population, et comment compte-t-il y remédier ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I am not aware of the ranking of Mauritius in that Index, first of all, but what I can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the water which is being given to our population is as per norms established in the Environment Protection Act (1991). I have also stated that on a very regular basis the quality of water is tested not only by the CWA, but also by other entities to ensure that the water which is distributed to the population is of good quality.

Mr Speaker: The paper you have circulated cannot be understood. It is a supplementary question; just avoid referring to that paper. Put your next supplementary.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: But the paper is available online and it is a public paper.

Mr Speaker: Yes, it is a public paper.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: From Yale University.

Mr Speaker: I know it is a public paper, but the point is that when you stand in Parliament to put a question, your question should be understood and the paper you have put on the Table should be understood. Take care of that. Continue!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Maybe we need better quality printers then. *Je demande au ministre si durant la dernière année, il y a eu des pénuries de chlore gazeux, si oui, quand et si durant les pénuries...*

Mr Speaker: No, this is a question which is not... I do not know if the Minister has this kind of answer.

Mr Lesjongard: No, no, Mr Speaker, Sir, I...

Mr Speaker: You should stick...

Mr Lesjongard: I wish I could reply, but I do not have the information.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let me! You should stick to your main question. You have two supplementary for clarification.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: But there is chlorine in my question, about the chlorine dosage, it is in my question. It is (b).

(Interruptions)

In my question, I am talking about chlorine.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Yes!

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Yes! So, I am asking *si durant les pénuries, la CWA a recours au chlore en forme solide, si oui, comment est assuré que le dosage de celui-ci est adéquatement fait ?*

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I said was, I wished I could reply to this supplementary question, but what the hon. Member has asked is irrelevant to the main question that she has put. Unfortunately, I cannot reply.

Mr Speaker: Your turn is finished! Next question!

(Interruptions)

Order!

FISHERMEN –FISH PRESERVATION

(No. B/316) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the registered fishermen, he will state the measures his Ministry are taking to offer ice for the preservation of fresh fishes thereto.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, preservation of fresh fish is an important aspect of good hygiene and usage of ice, which is one of the various methods used, is one of the safest cooling methods. Not only does ice keep fish moist and suitable for transport, it allows fishermen to retain the freshness of their catch during their long day at sea.

Ice has been used to ensure that quality fish products enter the local market as preserved fish and extends shelf life by lowering the temperature of fish. Thus, if the temperature is decreased, the fish retains its freshness for a longer time. Currently, my Ministry has put in place the following measures to ensure preservation of fresh fish –

- (a) A general course for fishers. In fact, this course is dispensed by the Fisheries Trading and Extension Centre (Fitech) and one of the modules is Fish Handling, Preservation and Marketing. Since 2019 to date, Fitech has trained 427 fishers and 123 fishmongers for the period 2021 and 2022. This general course is ongoing, and
- (b) distribution of ice boxes to ensure that fresh fish products reach our local markets, my Ministry has already provided 1,755 ice boxes to the registered fishermen.
- (c) Provision for ice making machines. With regard to supplies of ice flakes, my Ministry, in collaboration with the United Nation Development Programme, has embarked on a project entitled ‘Supporting the Economic Empowerment of the Artisanal Fishing Community of the Republic of Mauritius Project,’ basically known as the EcoFish Project, with the aim to empowering the artisanal fishers.

One component is the procurement and installation of four containerised solar powered ice-making machines for Mauritius and one for Rodrigues. The objective of installing the ice making machines is to provide ice flakes to the fishermen community for the conservation of their catch during and after their fishing activities. This year, the ice making plants will be placed

at Case Noyale, Mahebourg, Trou d'Eau Douce and Grand Gaube Fisheries Posts and one in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ice making plants will be an ongoing project until all our fisheries posts are equipped with ice making machines to enable all our fishers to benefit from this facility.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has a similar project with FAO Reefish Project, under which two ice making machines will be installed in Trou aux Biches and Poste de Flacq, and one again in Rodrigues. The procurement exercise for these ice making machines have been completed, my Ministry is working on the logistics required for the setting up of these ice making machines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by using ice, the quality of fish is maintained as fresh as possible. The primary objective is to prevent spoilage, and therefore, ensure food security. Clearly, the better quality of fish that reaches the final market, the better the price is achieved for our fisher community, which means better quality, more money for our fishers.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Being given the importance of ice in the value chain, will the Minister give an indication as to how this vital equipment is put to the disposal and good use of the fishermen?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this project aims at better management of fish quality and it is intended to provide ice to fishers during their fishing expeditions, landing and processing operations as well as their sale operation, and also for transporting fish from fish landing stations to other markets. Thus, of course, it will ensure the importance of ice in the value chain to keep the freshness of the catch.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

BAIN-DES-ROSNAY – FISHERS COMMUNITY – PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

(No. B/317) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the fishers at Bain-des-Rosnay, he will state if he has received representations

therefrom in relation to a property development project thereat that may hinder the fishing activities and, if so, indicate the action he has taken or proposes to take in relation thereto.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has on 14 April 2023, last week, received a representation from the Fishers Community of Bain-des-Rosnay, indicating the poor working conditions and lack of appropriate structure for the registered fishers operating thereat. We have not received any representation with regard to a property development project that may hinder the fishing activities thereat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the GN No. 18 of 1983, there are 61 areas around the island which have been prescribed as fish landing stations. Out of the 61 fish landing stations, there are 16 with jetty facilities, 14 with fish sheds and the remaining are open fish landing stations. All these fish landing stations have mooring facilities.

An open fish landing station means a designated landing zone with mooring facilities where fishermen are allowed to land their fish and operate from the shoreline.

Bain-des-Rosnay is one among those which was not provided with a jetty and a fish shed. However, in Bain-des-Rosnay, there is an existing old jetty which was previously used by sand extractors. Since the abolition of sand extraction in 2001, this landing jetty is being used by the fishermen community. With time, there has been a deterioration of the old jetty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, my Ministry cannot carry out immediate repairs as the jetty is not vested with my Ministry. Anyway, my Ministry will consult the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to look into the possibility of vesting this jetty in my Ministry so that we can proceed with the repairs pending a major refurbishment and installation of facilities being envisaged.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Economic Development Board (EDB) that, on 13 April 2018, a private company was issued with a Property Development Scheme Certificate for the development of apartments, penthouses and amenities on freehold land of an extent of 17 acres at Saint Antoine under the Property Development Scheme (PDS) and which is adjacent to the jetty which is being used as an embarkation and disembarkation point by fishers of Bain-des-Rosnay.

The private company has submitted a development proposal to the EDB to carry out the following works –

- a. refurbishment works for the existing jetty;
- b. installation of a floating jetty to ease boat to berth and wind-protection, and
- c. construction of a new ramp for boat launching at sea.

I am further informed that a first meeting was convened by the EDB on 03 March 2023 at Bain-des-Rosnay site to discuss the above-mentioned proposals. Same was attended by officers of my Ministry and other stakeholders, including representatives of the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, the District Council, the promoter and fishermen from the locality. Further consultative meetings with regard to this project have been schedule with all stakeholders, including the fishermen community of Bain-des-Rosnay.

Once the project plan is finalised, my Ministry will initiate the necessary procedures to have the required extent of land to be vested under my Ministry for this project.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am made to understand that as per conditions of the project, the fishermen of that region and the public shall have access to the site at all times during the implementation of the project.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. Dans leurs correspondances adressées au ministre, les demandes des pêcheurs sont simples. D’abord –

- (i) pouvoir avoir accès à la plage publique ;
- (ii) que la plage soit décrétée plage publique ;

D’ailleurs j’ai adressé une question au ministre du Tourisme et qui paraît sur la liste des questions d’aujourd’hui.

- (iii) réaménagement et réhabilitation de la *landing station* qui tombe sous le ministère de l’Économie bleue.

Et ces demandes datent depuis 2017, soit 6 ans de cela. Le ministre peut-il informer la Chambre pourquoi il y a tant de temps qui est passé et que rien n’a été fait jusqu’à maintenant ?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I just explained with regard to the project being implemented by the private sector, in fact, we had informal information that there is a proposal by the promoter for upgrading the facilities for the fishermen. So, it is only now, at Phase 4 of the project, that the issue with regard to upgrading the facilities for the fishermen, meetings are being held by the EDB. Of course, consultations also with the fishermen and other stakeholders, and they are working on the project. Once everybody agrees to the proposals, then, obviously, it will come to us for the implementation.

Mrs Navarre-Marie : Est-ce que le ministre peut donner la garantie à la Chambre que les *facilities* qui seront accordés aux pêcheurs comprennent également le réaménagement et la réhabilitation de la *landing station* ? Et si oui, combien de temps cela va prendre ?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, as I explained, the Bain-des-Rosnay was an open fish landing station, which means that there was no jetty. The jetty was used by sand extractors. Of course, the fishermen used it after the abolition of sand extraction as I have explained. We have received the request and being given that there is a request to upgrade the place for the fishermen and for the public also, we are working on that, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let the EDB and all stakeholders finalise the project. Then we will entail with the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning which is in that Committee and then of course, once the land is vested to my Ministry, we can start the project.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/342, B/348, B/358, B/360, B/362, B/372, B/374, B/382, B/385, and B/386 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

Mr Juman: B/319

Mr Speaker: Which one?

Dr. Husnoo: PQ B/318 has been referred to the Prime Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I be allowed to clarify?

Mr Speaker: MP Boolell, I already made an announcement this morning. Your question has been transferred to...

Dr. Boolell: This question has been transferred.

Mr Speaker: I already made the announcement. Maybe you were not here. Let me apologise in your place.

(Interruptions)

Please! Who is the next one? Next question!

**ABERCROMBIE MARKET FAIR BUILDING – MULTI SPORTS COMPLEX
AND MUSIC SCHOOL PROJECT**

(No. B/319) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the implementation of the Multi Sports Complex and Music School Project at the Abercrombie Market Fair Building, he will state where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) date on which the –
 - (i) tender was launched, and
 - (ii) contract was awarded, and
- (b) expected completion date thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it had retained the services of a consultant to provide its services for the project Multisport Complex and Music School at the first-floor level of the existing Abercrombie Market Fair Building, Port Louis. Bids for same were invited on 22 October 2018 through Open National Bidding. The closing date for the submission of proposals was on 10 December 2018.

After the selection exercise, a joint venture, namely, JV- Pixel-Luxconsult was selected for the provision of the Consultancy Services. The contract was signed between the Council and JV Pixel Team on 04 July 2019.

The Consultant prepared and submitted the bidding documents for the project, which was then forwarded to the Central Procurement Board (CPB) for vetting and launching of bids. After vetting of the bidding documents by the CPB, the bids for the construction works were launched on 10 December 2020 through Open National Bidding and the closing date for the submission of

bids was on 08 February 2021. Evaluation was carried out at the CPB and the successful bidder was AWL Trading & Contracting Co Ltd. The contract was signed on 13 July 2021 for an amount of Rs68,747,955 (excluding VAT). The site was handed over on 04 August 2021. Subsequently, the contractor mobilized on site and works started. Site meetings were held fortnightly.

During a site meeting of 08 December 2021, a Health Inspector of the Council who is in charge of the Abercrombie Market Fair informed that debris had fallen onto the market area and dust were settling on food and other items of market vendors. A site visit was carried out on the 09 December 2021 to assess the severity of the comments of the Health Inspector in the presence of the Consultant, the Contractor and the employer and instruction was given to the Contractor, by the Project Manager to provide safety measures for works being carried out at the parking side.

On the 09 December 2021, the Project Manager sent a letter to AWL Trading & Contracting Ltd issuing a stop order for specific parts of the building under construction. On the same day, AWL Trading & Contracting Ltd replied to the Project Manager on remedial actions and reservations in connection with a Stop Order for concerned parts. Several letters were exchanged between the Consultant and the Contractor.

On the 22 December 2021, the Municipal Council of Port Louis sought legal advice from its Legal Adviser on the disputes and on 29 December 2021, the latter advised as follows –

“Council is therefore advised to inform the Consultant that pursuant to the information received from CIDB to the effect that at all material times, JV-Pixel team does not hold a temporary registration certificate for the present project, you have wilfully, knowingly and unlawfully acted both in breach of clause 1.8 of the ITC as well as in breach of Section 19 of the CIDB Act which renders the present contract void *ab initio*. You are hereby informed that the post of Consultant of JV-Pixel Team is therefore rescinded with immediate effect.”

As the Consultant was not agreeable to the erection of a roof metal structure and had refused to certify payment claims, the Council had sought legal advice from its Legal Adviser on 20 September 2022 and the latter had on 27 October 2022, advised as follows –

- (a) Contemplate whether to act according to advice dated on the 01 June 2022 already submitted by Mr Wong, of Counsel, as regards the way forward with the contract of the Consultant;
- (b) Alternatively, have the Council's engineering team hold an informal conciliation meeting with the engineers and the technical team of both the Contractor and the Consultant respectively and reach a solution as how to finalise in a cost effective and practical way to complete the project in a safe and time effective manner, and
- (c) To weigh the costs of termination the Contractor's contract as opposed to that of the Consultant's and find a technical way forward which is less costly, namely, to have the project completed safely and supervised by its own engineering team as suggested by the MNICD.

Based on the legal advice obtained, the Council had in a letter dated, 13 December 2022, informed the Consultant, JV-Pixel Team that its contract with the Municipal Council is being treated as null and void.

Following disputes between the Consultant and the Contractor on the soundness of the roof metal structure erected by the Contractor, Government decided to appoint a technical team from the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development (MNICD) to assess the soundness of the metal roof structure. The report of the technical team approved the erection of the metal roof structure with some reinforcement measures.

Following several meetings held with the Contractor to resolve the issues, the Stop Order was waived on 12 December 2022 in order to ensure that the site is in safe and secured conditions. The Contractor has, on the 27 February 2023, informed the Council that although the Stop Order was waived, the latter is not in a position to resume works with regard to the structural roof due to several pending issues, such as, determination of a revised completion date, associated costs and revision of the contract price due to consolidation works, as recommended by the technical team of the MNICD, that has to be implemented on the ground floor.

Once the design of the consolidation works has been finalised, the Municipal Council requested a quotation from the Contractor for the implementation of the consolidation works on the 28 March 2023.

A meeting was also held on 12 April 2023, where the Legal Advisers of the Council, the Contractor and the Officers of the Technical Team of the MNICD were present to sort out the pending issues and other bottlenecks. However, an agreement could not be reached on the outstanding matters and the Contractor stated that in such a case, it would be better to mutually terminate the contract.

The Council has, in its Executive Council held on the 19 April 2023, decided to seek legal advice on whether it would be in the interest of the Council to mutually terminate the Contract with the Contractor AWL Trading & Contracting Ltd and the way forward to successfully complete the project. A reply is still being awaited.

Mr Juman: Ça fait 10 mois que le chantier est à l'arrêt, M. le ministre. Valeur du contrat – R 78. 2 millions incluant de la VAT, supposé être terminé août 2022.

Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, can you please inform the House whether, as of now, the Municipal Council of Port Louis is in the presence of several claims from the Contractor –

- (a) Rs35.07 m. for idle time;
- (b) Rs51.75 m. for reinforcement of the base, and
- (c) Rs20.7 m. for extended time, which bring to Rs185 m?

Dr. Husnoo: I have just mentioned. I have explained, there are a lot of disputes going on and the Contractor has decided to stop working. We will have to wait and see how things developed because the Council has contacted their Legal Advisor to decide on the way forward.

Mr Juman: Hon. Minister, in a meeting held on 20 December 2022, *au siège du ministre des Infrastructures Publiques*, Mr A. B. Furzun, Lead Engineer, stated that a survey had been carried out in the existing building on the ground floor and based on the visual inspection made, there was a high possibility that reinforcements would have to be considered in the existing building so that it can sustain the loads of the first floor.

M. le vice-Premier ministre, est-ce-que les maraichers et les personnes qui visitent régulièrement la foire Abercrombie courent le risque de voir le bâtiment s'effondrer ?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is what the issue is about because ...

Mr Juman: I can table a copy of ...

Mr Speaker: Keep it! Keep it!

Dr. Husnoo: I have just mentioned there has been a lot of a dispute between the contractor, the consultant and the council. I have mentioned that in my reply. I have also mentioned that the consultant has stopped working on the site and has been replaced by engineers from MNI who have said that reinforcement work has to be done at the ground floor level. Following that, the contractor has stopped working and he has sent this claim which you have just mentioned.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PAMPLEMOUSSES & TRIOLET – DRAINS CONSTRUCTION & REHABILITATION

(No. B/320) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction and rehabilitation of drains in Constituency No. 5, Pamplemousses and Triolet, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority since July 2022 to date, information as to the –

- (a) date of award of the contract;
- (b) name of the contractor, and
- (c) total project value thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that for the region of Pamplemousses and Triolet, Constituency No. 5, the LDA has earmarked a total amount of Rs1.9 billion for the construction and rehabilitation of some 111 drains under the National Flood Management Programme over a period of three financial years. The projects are being implemented by the NDU, the RDA and the District Council of Pamplemousses.

I am informed by the District Council of Pamplemousses that they have awarded a contract to the tune of Rs16,697,000 in April 2022 to Best Care Ltd for the construction of absorption drains in the regions of Terre Rouge, Baie du Tombeau, Pamplemousses, Calebasses, D'Épinay, Trou aux Biches and Triolet, works which were completed in July 2022.

I am further informed there are eight ongoing projects, out of which five are being implemented by the NDU and three by the RDA for a total amount of Rs513 m. The projects being implemented by the NDU are as follows –

- (a) Flood Mitigation measures at Belle Source, Pamplémousses awarded to Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd for an amount of Rs69 m.;
- (b) Construction of attenuation basin and enlargement of road at Camp La Cloche, Pointe aux Piments awarded to Sotravic Ltd. for an amount of Rs114 m.;
- (c) Road widening, and drain works at Jouvance D'Épinay awarded to Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd for an amount of Rs51 m.;
- (d) Construction of drains and resurfacing of part of Route du Jardin, Pamplémousses awarded to Best Construct Ltd for an amount of Rs28 m., and
- (e) Construction of drains and resurfacing of Kalimaye Lane, Calebasses Branch Road, Arsenal awarded to Square Deal Multipurpose Cooperative Society for an amount of Rs35 m.

As regards the RDA, the following projects are ongoing, namely –

- (a) Construction of Froppier Bridge, Canton Nancy, awarded to Gamma Civic Ltd for an amount of Rs33.4 m. This is a very important project in this Constituency, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is about increasing the hydraulic capacity of that bridge to be able to mitigate the flooding problem in that region. Here, I need to thank my hon. friend, Soodesh Callichurn, who has been instrumental in getting this project done, and also the PPS of the region.
- (b) Refurbishment of footpath and drains in the district of Pamplémousses awarded to Safety Construction for an amount of Rs9.9 m., and
- (c) Construction of bridge and footpath at Pont Bruniquel awarded to General Construction for an amount of Rs171 m.

An hon. Member: *Ramful, pa nanye?*

Mr Hurreeram: *Ramful? Inn dir, inn dir!* Thank you.

Mr Speaker: You see, you are in good mood and I am in trouble!

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House if a master plan for Constituency No. 5 is available for implementation of the drain and if so from which year it is available? Following my PQ last year, B/608, I have been informed that Rs2.8 billion have been allocated for the implementation of 115 drains project by the NDU and RDA. Is there any master plan for the Constituency No. 5?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, we have. My hon. friend will agree that we have, as I mentioned, the National Flood Management Programme and under this programme, all the drains that have to be done - we have around 1,700 drains that need to be built around the country - and for Constituency No. 5, we have 111 drains that need to be constructed.

Currently, we are doing those big mitigation measures at Canton Nancy, at Belle Source, and at Camp La Cloche. Obviously, we are observing how they are behaving in several rainfalls. This is a very dynamic situation and we might need more we might need less eventually. But there is a plan after we have done our digital elevation model, now we can see where are the natural drains courses and what has been blocked, what needs to be unblocked. We are working according to this. Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what percentage of drain according to the master plan has been completed and also indicate the average cost of the recent drain per linear metre which is being paid to the contractors?

Mr Hurreeram: No, I think my hon. colleague here is asking for some quite technical information that I do not have with me, but which we can provide. Suffice is to say that - you will agree, I have said that there was 1.9 billion that we should spend for the next three financial years which take us to about 600 million per financial year - as at to date, for what has been completed and what is ongoing, we are at Rs513 m. So, we are almost on target for this financial year.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**NEW SOCIAL LIVING DEVELOPMENT LIMITED – CONSULTANTS
APPOINTED**

(No. B/321) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning,

Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the New Social Living Development Limited, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) names of the consultants appointed thereat since the date of incorporation thereof to date, indicating the;
- (b) purposes for the appointment thereof, and
- (c) quantum of fees –
 - (i) claimed, and
 - (ii) paid thereto.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that the question of the hon. gentleman, as formulated, refers to each and every consultant appointed by the NSLD since its incorporation requesting for each and every consultant –

- (1) the purpose of appointment;
- (2) fees claimed, and
- (3) fees paid.

So, I am informed by the NSLD that, given the very wide scope of the question and the detailed nature of the information sought, compilation of relevant data is a time-consuming exercise. But I can assure the hon. gentleman that once available, the information requested will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Uteem: At Committee Stage, three weeks ago, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister gave an undertaking to provide those information and now he is not providing those information. So, may I at least know for the eight consultants, who had been appointed following the second tender - the first one was cancelled - whether their contracts have been terminated and how much have been paid to them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: During the Committee Stage, the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition related specifically to the PMCCs - I do not have the exact term - I undertook to communicate this information as soon as possible, and I shall do so with the amount - I do not know if the right term is claimed - but the amount provided for under the respective contracts and how much has been paid out.

Mr Uteem: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether the contract of these eight consultants, who have been terminated now, that his Ministry and this New Social Living Development Company have decided to go by way of design and build projects? So, do you still require these consultants and if you do not require these consultants, have their contracts been terminated and how much money is being paid to them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: So, had the question been drafted in that manner, yes, I would have provided the information available. I cannot refer to the precise figure at this stage. I have requested the NSLD to calculate the precise figures and I understand there is a dynamic picture; this is ongoing.

Yes, if the House will bear with me, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe there were indeed eight PMCCs that were contracted initially. One of these PMCCs had its contract terminated well before the decision to opt for Design and Build because the NSLD was not satisfied with the services it offered – I am speaking from memory. As regards the seven others, yes, their contracts have been terminated when it appeared that the only way to go forward with the construction of social housing units would be to opt for the Design and Build approach. So, their precise role was no longer relevant.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, it's okay. Two questions! We are limiting.

(Interruptions)

No! Next question!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *2 kestion kot sorti?*

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Quirin!

**CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 – MORCELLEMENT LES VUES D'ALBION & SPLENDID
VIEW – DRAINS CONSTRUCTION**

(No. B/322) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood-prone areas in Constituency No. 20, Beau-Bassin and Petite Rivière, namely, Phases 1 and 2 at

Morcellement Les Vues d'Albion and Splendid View respectively, in Albion, he will state where matters stand pertaining to the construction of new drains thereat.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that they are carrying out a survey for the whole region of Albion including Morcellement Les Vues d'Albion and Splendid View with a view to implementing measures to prevent and mitigate flooding thereat.

The catchment under study ranges from Gros Cailloux upstream toward the different residential areas in Albion. The initial observations made are as follows –

- (i) flooding issues are mainly due to the overflow of the Magenta irrigation channel during heavy rainfall which flows along existing drainage paths and roads to Morcellement Richwood, Splendid View, Les Vues d'Albion and the adjoining residential areas;
- (ii) the Magenta channel is not adequate to take the surface run-off and overflows during heavy rainfall;
- (iii) the surface run-offs from the upper land of Albion are directed towards the Magenta channel and towards the residential Morcellement at the Splendid View and others, and
- (iv) there is no adequate drainage infrastructure in the Morcellement Les Vues d'Abion, Richwood and Splendid View. The issues pertain to the size of the drains in those Morcellements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Land Drainage Authority is now finalising the alignment of a cut-off drain upstream of the impacted region as a preliminary and urgent measure to protect the downstream residential areas including Morcellement Les Vues d'Albion and Splendid View. Once the alignment is finalised, the NDU will proceed with the appointment of a consultant –

- (i) to study Rivière Belle Eau and the problem of flooding in the region of Gros Cailloux towards Albion, and
- (ii) for the implementation of the cut-off drain.

Consequently, major drain works to prevent and mitigate flooding are expected to start next financial year once the detailed design report is finalised and approved by the Land Drainage Authority. As immediate measures, the Land Drainage Authority has requested the District Council of Black River to proceed with urgent cleaning of drains in the residential areas and the replacement of the slabs, covers of drains with metal gratings so as to increase the absorption capacity of the drains to surface water.

In addition, I have been informed that the Road Development Authority has carried out the construction of a new twin culvert of 14 metres by 1.2 metres along Albion Approach B105 near Morcellement Splendid View. The value of the project was Rs5 m. and the project was completed on 22 April 2021.

The NDU had also carried out the cleaning and desilting of Rivière Belle Eau, Albion in 2019. Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, tout indique qu'une des causes principales d'inondation dans ces régions est le canal Magenta qui déborde en période de grosses pluies. De ce fait, l'honorable Ministre peut-il nous dire en attendant que débutent les travaux de construction de drains adéquats, si la *Land Drainage Authority* compte draguer ce canal pour éviter tout débordement éventuel ?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, my hon. colleague will agree that Magenta canal belongs to several private owners and is being maintained by a syndic. At the level of the LDA we have been issuing enforcement notice to the syndic to make sure that they clean the canal as often as possible so as to prevent any mishap in the future.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, il me semble évident que les drains qui ont été construits dans le passé dans ces morcellements à Albion sont totalement inappropriés vu l'envergure de ces régions. De ce fait l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire quelles sont les conditions que le *Morcellement Board* impose à tous promoteurs par rapport à l'aménagement de drains avant qu'un permis de développement soit octroyé ?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government in 2018, created the LDA and from then, the LDA is now sitting on the *Morcellement Board* and giving its views regarding drainage

facilities around those *morcellements* and making sure that when permits are being issued, there are proper drainage facilities.

Unfortunately, the main issue here is Morcellement Richwood for which a permit was given on 19 February 2014. And as I have clearly stated, at that time, there was no Land Drainage Authority and drainage was not an issue for those giving those permits at that time – *to ban allié mem sa*. So, they have given a permit to a morcellement without proper drainage infrastructure. Today, it is this Government that has to come and remedy and I thank you for your support.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/333, B/334, B/340, B/351, B/352, B/359, B/361, B/369, B/376, B/387, and B/390 have been withdrawn.

Next Question!

NSLD LTD – 12,000 HOUSING UNITS - CONSULTANTS

(No. B/323) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the project for the initial construction of 12,000 housing units, by the New Social Living Development Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if the contracts with the consultants have been terminated and, if so, indicate the terms thereof and the quantum of compensation paid, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my reply to PQ B/321 earlier, as regards the detailed information concerning contracts with consultants, this is being compiled and will be placed in the library.

However, I will try to be helpful. I presume that the hon. Member is referring to a specific category of consultants: the PMCCs (Project Management Consultants in Construction) – I got it right this time – in which case, I am informed by the New Social Living Development Ltd. (NSLD) that contracts were initially awarded to eight PMCCs.

As per the normal practice for major construction projects both in the public sector and private sector, there are tasks entrusted to PMCCs at the feasibility stage, preparing designs as

the hon. gentleman is well aware, designs, tendering and so on, and then for the actual monitoring of construction. This is what I have been informed.

Now, I am asked whether the contracts with the PMCCs – I presume you are referring to PMCCs, not to all consultants – have been terminated. Yes, they have been terminated.

I am also asked to indicate the terms. I presume this means the terms of each and every contract of PMCCs. This will be laid in the Library of the National Assembly as soon as it is available.

I am also asked to indicate the terms; I presume this means the terms of each and every contract of PMCCs. This will be laid in the library of the National Assembly as soon as it is available and I am asked about the quantum of compensation, there has been no compensation as such paid to the PMCCs.

Mr Osman Mahomed: We all know what we are talking about. Eight consultants were recruited but they failed to provide social housing as per requirement of Government and as such, these Consultants had an initial contract of about Rs1 billion but in not being able to provide what the Government wanted them to provide, their contracts have been terminated and public funds have been paid to them and my information is, it is Rs300 m. Can I ask the hon. Minister to confirm to the House that these eight PMCCs or whatever we call them have been paid Rs300 m. and there is the fear that further claims can be expected from them and the measures being taken by the NSLD to mitigate this eventuality?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me provide whatever information I have at this stage. Eight PMCCs, one of these PMCCs as I explained earlier to hon. Uteem, MP, one of them had his contract terminated earlier due to non-satisfaction I believe of the NSLD. As regards the seven others, they performed whatever task was in their contract up until the time when two successive bidding exercises yielded prices that were excessively high. I am not qualified to say whether the blame should attach to the Consultants or to the bidders or to the state of the market.

Dr. Boolell: You are the Minister.

The Deputy Prime Minister: What... I am sorry.

Mr Speaker: No, do not disturb.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Maybe the gentleman has a point of order?

Mr Speaker: Do not disturb.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Please proceed, proceed.

Mr Speaker: Continue, Minister.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Boolell!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would appreciate not being interrupted, Mr Speaker, Sir, just as I did not interrupt hon. Osman Mahomed. So, what I was saying was that we had – and I explained this earlier – two unsuccessful bidding exercises and Government had the choice either to give up and to say as many other Governments across the world and Jessica Arden’s Government is the perfect example, to give up and say ‘COVID has happened, we do not have the funds, we are not going ahead’, and we would have ended up just as the Labour Party did between 2005 and 2014. Right, we chose not to do that; we chose to find ways and means of proceeding and that is why we opted for a different approach which is the design and build approach.

Now, in that perspective, you cannot have Consultants to do the design; that is logical. So, the contracts had to be terminated. Now, the hon. gentleman quoted a figure of Rs1 billion. I do not have that information and I will provide the exact figures as soon as they are available. The gentleman also referred to a figure of, if I heard him right, Rs300 m. that had been paid to all the eight...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To pa pe tande?*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry if the hon. gentleman...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let him answer!

The Deputy Prime Minister: ...is not willing to listen then I can stop here.

(Interruptions)

Right, so, let me say it again. The gentleman suggests that Rs300 m. would have been paid to these eight PMCCs. I do not have that figure; it might be less; it might be more. I do not have the figure. As soon as it becomes available, it will be laid in the National Assembly.

Now, what I want to point out and this is very important and I trust that my hon. colleagues of the other side of the House are all of good faith. So, what I would like to inform the House is that those PMCCs did what they were paid for. So, they did the topographical surveys, the geotechnical investigations, they oversaw the feasibility studies, they sought the preliminary clearances from authorities, preliminary master plans of sites, assessment of extent of offsite works. Now, all that information produced by the PMCCs is being used by the NSLD. All that information is being placed at the disposal of the Contractors so that whatever has been paid to the PMCCs and I understand there is no compensation but there is a prorated assessment of works undertaken. So, that work will be of use, is already of use to the NSLD and to the Contractors within the new approach.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I am quite baffled by the fact that the Minister can now after this...

Mr Speaker: No, but, do not comment. Put questions!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ...compare to the Labour Party's performance. Now, can I ask him a direct question whether this prorated assessment of Rs300 m. in addition to the Rs200 m. that the NSLD has consumed since its existence, totalling half a billion rupees are sunk costs? Can I ask him whether he will be humble enough to tell the House that he and the team at the NSLD have failed?

Mr Speaker: No. I do not know if you are going to answer this.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would like to answer, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would very much like. I am indeed very humble and I always am and which is why I will tell you that social housing is a huge challenge for any Government and there is no guarantee of success, the more so at the time of COVID but this Government is committed and will do all it takes to succeed in the achievement of its ambition.

Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I did refer to the example of the Labour Party because in the whole of the history of Mauritius, this was the worst period in terms of social housing and even without...

(Interruptions)

Mr Osman Mahomed: You are doing the worst!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Please, please, bear with me! Please bear with me.

Mr Speaker: MP Mahomed! Let the Minister reply!

The Deputy Prime Minister: The gentleman was at liberty to speak of failure. So, please let me answer. The number of houses built by the NHDC since this Government took office in November 2018 is already equal to the number of houses built by the Labour Party between 2005 and 2014. So, the facts are there and we can compare. Let me go back to what the hon. gentleman was saying and I do not want to let this pass un rebutted. The hon. gentleman is quoting figures for which he assumes responsibility. I cannot, I do not have these figures pertaining to either the cost, the amount paid, the quantum paid to the eight PMCCs. This will be provided in the National Assembly. I do not have figures pertaining to the operation of the NSLD since it came into existence but whatever these are; I dispute the fact that you called them sunk costs. Whatever costs incurred by the NSLD have been productive and will contribute to the eventual construction of social housing units for the poorer members of the community.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MODERN URBAN TERMINAL, VACOAS – AWARDED CONTRACT

(No. B/324) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the contract awarded to the Joint-Venture Laxmanbhai & Co. (Mauritius) Ltd. and Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. for the Development and Operation of a Modern Urban Terminal at Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) expected start and completion dates thereof, and
- (b) date of approval of the detailed design thereof submitted by the Joint-Venture.

The Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, following a request for proposal exercise which was launched by my Ministry on 29 October 2020, a notification of Contract Award was made to the Joint-Venture Laxmanbhai & Co. (Mauritius) Ltd. and Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. on 15 September 2021.

However, following legal advice obtained, the contract had to be cancelled prior to the submission of the detailed design of the project by the Joint-Venture since the latter has made counterproposal most of which were outside the ambit of the request for proposal and the letter of award.

My Ministry has reworked out the request for proposal document for the project in consultation with the different stakeholders concerned and same has been launched on 06 April 2023. The closing date for the submission of the request for proposal is Wednesday 05 July 2023.

Mr Lobine: May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, as it stands, we had a promoter and now we do not have a promoter for the construction of the Vacoas Urban Terminal, may we know, in the new request for proposal that has been circulated on 06 April 2023, what is different from the previous request for proposal? Because you are inviting private investment and, as per my information, these are the same request for proposal. So, what novel approach have you put forward in this new request for proposal to promote private investment in this Vacoas Urban Terminal?

Dr. Husnoo: As I mentioned at the beginning, Mr Speaker, Sir, the joint-venture made a number of counterproposals, most of which were outside the ambit of the request for proposal. In the latest proposal, we have three different options and it is not like before. At the beginning, we had a set of requirements for the Urban Terminal, but now we have decided to change the request for proposal and to have three different proposals –

- (i) if the promoter can supply or provide all the amenities requested by the Municipal Council;
- (ii) there was a decreased number of options, and

- (iii) we leave it to the promoter to provide the project so long as it caters for the people working in the market, the number of bus-based and taxi drivers.

It was a minimum that we asked. So, they can provide a project which they think is best. We gave them a lot of leeway to provide something which they feel is the better option. As I have mentioned, three options, one is the maximum number of requirements and one is the minimum requirement. It is up to them to make a proposal and we are going to assess them accordingly.

Mr Lobine: May I refer the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to a previous PQ, B/1045, you mentioned that the promoter is expected to start the construction works after signature of the lease agreement for the rental of the land and the finalisation of the detailed design of the project. Now, this is a completely new facet that you are putting because Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. and Laxmanbhai & Co. (Mauritius) Ltd. were on the verge to start construction upon finalisation of the lease agreement. So, now with those new approaches, has this been canvassed with the entrepreneurs and the inhabitants of the township of Vacoas-Phoenix, that there will now be a new form of the Vacoas Urban Terminal that will integrate all the issues that you have mentioned earlier?

Dr. Husnoo: Actually, as I mentioned, it was cancelled because of the counterproposal which was given by the promoter. That is why it was cancelled and because last time we had only one promoter. To give a chance to more promoters so that they can bid for the project, we have changed and put different options. So, according to the options they are going to provide, we are going to assess the project. It is the same one that we are applying for Quatre Bornes as well.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

VACOAS-PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL - LORRIES - SCAVENGING SERVICES

(No. B/325) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of lorries engaged in providing scavenging services, indicating the number thereof –

- (a) on repairs, and
- (b) actually in operation.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that it has a fleet of 18 lorries engaged in scavenging services, out of which, 12 are in running condition, whereas 5 lorries are under repair, 1 lorry has been recommended to be scrapped as it has completed 13 years of its economic lifespan.

Although 6 lorries are not actually in use, some regions, namely Mesnil, Hermitage, Glen Park, Castel, La Caverne, John Kennedy, Hollyrood, and main road of Phoenix and Vacoas Town Centre are being provided with twice-weekly scavenging services. The other regions are being provided with once-weekly scavenging services.

Moreover, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has invited bids for procurement of scavenging lorries and a minimum of 2 lorries will be provided to the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix upon successful award of the contract. The Central Procurement Board has approved the award of the contract on 18 April 2023 and my Ministry is in the process of notifying the successful and unsuccessful bidders.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, la semaine dernière il y avait 7 camions qui étaient en réparation. Donc, 7 camions sur 18, quand même cela impacte directement sur la qualité du service de voirie et les régions comme Solferino, Phoenix ou Carreau Laliane sont pénalisées. Je sais, M. le vice-Premier ministre, que la réparation prend du temps et elle est entreprise par la municipalité. Est-ce que ce n'est pas mieux pour la municipalité de *outsource* la réparation de ces camions comme cela se fait pour la voiture du maire dont le *servicing* est *outsource* à l'extérieure. Donc, pour ne pas prendre du temps et ne pas pénaliser la ville de Vacoas-Phoenix, qui est extrêmement sale parce que les déchets sont sur la rue, de *outsource* ce travail de réparations de camions.

Dr. Husnoo: I would like to mention that the inhabitants of Vacoas-Phoenix are not being penalised. In a lot of places, we have twice-weekly services. Most of the places, it is once-weekly services and we did not get any complaint. Secondly, as far as outsourcing is concerned,

that will depend on the Council. It is for them to decide how they are going to manage their fleet. You have mentioned 7 lorries, they told me only 5 were under repair.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le vice-Premier ministre, nous parlons d'une ville qui quand même est 'la Manhattan' de l'île Maurice. Parmi le nombre de camions que vous avez cité, M. le ministre, 3 camions – vous allez pouvoir vérifier avec la municipalité – 5Z 122, 5Z 126, 5Z 127, qui sont en service d'après vos chiffres, je voudrais savoir si vous êtes au courant de cela, pour ces 3 camions, le chauffeur et les éboueurs qui sont dans la cabine du chauffeur en temps de pluie, ils sont obligés de se protéger avec un parapluie dans la cabine du chauffeur. Pour vous dire que c'est les 3 camions que vous avez cités et qui sont en service. Est-ce possible de voir avec la municipalité si ces 3 camions sont toujours en service – si on peut dire – ou il faudra les envoyer pour réparation ?

Dr. Husnoo: I did not have that information, but I will have to check that. Having said that, I have just mentioned, they are going to get a minimum of 2 more lorries now. The tender board has already decided who is going to provide the service. You are going to get more lorries in the coming weeks and this is going to help to palliate the situation.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

METRO STATIONS - PASSENGER LIFTS - CONTRACT & MAINTENANCE

(No. B/326) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the passenger lifts at the Metro stations, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Limited, information as to the number thereof in operation and company awarded the contract for the installation and commissioning thereof, indicating –

- (a) if the same company is responsible for the maintenance and public safety thereof, and
- (b) maintenance contract value therefor.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Metro Express Limited that there are 7 passenger lifts at 4 Metro stations as follows –

- 1 at Port Louis, Victoria Station;
- 2 at Coromandel Station;
- 2 at Rose Hill Central Station, and
- 2 at Curepipe Central Station.

I am further advised that Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. has been awarded the contract for the installation and commissioning of these passenger lifts by the service provider of the Metro Express Project, that is, Larsen & Toubro Limited during the implementation of the project.

As regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. is responsible for the maintenance of the passenger lifts. It is to be noted that after the completion of each phase of the Metro Express Project, Larsen & Toubro Limited provided a warranty period of one year.

In the same spirit, after the lifts were installed and handed over to Metro Express Limited by L&T Ltd, the latter ensured that the lifts were covered with a one-year warranty by Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the preventive and corrective maintenance of this lift required skills, which were outside the competencies of the Metro Express team, the Metro Express Limited entered into a maintenance service agreement with Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd, which is the only local representative of the Otis brand, the original equipment manufacturer, with effect from 01 January 2021 in order not to compromise with the quality of the maintenance.

The maintenance works are carried out on a monthly basis by Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd in accordance with the Maintenance Service Agreement. The Metro Express Ltd, being the owner of these lifts, is legally responsible for public safety at the seven-passenger lift. Accordingly, lift tests are carried out twice daily by the Metro Express Ltd, one at night and the other one in the morning to ensure that they are in good working conditions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the yearly maintenance contract value amounts to Rs876,990 (inclusive of vat).

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister must be aware of an incident that occurred on 11 March where nearly 8 passengers were trapped in the lifts. Can I ask

the hon. Minister whether he has been made aware by the maintenance company, the so-called, you said Manser Saxon, why the emergency button was not working and no response was available, subsequently to which crow bar had to be used to secure the safety of passengers?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the information that I have and I am thankful to the hon. Member for giving me a possibility to shed light on this incident. In fact, on Saturday 11 March this year at 8.59 a.m., eight students were trapped in the passenger lift located at Platform 2 of the Coromandel Metro Station.

The passenger lift was stuck mid-way between the first and ground level. On being alerted at 9.01 a.m., the Operations Control Centre was alerted and activated the rapid response emergency protocols. At 9.10 a.m., the Operations and Maintenance Team, the OCC Police, Edmond Security Team and the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services proceeded with a lift rescue operation in accordance with the procedure in the lift manual.

Once the passenger lift was brought near ground level, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services tried to open the door. According to my information, due to a wrong manoeuvre while using the lift key, the door could not be opened and the Fire and Rescue Services had to force open the door. The eight students were safely evacuated at 9.28 a.m. and the incident was resolved within 30 minutes.

According to Metro Express Ltd, Sir, lift tests were effected as is the standing practice twice daily by the ONM Team at night on Friday 10 March 2023 and during the early morning 6.45 a.m. on Saturday 11 March and the lift was functioning.

Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd, who as I just said, is the sole supplier service provider in Mauritius for Otis Ltd also carries out its maintenance on a monthly basis. Thank you.

Dr. Aumeer: The hon. Minister will surely appreciate that an excess of Rs5 billion have been used of taxpayers' money to implement the Metro Express Services in Mauritius and as you just said in your reply, there are maintenance and checks twice daily. How come the emergency button did not work?

Mr Ganoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a Diagnosis Report from Manser Saxon Contracting Ltd. According to this report, the incident happened due to a loss of door contact

registered by the Safety Circuit Unit, thus stopping the cabin mid-way. The report, in fact, is very clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. I quote –

“The error lock was sent to Otis on 13 March and they advised that the root cause is most likely due to the loss of door contact registered by the safe key circuit.”

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/331, B/335, B/337, B/339, B/343, B/356, B/364, B/365, B/373, and B/391 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

MAURITIUS SOCIETY OF AUTHORS - TWO SENIOR OFFICERS - OVERPAYMENT

(No. B/327) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Mauritius Society of Authors, he will state the disciplinary actions the Board thereof proposes to take against two senior officers of the said Society having allegedly benefitted from overpayment prior to the implementation of the Office of Public Sector Governance Report 2022.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Office of Public Sector Governance submitted a report on misallocation of royalties by the Mauritius Society of Authors on 30 September 2021.

Following the submission of the report by the OPSG, a committee was set up to look into the following –

- (1) The possibility of an Internal Control Unit to conduct an enquiry into the financial affairs of MASA, and
- (2) The proposal to review its organisational structure.

Accordingly, a technical team was set up at the level of my Ministry to examine the recommendations of the report of the OPSG. Thereafter, it came up with an action plan with specific deadlines. The action plan, which was a very concise version of the report, was discussed with the then Director of MASA for him to take actions as appropriate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amongst other matters, the report of the OPSG highlighted a potential case of overpayment made to certain officers. My Ministry will be sharing the report of the

OPSG with MASA for it to implement the recommendations contained therein as well as to take any action it deemed necessary, including any action if needs be in the potential case of overpayment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in respect of any overpayment made to any officer, such amount is recouped from the salary of the officer.

Mr Armance: May we know from the Minister what is the approved amount as the responsibility allowance that has been approved and paid to the officers? Is it a fixed amount? Is it a variable amount because it is noted that this amount has changed from 2016, 2017, 2018 and on year goes? So, can we know whether this amount is fixed and if not, why not?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not have specific information but what I am made to understand and I was informed of is that when you assume certain additional duties, you are either paid an increment which is decided by the Board or there is another calculation made. I will not venture into giving additional information on this because I don't have it with me but this is established practice as set out in the PRB Report.

Mr Armance: The Minister mentioned that the report was submitted in September 2021. We are now in 2023. Can you please enlighten the House whether you have done anything to recover the overpayment from the officers who have been overpaid?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, following submission of the report, I mentioned there was a committee that was set up to examine the findings and the recommendations. Thereafter, a technical team also was put in place to work on the action plan. So, now that these elements are ready, these will be shared with MASA for MASA to take any action deemed necessary.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

(4.16 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

RÉSIDENCE VÉTIVER, GROS CAILLOUX – NHDC HOUSING ESTATE – FLOODING

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement on the issue of flooding at the NHDC Housing Estate, Résidence Vétiver at Gros Cailloux .

Mr Speaker, Sir, in August 2018, the contract for the NHDC Housing Estate, Résidence Vétiver, Gros Cailloux was awarded to a CIDB registered contractor for the construction of 126 housing units. The Consultant for the project was a reputable and well-established firm and the construction was completed in October 2021. The Residence consists of 6 blocks of houses and comprises at present a community of some 378 individuals.

Mauritius experienced heavy rainfall on 26 January and 27 January of this year. The rainfall caused flooding both on and off the premises in the vicinity of Résidence Vétiver, and some 35 housing units out of a total of 126, were reportedly affected.

I am informed that the main cause of flooding within Résidence Vétiver, was water flowing onto the NHDC site from adjoining plots of land belonging to a private party that caused a boundary wall of a stretch of over 15 metres of length to collapse. Immediate action was taken by the NHDC Ltd. in consultation with the residents and there was a coordinated response from relevant services namely, the Police, the Fire Services and the Special Mobile Force throughout the night of Thursday, 26 January and the whole day of Friday, 27 January 2023 until late in the evening.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following another night of heavy rainfall as from 17 March to 18 March 2023, the residents of Résidence Vétiver,, Gros Cailloux, informed the NHDC Ltd. that housing Block F was affected by flooding.

I am further informed that on 04 April 2023, during heavy rainfall, there was accumulation of water in the yard of one particular housing unit at the NHDC premises at Gros Cailloux.

Now, short term measures taken by the NHDC after the first instance of flooding included –

- (i) Placing of 100 *Rafia* bags filled with rock sand to prevent water from flowing onto the affected areas;
- (ii) Excavating a canal from Résidence Vétiver, up to a plot of land belonging to Société Gros Cailloux, to divert water from the high-level point to a lower point after the NHDC site;
- (iii) Cleaning of the cut-off drain at the entrance of Résidence Vétiver, and removal of debris;
- (iv) Rehabilitation works including painting works for one particular unit;
- (v) Excavation of trenches to reach concrete drain underground towards the offsite absorption pit.

The NHDC Ltd., I am informed has now entrusted to a Contractor responsibility to carry out the following –

1. Excavation of a new retention pond at the low-lying point of the housing estate;
2. Enlargement of the existing earth drain and the retention pond found downstream, and
3. Modification of rainwater pipes at the rear of housing units to divert rain water from rooftops to a common discharge point.

This work is expected to be completed by early May 2023.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to establishing the respective responsibilities of parties concerned and to avoid any recurrence, I requested the NHDC Ltd. to set up a Committee to investigate the causes of flooding at Résidence Vétiver, Gros Cailloux. I understand that the Committee comprises a Law Practitioner, an Architect and an Engineer and that the Committee is expected to submit its report in the near future.

Now, the Land Drainage Authority has recommended excavation works and realignment in respect of a water path from the lowest point at Résidence Vétiver, to an existing water path thereby creating swales – earthen canals; leading to a large retention pond. In addition, a plot of land will need to be acquired for implementation of the proposed swales within the next three months.

I have requested the NHDC to closely monitor the situation at Résidence Vétiver, to minimise risks of recurrence of the flooding incidents in the short term and ensure that a permanent and lasting solution be found by addressing the root cause of the flooding problem and devising appropriate mitigation and or remedial measures with the assistance of relevant technical services.

As regards, assistance provided to the families concerned, according to the Ministry of Social Integration and Social Security –

1. 33 families at Résidence Vétiver, have benefitted from financial assistance of Rs 250 per member of each family;
2. In kind donation comprising non-perishable foodstuff and kitchen utensils worth Rs 3,000 were effected to the households residing in units procured by the National Empowerment Foundation, and
3. Non-Governmental Organisations have provided food assistance and mattresses to those most affected and I wish here to express government's appreciation to these NGOs for their assistance.

I thank you, Sir.

(4.23 p.m.)

MUNICIPAL TAX ABOLITION – FAMILY HOME

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement apprising the House on the abolition of Municipal Tax on Family Home.

This Government decided to abolish Municipal Tax on Family Home since it was considered unfair that a family pays Municipal Tax on his residence, solely because he lives in

an urban area. The government took a commitment in 2019 to redress this anomaly and in the Budget Speech 2022/2023, it was announced that as from the 01 July 2022, Municipal Tax on Family Home would be abolished.

To implement this budgetary measure, my Ministry had consultations with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Attorney General's Office, the Valuation Department as well as the Municipal Councils to discuss on the best possible way to implement this decision.

Following several consultations with all these institutions, it was decided to exempt all households owning a single house.

In the event, a household owns more than one house in any Municipal area; it would be exempted only for the house which is the main residence of the owner.

In cases of Mixed-Used Buildings, that is, buildings which are partly residential and partly industrial or partly residential and commercial, exemption will be provided for the residential part of the building only.

The Local Government (Exemption of Municipal Tax on Family Home) Regulations 2023 and the Local Government (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2023 will be promulgated this month and the regulations shall be deemed to have come into effect as from 01 July 2022.

Around 115, 000 households are concerned with the exemption of the payment of Municipal Tax and this will amount to more than Rs124 m. annually.

I wish to thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for having given me the opportunity to enlighten the House with regards to this key measure implemented by this Government for the welfare of the citizens.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo.

(4.25 p.m.)

YAOUNDE, LOME & COTONOU AGREEMENTS

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you once again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Yaoundé, Lomé and Cotonou Agreements have provided the framework for ACP countries to export to the EU Market. The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), formerly known as the ACP Group of countries, have been negotiating a new Partnership Agreement with the EU that will succeed the Cotonou Agreement.

In February of this year, Mauritius acceded to the chair of the OACPS and I am currently presiding the OACPS Council of Ministers for the term February to July 2023.

I chaired for the first time a Special Virtual Session of the OACPS Council of Ministers in my capacity as new President of the OACPS Council of Ministers on 23 March 2023. The objective of the Special Session was to, *inter alia*, update the Council on the status of the signing of the Post-Cotonou Agreement, which is called the Samoa Agreement.

The Post-Cotonou Agreement, Mr Speaker, Sir, was initialled in April 2021. However, it has yet to be signed because of objections raised by one EU Member State with regards to the new agreement.

This EU Member State – Hungary had reservations on some provisions of the Samoa Agreement. It was refusing to sign the text of the Agreement which it considers to be pro-migration.

This refusal had also to be seen in the broader context of the political and financial divergences between the EU and that Member State on democratic values and rule of law and the repeated vetoes that it is using especially in the area of EU foreign policy.

The position of that EU Member State on migration and on return and re-admission, and the divergence it had with the European Commission led the OACPS to consider how to make progress on the signature of the Post Cotonou Agreement. As part of the lobbying exercise during the current Mauritius Presidency of the OACPS Council of Ministers –

- (a) I had written to the President-in-Office of the OACPS Summit, H.E. Mr Joao Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of Angola, on 17 February 2023, to take up the issue

of the signature of the Samoa Agreement with the French President Macron during the latter's visit to Angola earlier this year. I also had discussions with H.E. Mr António, Minister of External Relations of Angola, in the margins of the AU Summit held in February of this year in Addis Ababa, and

- (b) I had also written to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, H.E. Mr Péter Szijjártó, requesting for a meeting to discuss the issue of the signing of the Samoa Agreement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in response to my letter, H.E. Peter Szijjártó, Hungarian Minister, agreed to my request and led a delegation to Mauritius from 18 and 19 April 2023.

His delegation comprised, amongst others, of Mr Gabor Eros, Member of the Hungarian Parliament, Mr Azbej, State Secretary, H.E. Ambassador Gyorgy Horvath, who presented his credentials to the President on 17 April 2023 at the State House.

That the Hungarian Minister took time from his busy schedule to travel to Mauritius and had this meeting with us here including our Prime Minister on an important matter is a tangible proof of the commitment of Hungary to the EU-OACPS Partnership, which is greatly appreciated by all 79 OACP States.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my objective, as the President of the OACPS Council of Ministers, was to have a candid discussion with the Hungarian Minister and put across arguments that would bring Hungary to review its position concerning the signature of the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement.

While Hungary supported economic cooperation between the EU and the OACPS, as laid down in the post-Cotonou agreement, it opposed its sections on migration and sexual rights. In fact, the Parliament of Hungary made a clear decision in 2021 which required the Government to oppose the approval of the Post-Cotonou Agreement.

As Chair of the OACPS Council of Ministers, I engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Hungarian delegation with a view to reconciling our divergent positions with a view to help resolving the matter and expedite the process for the timely signing of the Post-Cotonou Agreement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that a major diplomatic breakthrough was achieved at this meeting. Hungary received the necessary guarantees that led it to agree to the EU signing the Post-Cotonou Agreement with the OACPS. It was agreed that all decisions regarding migration and sexual rights, as well as the employment and integration of foreigners would remain within Hungary's sovereign competence.

Hungary is now satisfied that these developments fulfilled its Parliament's expectations and it agreed to the EU signing the Post-Cotonou Agreement. This is expected to happen in the coming months in Samoa, under the Presidency of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was crucial to make significant progress through this meeting and find a way forward so that the Post-Cotonou Agreement could be signed. Any further delay would have sent a wrong signal about the commitment to the OACPS-EU Partnership, especially at a time when the world needs cooperation to tackle the various global and regional challenges.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may also wish to know that under the Post-Cotonou Agreement, there is no dedicated financial Protocol, unlike the Cotonou Agreement, which had a financial package to fund the National Indicative Programmes through the European Development Fund (EDF) earmarked for the ACP.

The EU has now adopted a new approach to financing under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), which would extend financial assistance through geographical and thematic development projects.

In this regard, the EU has put in place the Team Europe Initiative which essentially consists of the EU Member States working together and pooling their resources and expertise to identify critical priorities that constrain development in a given country or region. In view thereof, Mauritius and Hungary agreed to engage and explore avenues to enhance bilateral cooperation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius will now be included in Hungary's scholarship programme. Hungary has agreed to offer 15 scholarships annually to Mauritian students wishing to study in Hungary. We also agreed to pursue efforts with a view to attracting more tourists from Hungary.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it can be seen, we are taking all pragmatic measures to protect our economic interests. We may not be able to take a single sword swipe to cut the Gordian knot of

complex geo-economic challenges, but we are leaving no stone unturned to ensure that our economic interests are protected and promoted.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 - BROKEN AND LEAKING PIPES

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a statement on a matter raised by hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha at the Sitting of the National Assembly held on 18 April 2023, in respect of a list handed to me by the hon. Member, regarding broken and leaking pipes in the Constituency No. 20, Beau Bassin/ Petite Rivière.

I wish to inform the House that officers of the Central Water Authority and the Technical Services Unit of my Ministry had carried out a joint site visit on 19 and 20 April 2023, at the locations mentioned in the list provided to me.

I am informed that problems of broken pipes in respect of 15 out of the 44 locations have been reported to the Central Water Authority, out of which, 12 have already been repaired. The outstanding works at the remaining three locations are expected to be completed by the end of April 2023.

It is to be noted that for 28 locations, the CWA has informed that it has not received any complaint of leaking or broken pipe. One address, namely Rue Cana, Les Chebecs, Chebel could not be traced.

Moreover, during the site visits, no visible leakage was found at 4 locations, namely –

- (i) Baznath Lane, Canot;
- (ii) Zinia Lane, Canot;
- (iii) Raymond Rivet Road, Mont Roches, and
- (iv) Arthur Maurice Road, Mont Roches.

As I have mentioned in my reply to PQ B/315 earlier today, some parts of the CWA network date back to 60 or 80 years and hence, may be more prone to faults. Every effort is, however, made to prioritise the faults and attend to them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Central Water Authority that an investment of more than Rs3.5 billion has been made since year 2015 in respect of projects to replace old and defective CWA pipes. Major works have been carried out at –

- a) Plaine Verte to Cité Martial;
- b) Salazie to Les Mariannes;
- c) La Marie to La Brasserie Reservoir;
- d) Coromandel, Gros Cailloux and Canot Areas;
- e) South Western Coast;
- f) Candos;
- g) Riche en Eau to Grand Bel Air;
- h) Pereybère;
- i) Lallmatie, and
- j) Rose Hill, among others.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MR DAWOOD RAWAT - CLAIM - OUTCOME

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin):
Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House of the outcome of the claim entered by Mr Dawood Rawat, hereinafter called the Claimant, against the State of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this claim represents one of the biggest arbitration claims ever entered against the State of Mauritius.

On 08 June 2015, the Claimant sent a notice of arbitration to the Republic of Mauritius on the basis of the France-Mauritius Bilateral Investment Treaty.

On 09 November 2015, the Claimant filed a request for arbitration under the rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) 1976 on international arbitration. The proceedings were administered under the aegis of the Permanent Court of

Arbitration in The Hague and conducted under the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules. The case reference is PCA 2016-20. The seat of arbitration was Brussels.

On 06 April 2018, the Arbitral Tribunal delivered its Award setting aside the claim for damages in the sum of one billion US dollars against the Republic of Mauritius for alleged breach of the France-Mauritius Bilateral Investment Treaty in relation to the assets of the British American Investment Co. (Mauritius) Ltd.

On 03 July 2018, the Claimant lodged an action for annulment (i.e. *une demande d'annulation*) of the Award. The said action for annulment was lodged before the *Tribunal de Première Instance Francophone de Bruxelles*.

On 30 June 2021, the *Tribunal de Première Instance Francophone de Bruxelles* delivered its judgment dismissing the action for annulment of the Award.

The Claimant appealed against the judgment of the *Tribunal de Première Instance Francophone de Bruxelles* to *La Cour de Cassation de Belgique*.

In a judgment dated 06 April 2023, *La Cour de Cassation de Belgique* has dismissed the appeal of the claimant with costs.

Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the following Bills were read a first time –

- (a) *The Caudan Bridges, Port Louis (Authorised Construction) (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2023).*
- (b) *The Education (Amendment) Bill (No. VI of 2023).*

Second Reading

THE MAURITIUS DIGITAL PROMOTION AGENCY BILL

(NO. III OF 2023)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill (No. III of 2023).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(4.39 p.m.)

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have today in front of the House, a bill that has been presented to us by the hon. Minister Darsanand Balgobin whom I would like to congratulate and his team as well, because it was time to repeal and replace the National Computer Board Act and bring a new establishment for the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency.

If we could recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I was still a kid when the National Computer Board was brought to this House. It was in 1988 under the Prime Ministership of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth and was presented at that time by the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo. The Bill that was presented at that time was through the establishment of the Computer Board and its role was to harmonise computer development locally and to ensure that the necessary training and research facilities are available at the national level to build up the required expertise in that field.

There was also at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, a National Information Technology Plan and it was important at that time and - we can say - the vision of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth to bring this ICT sector to a new level. We can say that he was a man of great vision and today, we have the testimony when we see what has been developed in Ebène and how many youths are getting jobs there. We can say that he was a man of great vision and he put the country in the right place with the creation of the National Computer Board at that time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also quote our Prime Minister from our Government Programme in 2014 when it was presented. He said in his speech –

“Internet connectivity, broadband, information and communication technology and indeed innovation will be at the heart of all our economic and social strategies cutting

across not only through our existing pillars but as importantly through all the new economic sectors.”

To tell you that this Government through the leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is bringing this ICT sector to the next level. And we know how information technology can be vital for a country to develop. During COVID-19 time, we have been witnessing it. How the use of technology has helped us to order food online, to be connected online to get the right information so that we take the necessary precautions.

I must also commend the Minister, hon. Darsanand Balgobin. We can say that during that hard time that we had, very big measures were taken so that we could help the country and the people, if we can say, to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Let me give you an example, we had all the My.T services, all the TV services were free of charge so that people could have a distraction at home, because if they didn't not have any activity they would want to go outside. There was schooling online. We can say that this was an important measure to prevent people from gathering and trying to go outside. There are several measures that were taken but I wanted to just name a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the vision that this Government has and with the presentation of this Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill, we are going in the right direction because we have to innovate. Last week, on 20 April, the President of OTAM, Ms Jenny Chan *a mentionné* –

“Il est essentiel d’agir assez vite. Nous ne pouvons pas rester à la traîne, sinon nous serons toujours en décalage en termes de formation et de création de compétences. Tant que nous serons en décalage, nous aurons des lacunes de compétences pratiquement en permanence et ce qui nous empêchera d’avancer et de faire croître le secteur aussi rapidement que nous le souhaitons”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a Government here and a team that is working for all spheres of the population to boost the ICT sector. During COVID-19 time, we can say that most of our sectors, for example, tourism was negative but the only two sectors that were positive were the ICT sector and the financial services sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if we do the right thing with ICT, it will have great promise to reduce poverty, increase productivity, boost economy growth, improve accountability and governance.

We can say for now, people are using more and more mobile phones for access; we are talking about 4G, now we are coming with 5G. We are going with the highest broadband in the region and the rapidness of our internet is the achievement that this Government is also bringing.

There are many things that I will come at a later stage to tell you what has been done by Minister Balgobin under the leadership of the Prime Minister through the three-year mandate that we are here; what many things that have been done that are improving the life of our citizens.

For example, I was reading the World Economic Forum the other day on the digitalisation of the economy and it is important that ICT is across all sectors, Mr Speaker, Sir. Last week, we were presenting the Waste Management Resource Bill and we can say that ICT will also play a big role in this sector because now with technology, Mr Speaker, Sir, from your office here, you can be watching what is happening at your house. You can even order to irrigate your garden from the latest technology.

What I want to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill, the mandate that is being given to this MDPA, it has a big mandate and it will have an utmost importance for our youth and for the future of this country because when we are talking about digitalisation of an economy, one of the four pillars is to have the proper training and infrastructure and one of the proper training would be through the MDPA. And, we can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, now when we talk about the ICT sector, Mauritius should be proud because we have many industries that are looking to come to Mauritius and many have been establishing themselves here.

The Minister informed in his speech and we have analytics and Big Data which many industries in this sector are looking at: Gaming and VR, Cloud Services, Fintech, because now Mr Speaker, Sir, with Fintech, accounting and finance sector is boosting and we also have the Internet of Things which could be one of pillars of our economy if we develop it in the proper way. But, we had to set the stone and that is why we are here. With the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency, one of the main objects is to grow the ICT sector for skill development and innovation and achieve basic ICT proficiency among all population groups.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our education literacy is more than 90% here in Mauritius. If we do not train our people or had we not have trained people during the pandemic, the World Health

Organisation would have been making praise of our country for having combatted the pandemic in a such way and to confront this, praises for our Minister of Health and Wellness also, Dr. Jagutpal, who has done a great work. But, to tell you, with the MDPA, we are also going to formulate National Policies in respect to promotion, development of the ICT and its application. If we look at what India is doing; in India many of the youth – it is like new Silicon Valley – many unicorns are being developed by the youth and here in Mauritius also, we are going to train our youth and the kids so that at a very early stage, they can be developing software, applications. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell you that many applications, as Facebook for instance, are being developed in Mauritius by our Mauritians who have learned from the University of Mauritius or who are trained abroad but the applications are now being developed in Mauritius.

There are many opportunities when we see about this digitalisation of the economy. The MDPA is going to play a very big role and I am pleased that I heard the Minister say that there will be a transition and there was confusion and he said it in his speech about all the staff of the National Computer Board. But now, we need to innovate more and more with VR. We are talking about artificial intelligence, Mr Speaker, Sir. I remember during the COVID, when Parliament was closed, the Leader of the Opposition, the Members of the Opposition were saying ‘let us do it virtually’ and maybe in the near future, we do not know what will happen; we are projecting for 50, 60 years in front, why not? We had our hon. colleague, the PPS from Rodrigues, who had the opportunity to make his speech on TV here for his intervention and now we can say we are being provided with iPads.

It has been so for the past years for all the MPs so that we use less paper but this has been the habit Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, the habits are changing. We can see hon. Léopold using his phone to make his speech during his intervention. What I want to tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are evolving. We are evolving and we are going in the right direction. When we talk about telecommunication, Mr Speaker, Sir, infrastructure is the foundation for a new digital economy and the investment that is being done by our Government in this sector, will generate intensive potential in the economic activity and will also attract investors to come to Mauritius because we have trained labour here but we will need to go further as the world is going so fast in this sector.

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, like I have said earlier, the MDPA will aim to spearhead the development of the ICT industry of Mauritius through innovation to increase its global competitiveness because we are going to have competition from our African brothers and sisters counterparts. Mauritius can be the ICT hub for Africa and as we are well situated, this sector is a pillar of the economy for our youth and where they are going, whether it is in social media development but there are so many trainings that have to be done and I feel proud to be in this Government where the Minister is bringing this MDPA to provide more training for our youth.

The MDPA will be called to play a more prominent role in advising Government on policies like I have said earlier. We have to develop a digital culture and empower our citizens. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will also coordinate service delivery in the ICT sector to move to the next wave of development. We had to have this change, Mr Speaker, Sir. One thing also, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is committed to digitalise our economy like I have said earlier and like the Minister have said, 140 Government e-Surfaces are available now to the public: application for registration mark, application for learners, drivers' licence. We have seen for the first time in Mauritius that the birth certificate and marriage certificate are available online. It is also accessible via all those smart channels like our tablets, mobile phones, through the *MoKloud* platform. We have other e-services applications like *MoRendezVous* that have definitely transformed the citizen interaction with the Government and have reduced the administrative hassle in everyday life. People do not need to move to go to the Municipality or District Council, they have the CSU now. They can make their complaint on the CSU and things are being done and I think the Ministry has been very innovative in this way. Now, we are also having at the level of the District Council, local authorities, the e-Platform that is being developed in all the local authorities.

We have also the *Fasil* platform that was launched in 2020, with 50 of the most used e-services such as annual registration fees of company, online payment of Motor Vehicle Licence, Building and Land Use Permit (BLP) and even more user friendly set up. We can say that *Fasil.mu* also hosts detailed explanation on how to optimally use online government services.

I would also request the Minister if we could use Creole language to explain some of these applications so that people are more at ease and can use all them. I think there is a training that has to be done with some people and there is a coordination that can be made.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill was important because now we are setting the pace to move to a higher level and we are preparing our youth to go in the right direction. With the proper training, there will be more of our youth who can have opportunities in many of the multinationals that are present in the ICT sector in Mauritius, whether it is Ceridian or others that are coming. We can see how fast this industry is growing.

I am convinced that the MDPA will bring a fresh air to this industry and it was important to repeal and replace the National Computer Board. It has made its time, Mr Speaker, Sir. I fully support the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill and I would like to congratulate the Minister and all his staff, the PS and all the team of the Ministry, who have worked on this Bill, and I wish him well in his future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

At 5.00 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, be seated! Next Orator!

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you.

The main object of the Bill before us today is to repeal the National Computer Board and to provide for the establishment of a National Digital Promotion Agency. The NCB, we will remember, was set up under the National Computer Board Act (Act 43) of 1988 as an apex institution to steer Mauritius in the information age.

First observation: Section 4 (b) of the Act provides that the NCB is entrusted with the following mission –

“advise Government on the formulation of national policies in respect of the promotion, development and control of information technology and its application;”

Whereas in Clause 4 (c) of the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill, it is –

“advise the Minister on the formulation of national policies in respect of the promotion, development of ICT and its application.”

It makes a huge difference here and this is prelude to more powers that the Minister is entrusting to himself through this Bill.

Second: whilst the NCB Act, section 5(3) stipulates that –

“Every member shall be paid by the Board such remuneration or allowance as the Board may, with the approval of the Minister, determine.”

The Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill mentions that –

“7 (2) Every member [of the Board] shall be paid such fees or allowances as the Minister may determine.”

Here the Board is not determining but solely the Minister. The Minister is here, the Boss.

Ce projet de loi permet au ministre de s’octroyer des pouvoirs toujours plus grands.

Section 11(1) of the NCB Act dealing with appointment of officers stipulates that –

“Subject to subsection (3), the Board may employ, on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit, such officers as may be necessary for the proper discharge of its functions.”

Whilst the MDPA Bill stipulates that –

“11. (1) The Board may, on such terms and conditions as the Minister may approve, appoint such employee of the Agency as it considers necessary for the proper discharge of its functions under this Act.”

À la section 10 du projet de loi, le *Executive Director* sera nommé par le *Board*, approuvé par le ministre mais on sait comment cela se passe en général, toujours *jobs for the boys or girls*. Et la section 7 également, sur le *Board*, sur 13 membres, pas moins de 6 personnes seront nommées par le ministre. Si cela n’est pas une mainmise, cela y ressemble étrangement.

Ce projet de loi accorde beaucoup trop de pouvoir au ministre. Ainsi, le ministre a donc, selon les dispositions de cette nouvelle loi, le pouvoir de nommer le personnel de cette agence et les consultants de son choix. Il y a des risques d’abus de pouvoir et cela inquiète. Cela inquiète également les employés. Le ministre a assuré à la Chambre qu’il les rassurait. Tant mieux ! Mais on se souvient qu’en septembre 2019 lorsqu’une décision avait été prise pour que le *Government Online Centre* et le *Computer Emergency Response Team* soient opérés sous la responsabilité du ministère de la Technologie, le personnel avait été forcé à prendre leur retraite s’il ne souhaitait

pas rejoindre le ministère en question. Est-ce que ce sera à nouveau le cas avec cette nouvelle loi ? Est-ce que leurs années d'expérience et de travail seront pris en compte pour d'éventuelles promotions dans la *MDPA* ? Ils sont à juste titre inquiets, M. le ministre et même si le fait que le ministre a déclaré qu'il les a rassurés.

Différentes organisations ont été mises en place dans les années 90, à savoir le *Central Information Systems Division*, le *IT Security Unit*, le *Information Communication and Technology Authority (ICTA)* et le *State Informatics Ltd* entre autres. Ces organisations sont basées sur un modèle de développement de cette époque. Elles sont maintenant dépassées face à l'avancée rapide des technologies digitales et aux besoins d'aujourd'hui.

Le *NCB Act* avait lui-même été mise en place en 1988, soit plus de 30 ans de cela et demandait à être revu depuis longtemps mais au lieu d'une réforme institutionnelle, le ministre vient nous proposer un *MDPA Bill* qui ne propose rien de plus comme objectif, que ceux évoqués par le *NCB Act*. Je cite –

“to boost the growth and development of the ICT Sector through skills development and innovation.”

Cette nouvelle agence aura donc quasiment les mêmes fonctions. Le *Mauritius Research and Innovation Council* et le *Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council* ont également les mêmes fonctions, M. le président.

Le Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Act qui advise the Government on the formulation of national policies and strategies in emerging technologies selon la section 4(a) et la Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency qui selon la section 4(c) advise the Minister on the formulation of national policies in respect of the promotion, development of ICT and its applications. Que font ce METC et les autres organisations existantes ? Combien de rapports et de recommandations ont été produits par ces organisations ? Combien d'argents ont été injectés dans ces organisations ? Are we having value for money ?

Plusieurs entités ont des *overlapping responsibilities*, l'*ICTA* pour l'*ICT regulation*, the *National Computer Board* et le *Data Protection Office*. Il y a l'*ICTA* pour le *ICT Security Policy and Standards and ICT Infrastructure Security*. Le *Cyber Security Authority* pour le *ICT Security Policy and Standards, Incidence Response and Management and Cyber City Research and*

Development. Le *National Cyber Crime Committee* dont le Chairman est semble-t-il le *Managing Director* d'une compagnie informatique en même temps. Si cela s'avère M. le président, il n'y a-t-il pas là *collusion* ? Le *Cyber Crime Authority* pour *investigation and prosecution of cybercrime, cybercrime awareness and education and international cooperation on cybercrime*. Le *CERT-MU*, le *Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius for incident response and management, Cyber Security Research and Development et Cyber Security Awareness and Education*. Il y a également le *CISD*, la *ITSU*, le *MRCI*, le *SIL*, le *MUTC* et j'en passe. There is a need for a proper responsibility matrix for all these bodies.

En prenant en compte toutes ces entités, quelle est la ligne de démarcation entre ces différents organisations ? Qui fait quoi ? Qui rapporte à qui ? *Is there the RACI Matrix, Responsibility, Accountability, Consultation, Information* ? Cela aurait dû être le premier objectif. Tout serait alors plus clair pour tout le monde.

De 2000 à 2005, le gouvernement d'alors dans lequel le MMM faisait partie, avait donné les moyens pour faire de Maurice un *Cyber Island*.

Le gouvernement avait donné les moyens de faire d'*Ebène City*, un *Cybercity*. Nous avions de grandes ambitions pour ce projet. D'ailleurs, le DPM et ministre des Finances d'alors, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, déclarait à la presse, je cite –

“Through the Cybercity Project, we want to forge triangular corporation involving India, Mauritius and Africa to develop synergy and facilitate Africa's march towards an e-economy.”

L'objectif était de faire de l'*ICT* un pilier de notre économie avec les menaces sur le secteur sucrier et celui du textile ; mais, surtout que la population puisse en profiter. Aujourd'hui nous sommes très loin du compte. Un exemple très simple où ce secteur a failli, a été constaté pendant la Covid-19 où des étudiants ont été privés de leurs classes parce que des foyers n'étaient pas pourvus d'Internet.

À quoi servent ces rhétoriques? Ces grands discours? Il y a actuellement un foisonnement d'organisations dans le secteur mais le petit peuple n'en bénéficie pas.

À Singapore, il y a uniquement deux institutions – *the Smart Nation and Digital Government Work Group* – qui tombent sous la responsabilité du Premier ministre. C'est un

Policy Unit pour la stratégie à adopter ; celle qui définit l’agenda, les directives et celle qui rapporte au gouvernement sur l’état de la transformation digitale.

Et deuxièmement, *the Government Technology Agency* – agence chargée de l’implémentation. Les deux travaillent en collaboration. Hors, à Maurice, il y a un foisonnement d’organisations dont les objectifs sont *overlapping*. C’est de l’argent jeté par la fenêtre ou alors n’est-ce pas là un moyen de caser les copains?

Je voudrais maintenant aborder le sujet des certifications. ‘*The Agency*’ selon la clause (f)

–

“shall operate a Certification Authority for the promotion of electronic transactions through the provision of digital certificates and e-sign services.”

This already seems to be the responsibility of ICTA and CCA – Controller of Certificates Authorities of Mauritius. On its website, it is clearly stated under ‘Licensing of Public Key Infrastructure Certification Services’. The ICT Authority is also tasked with the function to be the Controller of Certification Authorities (CCA). In order to discharge this function, the ICT Authority proceeds by licensing and supervising certification authorities for the Mauritius PKI. N’est-ce pas là encore une fois *overlapping*?

Venons maintenant au ‘Secrecy’. The full section on secrecy of the NCB Act does not appear in the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill. En effet, la section 13(i) du NCB stipulates –

“every member and officer shall before he begins to perform his duties take an oath of secrecy in the form specified...”

Et toute personne faisant entorse à cette section est *liable to a fine not exceeding Rs10,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years*.

Après l’incident qui s’est produit à la *Landing Station de Baie du Jacotet* où des étrangers auraient eu accès à des données sensibles, nous ne voulons pas que le même scénario se reproduise. Pourquoi cette section a été enlevée dans ce projet de loi? *The MDPA Bill* devrait inclure la *clause sur Secrecy for Members and Officers*.

Maintenant qu’en est-il de garantie sur le *privacy*? Le projet de loi ne comprend pas des dispositions spécifiques qui protègent la vie privée des individus ; tels que les exigences de

minimisation des données, la limitation de la conservation des données et, plus important encore, l'obtention d'un consentement explicite avant de collecter ou de traiter des données personnels. Nous attendons des éclaircissements du ministre à ce sujet lors de son *summing up*.

Le budget 2021 avait préconisé un *Mauritius Transformational Agency Bill* pour permettre une réorganisation institutionnelle et de s'aligner avec les nouveaux besoins et objectifs dans le secteur de l'*ICT*. Hors, le projet de loi devant la Chambre aujourd'hui, ne prend pas en considération d'une approche holistique et d'une réforme institutionnelle dans ce secteur. Ce n'est qu'un changement d'appellation mais cette fois, avec la plus de pouvoir octroyé au ministre.

Avec ce projet de loi, on pensait que le ministre allait venir avec des solutions innovantes, là, où la NCB a échoué. On pensait que le ministre viendrait avec des mesures pour améliorer les incubateurs et développer un *pool* d'entrepreneurs en *ICT* à Maurice. On s'attendait à ce que le ministre allait présenter des propositions pour *a proper e-government platform*, des solutions pour remédier aux longues files d'attente dans les différents services gouvernementaux et paraétatiques comme par exemple, à la NTA et faciliter surtout la population.

D'ailleurs, à la section 5(g), on peut lire qu'une des fonctions de la nouvelle agence sera de –

“Collaborate with the public sector for the purpose of research and development on, the use and promotion of *ICT* and, *ICT*-related matters”.

Il y a plus de 150 services en ligne et malheureusement très peu sont utilisés. La plupart d'entre ces services ne fonctionne pas. Pourquoi? Parce que l'application sur papier existe également. Les applications en ligne sont alors délaissées pour celle sur papier. Les applications pour les services gouvernementaux devraient être faites directement en ligne et cela requiert une éducation de la population. Qu'est-ce qui est faite pour éduquer la population?

Autre point. Parmi les fonctions de la nouvelle agence, elle devra « *promote and encourage the use of open data at national level* » – Section 5(i).

Selon le national data de 2017, le gouvernement génère des données de différents secteurs – la santé, l'éducation, l'économie et j'en passe. Et ces données devraient en principe être classées, regroupées pour informer le publique sur, par exemple la situation du diabète à Maurice

mais aussi et surtout, permettre aux secteurs public et privé de travailler plus facilement en partenariat pour assurer des solutions. Une formation aurait même été donnée par la Banque Mondiale pour le *Open Data Portal* mais le résultat est loin d'être satisfaisant.

Sur le website du *Open Data Portal Mauritius*, des données sont éparpillées et pas à jour, pour certains sujets, les relevés s'arrêtent à 1996. Il en est de même pour le nombre de *Protection and Occupation Orders* délivré par la Cour dans les cas de violence domestiques. Ces données ne sont pas à jour non plus.

Pour conclure, le pays a davantage besoin d'une agence s'attelant à la transformation digitale comme promis pour enfin voir un service publique efficient, *accountable* et réactif. Le cadre institutionnel actuelle n'est plus d'actualité et a prouvé son inefficacité à mettre en place des initiatives percutantes, permettant cette transformation.

Le gouvernement a échoué dans l'exploitation des services digitaux dans les secteurs comme la sécurité sociale, l'éducation et les services de la santé. Ces lacunes ont été encore plus flagrantes pendant et après la crise de la pandémie du Covid-19. L'expérience de cette situation exceptionnelle aurait dû être le *wake up call* pour une réforme institutionnelle pour une approche holistique, permettant d'exploiter les technologies innovantes et émergentes plus rapidement et plus agilement.

Le *wake up call* pour une réforme institutionnelle, pour une approche holistique permettant d'exploiter les technologies innovantes et émergentes plus rapidement et plus agilement.

Tout le monde pensait que le ministre proposerait la voie à suivre pour le progrès rapide de la génération, *Artificial Intelligence and machine learning*, qu'il préparerait Maurice à l'ère de *l'hyper connectivity*, *Internet of Things*, et la *Cyber Authority*, qu'il allait saisir les opportunités et analyser les défis dans ce secteur, qu'il ferait en sorte que Maurice joue un rôle majeur dans le *internet governance* et le *quantum computing*.

If the Minister fears that the computer will blow up with lots of data, he can be assured that with quantum computing, which creates new ways of processing and storing information, his computer will never blow up! *Merci*.

Mr Speaker: Next orator!

(6.08 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to express my views on the introduction of the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill.

Contrary to what the hon. Member who spoke just before me said, the ICT sector has been a driving force for the economic development in Mauritius since the last 20-25 years. From the introduction of ICT training in schools, Primary or Secondary, digital TV, 5G, free access Wi-Fi national wide, video calls, you just name it.

ICT has become an integral part of our daily existence. What have we heard the hon. Member say? That since the last 20/25 years... She has mixed ICT, the promotion, the law governing ICT sector, what has been the development throughout these 25 years into one subject. Today we are debating on the promotion to come to the next level, that is, why today we need to have this new Bill? Because Mauritius has made its way for the last 25 years to this level of IT status that we have in Mauritius. To make it to the next level, as pointed out by hon. Dhunoo, we are living in a competitive world and it is at this time that we have to get a new way of looking at the development of ICT in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is one of the sectors, in fact, again, contrary to what the hon. Member said, to have seen positive growth over the last two years despite the COVID-19 pandemic. If COVID-19 has brought something positive, it is in this field.

It has boosted the IT sector with increasing number of Mauritians adopting, for example, work-from-home concept. This happened because there has been a work going through for so many years. Video conferencing is now a common feature in the professional world. For students, e-learning and e-classes have taken a new perspective.

Yes, we may have reached a high level of e-learning, but during COVID-19, when students were at home; e-learning has proved its worth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during those challenging times, innovation was at its peak in the IT world. Again, we have to thank the Minister and his Ministry for going forward. The public sector responded rapidly with the Work Access Permit. We cannot forget it. It is hardly two years back. The BeSafeMoris mobile application, the digital vaccination card, digitalisation of COVID-19 results and the COVID-19 test that we had are tangible proofs. There are so much more.

It did not happen overnight. It materialised as a result of the work that has been done for several years. We are talking about security in the public health. What the hon. Member just said, the IT sector, I will give all the details in my speech. But Mr Speaker, Sir, all this happened during difficult times when the world had come to a stop. These achievements became reality because of the determination and the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if we reflect back on the ICT Sector, we have to thank the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the father of the economic development. 25 years back, at that material time, when the Mauritian economy was dependent on textile manufacturing and the sugar quota was just going to end, 507,000 tonnes of sugar being abolished by the ACP-EU, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, at that time, had the vision to transform Mauritius into a Cyber Island.

If you remember, Ebène Cybercity became a hi-tech area with the goal of stimulating and revitalising the country. That was made possible through the signing of an Agreement of Cooperation in ICT during the visit of the then Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth to India.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at that time, the Opposition was claiming that the Cybercity 1 was a 'white elephant.' Today, after 25 years, we can see clearly who was a man of vision and who was not. That 'white elephant' has expanded into a robust sector of more than 900 companies. If we listen again to what the speaker just before me has said, nothing has been done for the last 25 years - 900 companies employing more than 32,000 employees. That has been the achievement for the last 20/25 years! The result speaks for itself. Mauritius today is an Information Technology Hub for the region and has created so many jobs especially for the youth.

The introduction of the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill is in line with the Digital Mauritius 2030 and the Government's Vision 2030.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will again refer to what the hon. Member has said, especially on the fees that will be payable to the members of the board. If the Minister is approving a fee, he will be accountable to Parliament and to Parliamentary Questions. Just imagine, the Minister does not approve the fees and the board decides to approve the fees as the board wishes. Who will be accountable? This is the right way. The Minister is approving the fees and for any questions raised, the Minister will be answerable. What is wrong into the Minister's approving the fees of a committee?

Mr Speaker, Sir, my speech will be basically based on the E-Health project. Again, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation has shouldered the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the E-Health project. The Ministry of Health and Wellness intends to improve quality and responsiveness of health care services. The E-Health project would cover, in Mauritius, all Regional Hospitals, Community Health Centres, Medclinics and the Laboratory. The Ministry has identified digitalisation as a priority area to improve the quality of health services provided to the public.

The hon. Member was saying that we have done nothing for the health sector but digital health enables the right health information provided by the right person at the right place and in a secured time and in electronic form to optimise quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery.

As per Health Statistics Report 2021, briefly, Mr Speaker, Sir, our healthcare system receives 4.3 million consultations yearly with an average daily attendance of more than 22,000 in 157 health care facilities. Our healthcare services have 8.3 million contacts with the public every year. 8.3 million contacts! By contacts, I mean consultations, blood collection, medical advice, X-Ray, pharmaceutical services and so on.

Additionally, our laboratory facilities carried out nearly 16 million tests in 2022. Can you imagine the volume of work? We all know that IT is going to improve our services. You can see for yourself how the workload is enormous! This high volume of healthcare activities in the public service has stretched, of course, our workforce to its limits. Because our system is paper-based, just imagine the tremendous work being done by our officers and how it is being carried out daily.

Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, laboratory results are not easily obtained because it is not yet digitalised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these challenges make it clear that we have to embark on a digital transformation journey to lessen red tapism, react promptly and be more effective. The digital transformation mindset is a process that will not happen in the blink of an eye. It requires a strong commitment from all personnel of the health sector.

I am confident that the Digital Promotion Agency Bill which caters for the promotion of e-services and for the implementation of the digital transformation project of my Ministry will meet our expectation.

Digital Health contributes to the better and immediate availability of data for the patients: allowing access to past medical history, lab tests, radiological examinations, past therapeutic history and previous consultations in a click.

This enables to optimise medical time resources, to coordinate care givers, eliminate duplication of work, more precise prescription, and radiological examinations. And the free time spared, obviously, will allow the caregivers to be present with the patients.

Finally, improving the quality of care and optimising human and financial resources, correct data analysis will enable quality research programs, and guide health policies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the support of the UNDP, my Ministry has implemented the COVID-19 Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). LIMS is a system installed at Flu Clinics, for example, and has been essential in diseases surveillance. This is again another step forward for IT implementation in the health sector. The COVID-19 LIMS is now being upscaled into a National LIMS to include other tests in virology, molecular biology, biochemistry, bacteriology and haematology.

Along our digital health journey, so far, my Ministry has digitalised a few of its health services, for example –

- a) a patient file tracking system;
- b) a comprehensive blood transfusion system;
- c) DHIS-2 for HIV/AIDS programme;
- d) COVID-19 Laboratory information management system;
- e) BeSafe Moris and COVAC platform for vaccination purposes;
- f) Mauritius All-in-One Travel Digital Form, and
- g) a Digital System for the Harm Reduction Unit.

This application has been nominated at the special World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Prizes 2023 under the International Telecommunication Union. So, that has been the work that has been done in the Ministry with the support of the Ministry of IT.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all very much aware of challenges, especially to enable an environment for digital tools – from comprehensive rollout of digital infrastructure, to robust policy and regulatory framework keeping pace with these fast-changing digital innovations. So, we have to adopt many tools and this is possible with the support of different agencies.

Seizing the momentum of digitalisation and reforming the health sector, my Ministry has also signed a Project Portfolio Document on e-Health initiatives with the UNDP and that collaboration is on a cost-sharing mechanism. The Government of Mauritius has also received support from the Government of Japan to the tune of USD 3 million for medical equipment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, just to summarise the e-Health vision for the Ministry, it is –

“to capitalise on Information and Communication Technologies to create an interoperable national digital health architecture with associated standards that help drive decisions for investment for digital health system components to ensure continuity of care through affordable, high-quality, user-centric services to all healthcare stakeholders in Mauritius”.

So, the project, the journey for digitalisation in the Ministry of Health is ongoing. That will –

- (i) improve the services provided to all citizens;
- (ii) increase effectiveness and quality of patient care;
- (iii) ensure transparency of treatment performance;
- (iv) generate profound data for health reporting and health system, and
- (v) improve involvement of the patient and increased responsibility.

These works are being done with the assistance of UNDP.

A few words on the UNDP procurement process which allows for the Ministry to benefit from the UNDP roster pool of experts and companies or organisations as well. Following the advice of the UNDP Consultant, my Ministry has decided to procure the hardware and software

separately to ensure a larger pool of bidders and increased competition. ICT equipment such as barcode scanners, printers, PCs, would be procured separately.

The Patient Administration System (PAS) was found to be the commonality among all users and this will be the first component for the implementation of the e-Health, that is, “One Patient, One Record”. The Patient Portal, the blood transfusion service, reporting and analytics would also be included.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the strong support of these stakeholders, including the Ministry of ICT and the UNDP, an Expression of Interest was launched for the implementation of these systems and the UNDP recommended that a Digital Health Office be constituted at my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the health sector, like in many other fields, digitalisation of data is the key and the future. The Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency will pave the way for the youth by preparing the national upskilling programme in ICT. It will also conduct awareness campaigns to enable the population to benefit from ICT and to use different tools gradually.

It will also help to attract talent into the ICT sector which is a fast evolving one. We may have the best software, state of the art technology, best IT support, yet we will not succeed if we do not have the proper mindset to adopt the digital evolution.

Innovation is key to succeed and the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency will facilitate the setting up of ICT start-ups and devise programmes to help, for example, SMEs via digital entrepreneurship, hence promoting business compliance towards ICT laws.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Agency will be the certification authority for the promotion of e-transactions through the provision of digital certificates and e-sign services.

I, therefore, congratulate my colleague, hon. Deepak Balgobin, for the introduction of this piece of legislation.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Jutton!

(6.28 p.m.)

Ms T. Jutton (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. As surprising as it may seemingly seem to some Members on the opposite side of

the House, the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill (2023) is, to my mind, amongst the most important pieces of legislation that this Government is introducing and to the points that hon. Navarre-Marie raised, I will explain in a moment but before that, I would like to reiterate what I have been repeatedly saying during several of my speeches in this august House to that effect, that this Government is forward-looking, *avant-gardiste* and is determined to construct today, the Mauritius of tomorrow.

Since our swearing-in, we, as a Government, have been relentlessly laying down the blueprints for the future of this country, for the countrymen and especially, for the present and upcoming generations and, Mr Speaker, Sir, the undeniable truism is that the future, our future, the future of the humanity lies in the continuous pursuit of digital development, its promotion and its application and this is precisely the purpose of the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill being debated now in this House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, never before in the history of human kind has technology moved so breathtakingly fast as does digital development and if we, as law makers, do not keep abreast with such development, then we run the risk of sinking into obsolescence, leave alone further broadening the generational gulf between our emerging youth and ourselves on which I will also dwell a bit later.

So, one of the means to keep pace within this unforgivable digital race is to periodically review, update, revamp or simply scrap out legislations that have grown obsolete and to replace them by modern, more efficient and enabling ones. Hence, I congratulate the hon. Balgobin, Minister of Information and Communication Technology under the visionary leadership of our hon. Prime Minister for coming up with this Bill today.

The pioneering National Computer Board (NCB), set up in 1988 by a Government led by the MSM under the able leadership of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, has contributed largely in ushering the then emerging modern Mauritius into the digital era. It had not only laid the foundation of digital Mauritius but also played a vital role in the overall ICT development. However, with the unprecedented and if I dare say, the appalling speed with which progress has been registered 35 years after the inception of the NCB, it is imperative that this enabling body not be only overhauled but more importantly, thoroughly reengineered so as to meet the

requirements of and be proactively responsive to the present and foreseeable exigencies of digital technologies.

I have noted, not without some dismay, the misgivings highlighted by some hon. Members on the other side of the House. For instance, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie speaks about both NCB and the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill having the same objectives but as I just explained, we have to put everything in context and it is also a question of perception. So, this is why contextualisation is so important. She also spoke about *octroyer des pouvoirs toujours plus grands pour le ministre* but I truly believe what the Minister is doing today is actually bringing what is required to be able, as I said earlier, to construct today the future of tomorrow and I will also dwell on that a bit later.

It is also important that I say here when hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie mentioned about the Cybercity and the vision of the hon. Paul Bérenger, I think I prefer not to get into the saga of the infamous Illovo deal. So, I will just focus on the main objectives of this Bill and my honest plea to the hon. Members of the other side of the House is not to restrict their views to just one tree but to look at the entire forest. So, let us focus on the greater aims of this Bill rather than wasting time squabbling on less important issues.

So, the major thrust of the Bill is to boost the growth of the ICT sector through skills development and innovation and to achieve the basic ICT proficiency amongst all population groups as well as to advise Government on the formulation of National Policies for the promotion and development of ICT and its relevant applications. So, these objectives clearly encompass almost every component that is required for us as a nation to leapfrog into the all-pervading digital world. We, as a Government, want to ensure that our people, our systems and our processes are at par with every new development that takes place within the ICT sector.

The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principals dated January 2023 stipulates that –

“Everyone has the right to education, training and lifelong learning and should be able to acquire all basic and advanced digital skills.”

So, this Bill is a clear evidence of the principles and endeavours that the Government is adopting in line with its ambition of promoting and supporting efforts to be able to equip all education and

training institutions with digital connectivity, infrastructure and giving everyone the possibility to adjust to changes brought by digitalisation of work through up skilling and reskilling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, skills development and innovation as enunciated in the Bill, in fact, constitutes the very cornerstones of our digital future where the continuous updating and upgrading of ICT applications in our daily processes are the very bedrock that will allow us to remain at par with development happening with the rest of the world. As I said earlier, this is exactly what this Bill is trying to achieve and in an attempt to place in its right perspective the magnitude of the digital revolution that is almost taking the world by storm, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish with your permission, to highlight the unfathomable transformational shift that will rock the very foundation of the human ethos but, before doing so, some contextualisation may be required.

So, let us for a brief moment rewind to the days the National Computer Board Bill was being debated 35 years ago. Remember that it was a time when even the cell phone was a far cry. Mr Speaker, Sir, let us imagine that in his or her flight of fancy, an MP of the time would have prophesised that the future technological development will make practically most human activities possible with just a hundred gram palm held wireless device that would for instance allow users to make real time video conversations from one part of the world to another or that it would simultaneously provide virtually all services like even library, encyclopedia where we can get unlimited information and knowledge which would be just a click away, and customised services like banking, personal health monitors, directional maps and what not. So, all these, at that time, I am sure that that MP would have certainly provoked a general hilarity in the House and he or she would have been dubbed as being utopian and crazy.

But, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, as the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill is being debated, it will be actually crazy if we try to put a limit to the stretch of our imagination as to what technological progress can achieve, however dystopian it may appear to some.

As a matter of fact, we are living in a world where reality, whether virtual or augmented, has long overtaken fiction and sooner rather than later, Mr Speaker, Sir, this large chunk of humanity would undertake, what I believe to be, an exodus of almost biblical proportion as they migrate from our age-old universe to a putative meta-verse. This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, the

new digital revolution lurking in the corner has the potential of and indeed is redefining the very genesis and tenets of human race.

Hence, we, as responsible legislators, should and must set the enabling legal, administrative and empowering framework to create the appropriate environment through this Bill, for instance, to ensure that this radical digital transformation intervenes with the least of collateral damage so that as human entities, we manage to grapple our way backwards and to preserve our intrinsic and core specificities, and by the same token to prove wrong those holding a dystopian view of the upcoming digital revolution.

It is therefore noteworthy that the main objectives of this Agency, as I mentioned before, also lays a lot of emphasis on ensuring that across all strata of the population, the basic ICT proficiency is imparted. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will highlight the concept of digital inequality here, which refers to differences in the material, cultural and cognitive resources required to make good use of information and communication technology. The term 'digital divide' verily implies that such disparities may threaten the social and national cohesion as they negatively affect the full participation in work as well as the civic participation for some population groups who are left behind.

To be honest, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Generation Z of today and the Silent Generation that came of age in the wake of World War II are at such opposite poles that, I think, the grandparents of today may even feel left out when with the grandchildren who are absorbed in their own world on their mobiles or if not, iPads or tablets. Today, we are even talking about Generation Alpha, which is the first generation of kids to have never known a time when social media did not exist and are far more technologically savvy than any previous generation. Disparity in access to and proficiency in information and communication technology and therefore bridging the gap between the various strata within the society is a sine qua non.

Speaking of disparities, Mr Speaker, Sir, being a fervent gender advocate, I have myself, in the recent past, been leading research on the national level on how to encourage our young girls to embrace ICT as a career, and to explore the barriers of why girls or women are out of ICT related jobs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, do you know that the study revealed that there is definitely a digital divide favouring men for ICT-related jobs? It was also seen that there were more men promoted

to higher level jobs in the ICT sector. It has been recommended that stakeholders provide appropriate training in the field of ICT to attract a number of women to the sector to meet the increasing demand for skilled IT professionals. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, as proposed in this Bill, the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency will be mandated to conduct awareness campaigns to attract talents into the ICT sector, to coordinate public-private cooperation in the ICT sector, engage with the key players of the industry, to have a national reskilling programme and also ensure compliance towards the laws.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe if the investments are channelled in the budding and buzzing ICT sector, tapping into the right opportunities, then we are easily set out for the creation of a technological hub in Mauritius and in the region, establishing research, development, innovation, creating centres of excellence where youths, both local and international can benefit. The proposed Digital Promotion Agency will accelerate the digital innovation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that there still remains a mismatch on the current job market as the needs of the employers are not seen to be met with the current skill set. So that our youth do not lag behind, this Government is sparing no efforts. I will here quote of the hon. Prime Minister's words during the launch of the Digital Mauritius 2030 Strategic Plan, which is in line with Vision 2030 of the Government –

“In the same vein, due attention is being given to addressing the skills mismatch and skills divide. My Government will leave no stone unturned when it comes to upskilling our youth.”

He continues by saying –

“The Plan aims to build a culture of innovation whilst laying the foundations for emerging technologies as drivers of socioeconomic growth. Through the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in our education system, our technopreneurial spirit will take us to new frontiers.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with this very vision, this Bill provides for a national upskilling programme in ICT. According to the World Economic Forum, the new division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms is predicted to create at least 133 million new roles and jobs by 2025. It is also believed that the new digital jobs that are emerging will be flexible,

highly skilled and well remunerated. Hence, by upskilling through the digital economy, our youth can explore new ways of working, which can also be more engaging.

Over the past years, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has been giving a lot of focus to entrepreneurship initiatives. Contrary to what hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie said earlier, the aim is to empower the youth and to help them become independent and instead of also being jobseekers, be actually job creators. All these are clearly embodied in paragraphs 61 to 65 of our Government programme, from promoting digital entrepreneurship, innovation, research and development as well as to supporting youth led start-ups.

The term technopreneurship, which is actually a fusion of the two words, technology and entrepreneurship, is actually a combination of the technological advancement and entrepreneurial skills which we can see in the examples of Uber, Paypal, SpaceX and so many countless others.

So, through this Bill, the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency will be mandated to facilitate the setting up of ICT start-ups and to devise such programmes to be able to bring ICT skills development to the Small and Medium Enterprises, as well as to promote digital entrepreneurship, because we truly believe that technopreneurship will not just create new jobs, but will also help boost the ICT sector with the new emerging technologies. There is a strong need for building a strong ecosystem for nurturing entrepreneurship and innovation.

The Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill will also be called to play a more prominent role in the development of the ICT Industries by advising on policies to harness emerging technologies, implement innovative projects and also relating to boosting ICT exports, democratising access to ICTs as well as promoting a digital culture and citizens' empowerment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my two colleagues hon. Dr. Jagutpal and hon. Dhunoo earlier spoke lengthily on how during the COVID-19 pandemic, the power of the ICT has been able to transcend the barriers of place and time and how here in Mauritius and especially with the Ministry of ICT, we have been able to develop so many applications and also help our citizens during this difficult time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the value creation that ICT makes possible even when people are dispersed, presents an exciting new possibility. It can actually harness the independence and will of an individual and connect individuals together, thus enabling the formation of a value chain in

which individuals can share the values and integrate them with others to create enhanced value across virtual spaces.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we speak of digital literacy, which is one of the major proponents of this Bill, I would however like to urge on a word of caution here. It is a fact that our kids spend sometimes whole days and nights on their iPads, tablets and other technological devices, even mobiles. But Mr Speaker, Sir, the extent of misinformation, disinformation and fake news, that child reading or watching things online cannot also just be like a sponge soaking in anything. Moreover, that child may not be aware of all the dangers lurking out there. We all know, for instance, about the recent sad telegram incident and currently the growing number of cases of cyber bullying, cyber harassment, cyber violence and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one cannot throwaway the fact that there may be many dasted individuals with malevolent intent surfing the digital space. And there are so many victims; some who speak up and some who suffer in silence and some who even unfortunately *commettent l'irréparable. Oui, M. le président, le suicide ! Nos enfants ne sont pas à l'abri des agressions de toute sortes avec des mécréants et on ne peut ranger trop vite aux confins de notre mémoire collectives ces mots qui rendent notre société de plus en plus vulnérable, M. le président.*

I had said it earlier during my intervention on the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Bill that here on this side of the House, we do not wish that it be late over tomorrow, we will lose one of our children to suicide. So, in fact, I make an appeal to the media too that they fulfil their roles in terms of being safeguards to generate awareness on all the above and to help inculcate the inbred sense of responsibility that internet users on social media should operate with. This is also why this Government has been coming up with a series of legislations and hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie said it right but the perception was not right, such as emerging technology bills, Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Bill and today, this Bill. I also urge the social media platform owners to own up to their responsibilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if anyone of us here, for instance, post music or videos beyond a certain duration, the post can be removed as there are copyright issues but the post about human beings using, for instance, our pictures without our permission or consent, then what about body right issues? What about human dignity issues?

In the recent past, a whistle-blower explained how even if there is harm speech or content of abusive nature, as long as it is bringing money to them, Meta has no goodwill to act and also decried the inability of the moderators to deal with language issues, because if they change the algorithm to be safer, people would spend less time on the site which will in turn generate less returns for the company. I cannot say if this is true but it remains an undeniable fact that posts in social media with abusive content, hate speech have stayed online for a long time causing immense turmoil to many victims.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will have to sum up. So, I will just move to the last part. As we debate to the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill today, it is imperative that we draw a parallel between our build-up as human beings as of now and to how much humanness will remain in us when artificial intelligence will be in full application within the next few years or if not months.

Since the dawn of the civilisation, we have acquired across time our experiences and our perception of reality through what I call a ‘cultural prism’. So, our social, political and economic views have been shaped by media more so today by social media and through our interactions with our fellow human beings. Now through this digital revolution, we shall find ourselves and our younger generation believing and reacting inside hallucinations of nonhuman intelligence. In other words, we shall without even being aware of it hand over our power to influence choices, behaviour and even our very humanness to some artificial digital agent, euphemistically called artificial intelligence.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much! Hon. Bodha!

(6.54 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My question is: can we go to Google today and say “tell us what are the incentives if you would like to set up a centre in Mauritius which could be the launch pad of IT in Africa?” This is the question! Can we play in that league? Can we be another Estonia?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am putting this question because there are two extremely important dates: 1988 and 2000. You know in 2000, Minister Dr. Jagutpal raised this issue of the then Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth going to meet Prime Minister Vajpayee and coming back to Mauritius with Rs1 billion to start a cyber-city where there were 50 acres of sugar cane in Ebène.

In that year, we were talking about Infosys starting a centre in Mauritius; we were talking about Satyam, another Indian giant, coming to Mauritius to set up a laboratory and to help Mauritius to launch its IT Industry. In the period just after 2000, we were talking of the Indian Institute of technology (IIT) to set up a branch outside Mauritius so that the most brilliant students of Mauritius could be able to be *les soldats de la révolution digitale*.

But what has happened, Mr Speaker, Sir? What has happened down memory lane? In 1988, we have the Bill to set up the NCB and I read what was said by some of the Ministers then. You had the Minister Malherbe who said that –

« Ce qui nous fait dire que tous nos efforts doivent être utilisés afin que l'ordinateur trouve sa place, une place adaptée dans un secteur qui doit continuer à rester notre sauvegarde pour l'avenir et pour nos enfants »

And the Bill – as this was also mentioned – was presented by hon. Luchmeenaraidoo, the Minister of Finance. I think hon. Dr. Boolell was in the Government and the then Minister of Education, hon. Parsuramen with pride mentioned, that we had at the University, 16 IBM compatible computers, a BBC network with 12 terminals and a mini network with 16 terminals.

And then he said if we are paving the way for a new informatics culture, we are also paving the way for Mauritius to become a reference centre for the region and in summing up, Minister Lutchmeenaraidoo had said that we are doing it for the region, we want to be the key player and he said –

“I said in the past that Mauritius should become a locomotive that will pull the other countries in the region and most especially, in the East African region.”

What has happened Mr Speaker, Sir? 1988 to 2000?

In 2000, the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, went to India. He came back and I remember the Indian Minister, Mahajan, who came here for the laying of the foundation stone of the Cyber city he said in his speech –

“Your forefathers came in a boat and landed at Aapravasi Ghat. If you want it, tomorrow I can send you a plane of IT Engineers for you to be able to set up what can be set up and for Mauritius to become the launch pad of the IT industry in this area.”

What has happened? Why has our digital revolution fizzled out? Why is it that today, we are still at the lower end of the industry instead of being at the higher end of the industry? We know that 50% of jobs that are going to be created in the IT industry in the next 10 years are not yet even structured or even known. So, if you want to play in that league, we should be able to know what we have to do.

Let me now take two examples. The hon. Minister rightly mentioned Estonia and Rwanda. You know Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2000, Rwanda was reeling, standing up after a genocide of 1.2 million people whilst we were setting up the Cybercity. Estonia had just come out of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the one competitive advantage they had was that the KGB backup and database were in Estonia. So they had this competitive advantage to start with the IT sector. Where are Estonia and Rwanda today? Where are we today? And we are saying that we have to catch up!

Let me tell you one thing about Estonia. In that country, 99% of all government services are provided online. 98% of medical prescriptions are issued digitally and 99% of the population has an electronic ID. And the electronic ID is given to the baby as soon as he is born.

What are the main features of the Estonia policy? I think I am giving some ideas. I am giving some food for thought to the Minister and to the Government –

- 1) To make data move, not people. So people should not move to have the data. People should be able to have the data where they are.
- 2) Capturing and sharing the data between ministries. Let us take the SME sector. You have so many schemes, so many facilities but then you have to run after each one, offered by different institutions.
- 3) You have to put the technology at the service of the citizen and to be bold. That is why I said why can't we ask Google to come and set up a Centre in Mauritius?

To build the right digital Government is not only about technology but it is also about education. I will say a few words on that and to bet on digital inclusion to reach all corners of the community and the country and also to address the issue of Cybersecurity of course. But also to be transparent and honest with the citizens as regard to data about the country and about the schemes that are available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, Rwanda want to reach a service-oriented economy and this is what they have in the National Development Goals. They have set up a Digital Transformation Centre which advises the Government on the development of digital solutions in line with regional needs. And let me tell you one thing Mr Speaker, Sir, IT initiatives there relate to entrepreneurship, that is small and skilled industries, artificial intelligence, online platform, e-learning, blended learning. Mr Speaker, Sir, do you know that in Rwanda, drones are used to carry blood to the different remote areas of the country?

Now, that is what I am saying, that somewhere we have failed. We are all responsible for this. We should know why we have failed. What has happened? Why is it that we started so ambitiously, so big and we ended up where we are today whereas countries which have started many years after us are well ahead? How do we catch what we have lost? And it is not one authority which we will do that. We need drive. We need vision. We need to carry the country. We need a new culture of IT since childhood up to the time when you can use all the services which are provided.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me take three examples where I have personally been involved. I wanted to set up, as Minister of MPI and Land Transport, a cashless system for buses, metro, taxi which exists everywhere in the world in every big city. I was unable to do that for 5 years with local Consultants, with all the institutions of the Ministry of Information and Technology and with PricewaterhouseCoopers consultants from India. For five years, I battled and have not been able to set up a cashless system with a card where you can move from the bus to the taxi, from the taxi to the metro.

Second, where I was involved personally, the EDMS System at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; that is, the paperless system where you share all the information. The one ministry where the EDMS System can work beautifully is the Foreign Affairs because we need to give information and data spontaneously wherever we are. For example, formerly we would go to the High Commission in London and read the newspapers which have been sent there a week later or fifteen days later when we were students but today, it is spontaneous. It's now. So that was a Ministry where the EDMS system could be implemented and has to be implemented.

Now, the hon. Prime Minister signed an agreement with the Prime Minister of Estonia in New York. Two teams of Estonia came here and for 3 years, we have not been able to set up the

EDMS System while this system is already operating in other places. So, there is something wrong somewhere and I would ask the hon. Minister to understand there is inefficiency – this multiplication of resources. Why are we lagging behind when we have all this?

I am going to take another example – the online courses for education during the COVID-19. It was a total disaster. We know this. And, we know what happened in the schools. We know what happened for children who didn't have computers, who were not connected to the internet. Why? We have the means today, but that was a total disaster. The e-Health, I passed a question to the hon. Minister. We have been fighting to have an e-Health card since 3,4,5 years. What happens? Somebody goes to the Dispensary in the morning; he consults a Doctor, he has some medicines and then in the afternoon, he goes to the hospital and we start the whole process again whereas, with the e-Health card, it would have sufficed for us to print the name and we would have known where he has gone and all about his medical history.

So, with the e-Health card and the family doctor, the whole health system would be totally different Mr Speaker, Sir. So, I have given four examples. One – cashless system, because the Government is spending about Rs2 billion with the transport subsidy; the EDMS, I took one example; the COVID-19, I took another example and the e-Health, I took a fourth example. So, why are we lagging behind? Why can't we do all this? Because, we have the means and the resources today.

Now, we have about more than 300,000 of contraventions that people have to go and pay in the courts. If we had an online payment system, you would have paid your contravention at home. If we had an online payment system, you would pay your contravention at home. There was an article today saying that: *les transactions mobiles, la valeur totale des transactions est supérieure à R 4.4 milliards*. But how many Government services can we access with *la transaction mobile*? I hope that in the future, many of those services will be able to usurp the citizen and he will not have to go to court to pay for his contravention.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, my reflection is what has happened? In 2000, we had the consultants come in from the Software Technical Park of India to set up the industry and there was an engineer called Chaudhary. He was there, he set up the Cybercity and then we had the 35,000 people, which was an achievement, but I am convinced that we could have done a lot better.

Now, what was said then was that - I am asking the Minister whether he can reflect on it - I have been told that only one broadband provider will not attract the international companies because there is no backup and if something happens, how are we going to operate. I have also been told that BPML, at one point, invited Thaicom to come to Mauritius and they did come to provide broadband by satellite, but by the year 2000, they left.

So, we have to think about what has really happened. Why is it that IIT, at one point in time, offered its services to have the most brilliant Mauritian students? Because the IIT engineers were the best in the world and they were being promoted everywhere.

Now, my question is, Mr Speaker, Sir, why are we still at the low end of the IT industry with BPO and with call centres? We started 20 years before. So, why have we not now come up to the higher end of the industry? This is my question to the Minister. I think it is a challenge and I am sure he will be very happy to rise up to the challenge when it comes to Fintech, when it comes to block chain, when it comes to AI modelling. Today, you know, the Artificial Intelligence Modelling Division of the Bank of America is headed by a Mauritian. So, Mauritians have done remarkably well. So, my question is again why can't we now succeed - in what I would I have said – our digital revolution?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the Minister to also understand that we have the –

- (a) Mauritius Emerging Technology Council;
- (b) Mauritius Research and Innovation Council;
- (c) National ICT Advisory Council;
- (d) Central Informatics Bureau, and
- (e) SIL.

So, all these resources, and the question is do we have a coherent vision?

Now, let us address the real issues which are inefficiency, wastage of human and financial resources, overlapping roles of agencies. I am sure that we have to find the solution, and the solution is not the setting up of an authority. We need a structure, a driving force, to be able to have the dream that Mauritius can become a place where Google is, as I started by saying.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no economic restructuring will be possible or realistic in today's world without having a clear vision and a strategic focus on how to integrate technology in our reinvention process in each key sector of our economy and in the public sector itself.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister should have dedicated more time with the officers of his Ministry and other relevant stakeholders to chart out the best and most efficient digital strategy for the country. So many areas are yet to be digitalised, I mentioned some of them.

The expected outcome of a thorough strategic thinking, Mr Speaker, Sir, such a process would have surely allowed the hon. Minister to have a clearer view of the current inefficiencies and the urgent need to rationalise and optimise the roles and functions of the different agencies and councils under his Ministry.

We have a very competitive landscape today, Mr Speaker, Sir. The competitive landscape is getting more and more complex and Mauritius cannot keep coming up with weak initiatives as a facade to a so-called endeavour to show innovation. It requires a much deeper, bolder and thorough review and revamping of our fundamentals and decision making process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude I would like to say that the clouds are there for us to reach them. We should be bold and we should have the drive to do it. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Bholah!

(7.13 p.m.)

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favour of the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill (MDPA). A Bill put forward by my colleague, Hon. Minister Balgobin, a Bill which is a step forward to support the digital agenda of Government to further transform our economy and society.

Mr Speaker Sir, there is a familiar proverb which goes, –

“Necessity is the mother of all invention.”

This means that each of our needs, big or small, is a driving force to put out an effort and work hard to meet them. Human beings have always been associated with developing creative solutions to solve problems and make life easier.

I will require the House to bear with me as I take you back to the journey to help us understand the growth and progress of technology through the times and the importance of being constant and relevant to meet challenges.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1822, the mathematician, Charles Babbage, began developing what would be the first mechanical computer. Then, in 1833, that is, 11 years later, he actually designed an Analytical Engine which was a general-purpose computer.

Then, more than a century later, we got our first electronic computer invented by John Mauchly and Presper Eckert. The very first laptop was introduced by Adam Osborne and EPSON in 1981. In 1973, Motorola invented the first portable cell phone. The device was shaped like a brick and weighed around 2.4 pounds. The younger generation would often refer that to *'bar savon.'*

As we moved into the 90s, cell phones became smaller, but mightier in terms of functions. The first-ever text message was developed by Vodafone in 1992. The first-ever touchscreen phone was introduced in 1994 by IBM. 1999 was the year of major innovations for mobile phones with the introduction of functions like GSM, internet browser, MP3 player and camera.

By the turn of the millennium, mobile phones were equipped with more features like radio, calendar and bluetooth and in 2007, the first iPhone was launched. A year later, HTC Dream, first android phone was launched. Since then, the development of new devices and features has always been so eventful; eventful to the point that we now have control of our daily tasks in the palm of our hand.

So, we now have access to devices which are more powerful, functional and fast in speed. Looking back, we can say that technology has given us new capabilities to collaborate, connect and create.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to share my own personal experience. It was back in early 1980's when I started my professional career in The Accounting and Finance Department which is now a big organisation.

We were a team of around 7 to 8 persons, a team doing the usual accounting and financial functions over there and the only equipment we had at that time was a handheld calculator operated by batteries, which means that at frequent intervals we had to change the batteries and

the Procurement Department had to supply these batteries. A few years later, by 1983, we had our first PC, a single PC for a team of 7-8 staff. The supplier sent someone at the same time to install but also to train us. The first application that we were using was – I don't know if people might recall – Lotus 1-2-3 which was meant more to work on spreadsheets.

And then, we got a second computer, a third computer and once, someone said that a day will come when each and every one will have a personal computer on his desk. We did not trust him but the reality is that today almost everybody has a PC on his desk. Even tables, because at the time we had big computers with the CPU laying on the floor, a massif screen and the keyboard. Even tables were then designed and made in order to house those equipment. Today, we have got smaller computers, laptops etc. but in fact, any single computer that goes down, the person stops working. This is the widespread use and necessity of computers today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at that time, then the computer vocabulary came into life. We were then talking about CPU, keyboard, RAM, ROM, disk, memory, bugs, garbage in garbage out (GIGO). We started learning all these things at that time. And just see what changes computerisation and digitalisation have brought. At that time, because I am a chartered Management Accountant, we were working with our computer tables; there were no computers. So, whenever we had a computation to do, say regarding a loan and we have the amount of loan that anybody would borrow, given the rate of interest and the length of time for payment, we had to go to our tables and apply our calculators in order to come up about the monthly instalment. But look today! We have the application on the internet and many leasing companies and insurance companies have this application and anybody, even a layman, can just fill in the figures – the amount of the loan, the interest rate and the length of payment and you get the result. These are the wonders of computer today. Hon. Aadir Ameer Meea will concur.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot stem progress but we can embrace it. Technology will continue to evolve and we must keep improving. In this Bill, clause 4 specifies that the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency will strengthen the ICT sector by supporting innovation and by ensuring a pool of skilled professionals. The MDPA will also help Government in developing and implementing the right policies for the ICT sector to be a driver of economic development.

I understand that the operations of the National Computer Board will be taken over by the new agency as detailed in clause 26 of the said Bill. It does not amount to a simple change of

name. Going through the functions of the MDPA listed in clause 5, it is clear that the new agency has a broader mandate to cater for the latest developments in the socio-economic landscape.

It is also to be pointed out that the setting up of the National Computer Board dates back to 1988, that is, before the arrival or well after the arrival of the personal computers in different organisations. 35 years later, the ICT industry deserves a new impulse in the wake of globalisation as multi-faceted challenges have emerged.

Mr Speaker, Sir, three years back, at the end of 2019, no one could have foreseen the millions of infections, hundreds of thousands of deaths from a deadly virus, nationwide lockdowns, recurring waves of infections, huge numbers of shuttered businesses and rising unemployment. One important reality that we must come to terms with now is this: we are not returning to a pre-COVID-19 world. We should not be preparing for ‘business-as-usual’ or preparing to return to the good old normal.

Geopolitical tensions and climate change crisis are also major threats to the resilience of the global economy. So, now is the time to re-engineer our processes, reshape our economy and transform to create the right opportunities. And this ultimately goes through empowering our people and embracing digitalisation.

Therefore, this Bill, the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill comes at the right time. This Bill spells out the country’s approach to digitalisation with a clear framework for how we, as a country, can embrace the opportunities offered by digital technologies and future-proof our economy for the years ahead.

Preparing ourselves for tomorrow’s economy and society means seizing the opportunities presented by digital technologies today. For some, this will mean continuing and building upon the digital transformations they have already started. For others, it will mean embracing change. The stage is now set for the next phase of digitalisation in Mauritius, so that we can continue to reap the benefits offered by digital technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened carefully to the previous orator where he mentioned that we have failed. I invite him to look at the progress in terms of digitalisation, computerisation. Certain companies, certain societies and I will mention here what the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) has done it. Look at the different commercial banks placing ATMs in different

remote areas of the country and working on a live system. Look at other companies and corporates that have embraced digitalisation so beautifully.

So, the Bill presented in this House today, Mr Speaker Sir, bears testimony to the fact that we are putting our words into action. I must say that even before COVID-19 hit us, businesses, especially large enterprises, were already embarking on digital transformation but COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of change. We have witnessed advancements and a dramatic uptick in the use of digital technologies. These have proven extremely useful for companies, helping them to respond to disruptions. Digital technologies have given businesses greater visibility and control over their operations, allowed them to develop new business continuity plans and re-organise themselves better for resilience.

Technology has reduced face-to-face interactions, to safeguard employees' and customers' health and well-being during the critical phase of the pandemic. Digital solutions have also allowed companies to offer new products and services, access new markets even without a physical presence, or plug into cross-border data and information flows to gain new insights and ideas.

Customers are also riding this digital wave, globally. We have witnessed a sharp increase in e-commerce during lockdowns. In fact, the global e-commerce market is expected to reach some 6.3 trillion dollars in this year, that is, in 2023 according to Forbes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to emphasise on the importance of digitalisation in the manufacturing sector. It is to be highlighted that production methods have changed radically over the past few years. Industry 4.0 is emerging. Enterprises are moving from a highly labour-intensive set of mechanical processes to increasingly sophisticated technology-intensive processes supported by ICT.

Industry 4.0 technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Automation, Robotics, Industrial Internet of Things, Additive Printing, Augmented Reality and Machine Learning are dominating this era. Manufacturers who lag behind in adopting digital technologies face the danger of being out of business; I am afraid, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Digitalisation has, therefore, become a pre-requisite for our operators to improve productivity, increase efficiency gains and overall competitiveness as well as ensure business

continuity. Our manufacturing enterprises are compelled to demonstrate greater agility and flexibility through adoption of digital technologies to meet customers' exigencies and stay ahead of the curve.

In this drive, Government remains fully committed to accompany our manufacturing enterprises in their digital transformation journey. I can here mention the Modernisation and Transformation Fund of some Rs5 billion at the Industrial Finance Corporation of Mauritius (IFCM) Ltd. The aim is to provide leasing facilities to assist enterprises acquire cutting-edge technologies.

I am also pleased to enlighten the House on a wonderful project on which my Ministry has taken the lead. It relates to a 'Manufacturing 4.0' project with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat. This project aims to assist operators in the manufacturing sector embrace advanced technologies and digital solutions to improve their production systems for greater competitiveness. In the context of this project, a survey is currently underway to assess the level of digital readiness of enterprises. Following the survey, an intensive capacity building programme will be undertaken for a group of selected enterprises for a greater technology uptake.

In a broader sense, let me apprise that a few manufacturing enterprises have already taken meaningful steps to join the digitalisation bandwagon. I can here cite the example of RT Knits Ltd. RT Knits Ltd., a leading textile and apparel enterprise, has been a pioneer in the integration of Industry 4.0 technologies within its production process and related logistics. It has a special production line which is completely digitalised and operating on Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence connected devices.

To make it simple, RT Knits Ltd. can now manufacture a T-shirt with minimal, I say minimal, human intervention. Indeed, its collaborative robots, commonly known as, 'Sewbots' can autonomously cut, stitch, assemble and pack a T-shirt, thereby drastically reducing the need for manpower. This is a major breakthrough which can be emulated by other enterprises for greater productivity gains.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been observed that enterprises today are faced with an ageing workforce and there is a marked unwillingness of youngsters to join the manufacturing sector. In fact, the biggest challenge remains the perception of the manufacturing sector, particularly

among the younger generation. Many youngsters consider that this particular field of activity is characterised by manual jobs and the absence of rewarding career paths, including work life balance.

However, the nature of the work and career prospects are gradually changing in the manufacturing sector. There is prospect for high-skilled job opportunities as and when enterprises take on board digital manufacturing solutions. We have a generation of technology-savvy youngsters who can build knowledge and expertise through digital learning platforms, mobile learning, virtual and augmented reality applications. This novel work model is propitious to attract new blood in the manufacturing sector to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, SMEs face practical issues in raising their digital game. So, I am particularly very pleased to note that in contrast to the National Computer Board Act, the MDPA Bill has made provision for the new agency for the promotion of digital entrepreneurship and this has been canvassed by many interveners who spoke before me. Reference is also made to Clause 5, part (d) of the Bill. The new agency intends to support the development of ICT start-ups. Moreover, it will be very much involved in developing ICT skills related to programs for SMEs. I always seize the opportunity to mention that SMEs contribute 44% of national employment and 35% to gross value added in the Republic of Mauritius. This is very significant, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As at February this year, 568 SMEs operating in the ICT sector were registered at the SME Registration Unit of my Ministry. With the adoption of the MDPA Bill, I sincerely hope that this number will go up. I believe that the ICT Skills development programmes would help SMEs secure the necessary skills required for them to modernise and adopt new technologies and improve their processes. I suppose we all agree and understand that SMEs usually have limited resources.

Much has been said, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Donc je ne vais pas répéter ce qui a déjà été dit* and *donc*, I again congratulate my good friend for bringing this Bill to this House. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(7.34 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Much has already been said by the previous orators on this Bill. Therefore, I shall limit myself to a few points but as per the traditions of the House as you know, it is always good to set the facts the right.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been listening to the Members of both sides attentively and I could say that it has been a very passionate debate. I will start by the hon. Arianne Navarre-Marie who did a beautiful speech and she mentioned about the then Minister or Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, quoting the speech of that hon. Member and during the speech that she delivered, she kept saying ‘that Government’, ‘our Government’, but you know, the ego is there. So, she fails to say that it was the Government of MSM and it was the vision of SAJ for leading such a huge project for the Cybercity which gave the opportunity to Paul Bérenger to deliver that speech. So, I think it would be fair enough to call a spade a spade and come with the facts in this House and state clearly whose project it was and who gave him the opportunity to deliver that speech. Unfortunately, she is not here.

Hon. Bodha who spoke right in front of me delivered a very intelligent speech as well but I read this quote and I think it fits some of them. Like there are some people who believe are born in a generation where apple and blackberry are mere fruits. So, they are not well versed about technology and he started his speech with a question: ‘are we ready?’, ‘are we ready for it?’ So, my answer is yes. We are ready. I think that the facts, the proofs and all that we have been doing are proof and it is tangible. This is why I wonder what he has been following so far.

In June 2021, the hon. Prime Minister, together with my colleague, hon. Balgobin, launched the MIR-SAT1 which is something innovative and creative and something new which has set Mauritius on a map which shows that we do have intelligence here and I was just trying to Google and see whether we have information available, then I could see on 23 January 2023, on ‘Le Défi’, there is a beautiful article about two young boys Keelan Cannoo and Jeevesh Rishi Dindyal where it states –

« Cybersécurité: deux étudiants mauriciens rehaussent la sécurité d’internet. »

These are Mauritians.

So, we are trying to compare us with India, but I can guarantee you that we do have some intelligent people in the digital field in Mauritius as well.

Coming back to my speech now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like once again to congratulate the hon. Minister Balgobin for bringing such a Bill, especially for the youth of this country. I am very pleased and glad to add my name to the list of orators, lending the voice for this Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Bill. It is absolutely, Mr Speaker, Sir, crucial that in this digital age that we set up - I will lay emphasis on this one - a proper framework which would broaden up its duty, especially when we are talking about digitalisation and digitalising the government services.

The hon. Minister of Health has spoken lengthily about the e-health services. The digital space has been evolving, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the past 20 years and there were no major changes brought to the National Computer Board Act which dated since 1989, and this has been mentioned by the previous orators, stating that it is 35 years old and we need to innovate and adapt as well.

Digitalisation, as mentioned previously, is a game changer in today's generation. It is not us, it is not Members of Parliament of this Government who are saying this, but technologists see this as an urgency; it is urgent for us to adopt, to gain a greater result. So, this is why we say that digital marketing and strategizing are the mainstream and the focal point to start with digitalisation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2023, we expect to see continuous growth and maturity in digital capabilities. Businesses are becoming more mature and are adopting some new strategies, as rightly mentioned by the previous speaker, hon. Bholah, when it comes to SMEs and what happened during the pandemic as well. So, we are likely to see a ramp up of new innovations in today's era.

While adding digital capability has been the predominant focus in recent years, customer need, user experience and cost effectiveness must take the centre stage from now on to future proof of digitalising efforts. Therefore, this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a logical step where we talk about evolution. 1989 till 2023, 34-35 years only, with only few amendments brought to a bill. So, I think, it is a logical step to bring a new bill and bring some new ideas, broadening the prospect of such a Bill.

Coming to this Bill, which I think is here to match the technological evolution in which this world is facing, my speech today would be focusing on three main pillars that is –

- (i) the main objects of the Agency which has been canvassed by most of the orators,
- (ii) the powers of the Agency, Part II, Section 6, which has equally been canvassed, and
- (iii) Section 5 of Part II of the Bill, upon which I shall focus my intervention, that is, the functions of the Agency. It clearly mentions that the Agency shall prepare the national upskilling programme; coordinate public-private cooperation; operating certification, collaborate with public sector.

It is all available and detailed in the Bill. But I would like to talk about the functions of the Agency, Section 5 (i), where it states –

“promote and encourage the use of open data at national level.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to focus on this part: ‘promote and encourage the use of open data at national level.’ We live a democratic society where there is easy access to information. However, having said so, I also believe that we need to have means and ways to preserve our data, that is, our information. As mentioned by the British mathematician, Clive Humby, he famously said in 2006 that data is the new oil. Data is the new oil of the digital economy. So, it is not only enough to have data, but one needs to know and have the good data practice as well, a commonly understood language among those who are very techno savvy. So, one needs to have a data practice and needs to understand how to use the information as well.

Therefore, it is very important to know where the data comes from, that is, the provenance of data because as we talk about oil, it has a quality. So, same is for data as well, it has its own quality and if it is wrongly used, it can be very bad for the person and the company as well. This is particularly true because we tend to rely on public domain and on information that we receive as well, and some might just contain mistakes as well. So, I think the provenance of data should be very well understood and this is why, I think, we need to preserve the data as well.

Secondly, what I would like to share with you is the data privacy. My colleague, hon. Ms Teenah Jutton, spoke lengthily about all the data pictures being used, etc. I think one should be able, through the creation of this new Bill, to cater for the data privacy as well. The new board which is going to be formed needs to look after the aspect of what am I allowed to do with his data, that is, the data privacy which is very important.

Another point is data protection. How can I make sure as an individual that I do not lose my information, that I do not lose my data? So, data protection should also be one of the main aspects of the board to look after; how you can protect the data. Data preparation as well, how do I go from simple data to make it useful?

Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to lay the second part of my intervention upon the AI, the field of artificial intelligence, which has seen huge growth in the recent years. I would like here to refer to the article published on the World Economic Forum where it states AI predictions for 2023 and beyond, according to an AI expert, which was published on 26 January 2023. In the said article, Mr Speaker, Sir, they mentioned about the heightened awareness and ethical concerns when it comes to AI. The second part of it is about increased regulatory pressure where it says, and I quote –

“More companies are now cognizant of having to react to the potential conversion of voluntary guidelines into regulations in regulated industries and the potential costs of reactively achieving compliance (...)”

Furthermore, it states that there are companies which will have to invest in systems with model governance in place and for a peace of mind that their systems comply with legal and regulatory obligations. So, for us to innovate, for us to match the digitalised society and the digitalised world, I think, this is a logical step. I keep repeating it that we need to have the proper legal and regulatory setup for such kind of information being available, that is, AI that we can use, and further investments in the space as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleagues have already spoken about the COVID-19, which showed us how digital technologies determined whether or not we can achieve what we wanted to do. But as we say it again, we are very much grateful to the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and the team as well for the good job that they have been doing during the pandemic.

The Internet has been an amazing catalyst for change, innovation and creativity, but those benefits have come at the price of targeted actions designed to cause harm to individuals and institutions. A more familiar tech area to many would be Artificial Intelligence/AI, especially with AI driven Chat Box, ChatGPT gaining attention daily for its ability to generate content from law essays to code as well. When employed effectively, AI brings benefits for businesses and individuals such as increased efficiency through automation of task, better decision making through provision of data driven insights and predictions.

Before concluding, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to set on record my heartfelt gratitude towards the Minister of Technology and also the Minister of Gender because, not more than two weeks before, I had the opportunity to assist to a training session in Ruisseau Rose, Camp La Boue as we say it, in Long Mountain with some 30 elderly people who got the training about how to use technology and there was a gentleman from the National Computer Board who was there together with a team of the Sugar Industry Welfare Fund which hosted that seminar teaching those elderly people how to be tech-savvy. So, I think the Ministry together with the team they are doing very well and they are trying to leave no one behind whether it's the youth or the elderly people. So, I think you are doing a very good job and now this Bill that you have brought here bringing something new will definitely give hope to the younger generation who are more into technology.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed a great start but there is much more to do in the eco system as the technological evolution is very fast. So, this is a significant endeavour on a nationwide scale vibrant digital future for Mauritius and I unequivocally support this Bill.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: MP Dr. Gungapersad!

(7.48 p.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I just heard the previous orator and she talked about setting the record straight. She talked about the ego battle of some. She wanted to be fair enough in her speech. She wanted to call a spade a spade. She talked about Google. Let me call a spade a spade now.

I have listened to the previous orators on the Government side and I feel sad that they willingly and intentionally forgot to mention the first ICT Agreement which was signed between India and Mauritius. For the purpose of record, to call a spade a spade, I am duty-bound to refer to the first ICT Agreement signed by late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2000 when he visited Mauritius as the chief guest upon the invitation of the then Prime Minister Dr. Navin Ramgoolam for the independence of Mauritius.

Fortunately, we are talking about digital promotion and now I am going to read Parliament of India, Lok Sabha Digital Library, I am going to refer to the speech of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee where he talks about his visit to Mauritius, a speech which he gave on 16 March 2000. And what did he say? It is important for us to set the record straight, to call a spade a spade. This is the statement of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lok Sabha on 16 March 2000 –

“Sir, the House is aware, Mauritius and India have enjoyed a very close and traditional friendship. This has been continuously fostered through visits at the highest level. I was invited by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the Prime Minister of Mauritius to be the Chief Guest on the occasion of the first Independence Day celebrations in the new millennium. It is symbolic that 12 March was chosen by the leaders and people of Mauritius as their Independence Day to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi’s Dandi Salt March. This is testimony to their commitment to the values of Mahatma Gandhi and friendship with India. During my visit, three Agreements on bilateral cooperation in the field of trade and commerce, information technology and supply of coastal surveillance equipment with a credit of US \$9 million and a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of oceanography were signed. Through these Agreements, our cooperative ties in these important areas will be further strengthened. Alongside Prime Minister Ramgoolam, I also had the privilege to lay the foundation of an educational-cum-cultural institution named after Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Ilot Village in the Northern part of Mauritius.”

An institution with which I have been professionally linked for several years. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important to call a spade a spade and to set record straight. I hope today

through this speech, I am paying tribute to one of the greatest Prime Ministers of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee for whatever he did for us, for Mauritius in the field of technology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, digital transformation touches all aspects of life and is accelerating at great speed fuelled by progressing computing power, connectivity and increase availability of data and capacities to process it. Digital transformation promises to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and openness of governance to promote sustainability and to increase accountability and civil participation but at the same time digital technologies pose risks to democracy and governance, particular with regard to privacy, data protection and undue surveillance to name just a few areas.

Let me at the start itself refer to the most controversial part of this Bill. I am referring to Section 11 clause (1) –

“The Board may, on such terms and conditions as the Minister may approve, appoint such employee of the Agency as it considers necessary for the proper discharge of its functions under this Act.”

Under this section, the MDPA will provide full liberty and powers to the Minister to approve and appoint personnel, foreign or local consultants, experts of his choice within the Agency. The consequence of such powers will be very detrimental to our democracy and more importantly to our data and digital sovereignty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me quote what the Chairperson of Amnesty International, Mrs Lovania Pertab said in a Press interview –

“We have reached a level of nepotism in Mauritius whereby there is really state capture. Are all those political nominees deserving of the positions they occupy? And when you don’t deserve a position and you are nominated to it, you become very complacent. So many of these nominees are so complacent that there is state capture.”

This is something for everyone to ruminate. When I read Section 11 (1) and Section 5 (f) of this Bill which reads as follows –

“(…) operate a Certification Authority for the promotion of electronic transactions through the provision of digital certificates and e-sign services;”

Then obviously I have a few legitimate concerns. I hope the mover of the Bill will answer the following queries during his summing up:

1. Will he inform the House whether in general, Certification Authorities are operated by Governments or by Independent Private Companies in other countries?
2. Why is this Bill giving the Minister of ICT such powers which do not exist in other countries of the world?
3. What will be the risks of abuse by the Certification Authority?
4. Will this Certification Authority be globally trusted?
5. If ever you tell me that this Certification Authority will be globally trusted, then please be kind enough to inform the House, during your summing up, who will be the other local or foreign parties who will help our local agency to make this Certification Authority globally trusted?
6. Who will ensure that we have a foolproof transparency mechanism so that this Certification Authority is duly audited by other Certification Authorities?

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me refer to Section 4 (b) of the Bill which reads as follows –

“achieve basic ICT proficiency among all population groups;”

If the Agency aims to provide basic ICT proficiency among all population groups, then it should walk the talk. Achieving basic ICT proficiency among all population groups is in itself, a laudable move towards digital inclusiveness. In fact, no one should be left behind in this digital age. If this Agency is going to operate to achieve basic ICT proficiency among all population groups, then only can we pave the way for Digital Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us ponder on how to boost the growth of the ICT sector and achieve basic ICT proficiency among all population. Let us start with formal education. It is interesting to note that Mauritius has always invested in the ICT sector, irrespective of governments or Education Ministers. A number of schemes has been proposed by different governments over the years to transform education using ICT in the educational sector by envisioning e-Education plans and devising projects related to e-Learning. To name a few, we can refer to the Sankoré

Project in 2011, which aimed the digitization of classrooms in schools and private educational institutions with the introduction of technological equipment such as Interactive Projectors and Laptops. In 2014, the Tablet Personal Computer (TPC) Project was launched whereby 24,000 tablets were distributed in all secondary schools. In 2018, this government introduced the Early Digital Learning Project in Grades 1 and 2.

However, unfortunately, many teachers have not yet fully adopted ICT in their mode of teaching. Interactive whiteboards, projectors and other digital tools have not fully integrated our teaching and learning modes. In fact, COVID-19 came as an eye opener and questioned our readiness to embrace online mode of teaching and learning. While almost all fee-paying pre-primary, primary and secondary schools easily and smoothly shifted to a digitalized mode of teaching and learning, public schools faced myriad hiccups. Achieving basic ICT proficiency among all population groups is a laudable initiative and we should join hands to make it happen. The pertinent question is how this will be achieved. Can this be achieved with a low ICT enrollment at secondary and tertiary levels? Out of nearly 18,000 students who took the School Certificate exams in 2022, how many were enrolled for Computer Science? 6,922 took Computer Science at School Certificate level in 2022. How many out of 6,922 obtained a credit in Computer Science? 3,873 only. Out of 6000 students who took part in the HSC Exams in 2022, how many took Computer Science? Only 844. And how many passed the HSC Exams in Computer Science? 619 only. How will basic ICT proficiency among all population groups be achieved when around 600 successfully completed their HSC with Computer Science as their principal subjects?

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the 2020-2021 Budget under item 296(b), promise was made to develop a National e-Learning Platform to connect educators of the Secondary Schools with their students. Where is the National e-Learning Platform? It is important to have a look at other countries which are also engaged in Digital Promotion. For policy making and planning, vicarious experience is a potent source of learning. The problems other countries face, the objectives they seek, the routes that they tried, the results they arrive at and the unintended results they produce, are worth analysis.

We should refer to other countries not necessarily to compete with them. To find out who is number one or such position. We have to pick and choose good practices from elsewhere.

Adopt and adapt those which are most suitable to our current needs. For instance, the ‘one laptop per child at home’ did not lead to any major impact on the incremental growth in student learning in Peru but in Uruguay, it was more successful. In Uruguay, Plan Ceibal, named after Uruguay national flowering tree, was introduced in 2007, as a presidential initiative to incorporate technology in education and help close a gapping digital device in the country. The initiative’s main objective was to promote digital inclusion, graduate employability, a national digital culture, higher order thinking skills, gender equity, and student motivation. Today, Uruguay known as the Silicon Valley of South America has made powerful strides in the ICT sector.

Last year, in August 2022, the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, announced the addition of coding as a subject into its primary and secondary school curricula. This new development made Kenya the first country in Africa to approve coding as a subject of study in schools across the curriculum. Here, I wish to congratulate the National Computer Board (NCB) for pioneering coding in primary schools for around 400 Grades 4 and 5 students through the Children Innovation Learning Program Scheme.

However, the Digital Youth Empowerment Program for secondary school students is being implemented in a piecemeal way. The Digital Proficiency Course in collaboration with University of Mauritius launched a 6-months project, 2 years ago; a 6-months project 2 years ago and it has not been completed to date. This is the problem in this country. I hope the Digital Promotion Agency will look for enablers, for solutions and will help to promote digital literacy in our cyber island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the mover of the Bill mentioned that digital literacy has increased from 51.3% in 2010 to around 60% in 2021. We still have to work hard to achieve basic ICT proficiency among all population groups because as at today, 4 out of 10 Mauritians are not digitally literate. We still have to come to an acceptable definition of digital literacy. Who is digitally literate and who is not? Does handling a digital device amount to digital literacy? Broadly speaking, we may agree that digital literacy is about being able to critically evaluate the flood of information available through digital media.

Here, I would like to pay tribute to thousands of Mauritians who earn their living by being involved in the digital sector, albeit informally. I have in mind those who repair our mobile

phones, those who have the dexterity to repair our laptops, our computers or most of our digital gadgets. Do you realise many of them have not even followed a formal training? Many of them are in this sector in an informal capacity? According to multiple studies and position papers by UNICEF, the school-to-work transition is not linear in the informal sector as young people may be studying while holding jobs and may go back to school after work start off in irregular employment and then transition to regular employment.

Workers in the informal sector might need an enabling ecosystem to improve their skills needed at the workplace to overcome weaknesses, understand and manage barriers. This informal sector is not homogeneous and the different levels of accessibility, affordability, capacity, ability and strength, age, sex, disabilities, ethnicity and economic status are also key factors to be considered. A one size fits all solution cannot work. We cannot afford to have a digital divide in our cyber island where Mauritians are excluded from the access, use and benefits of digital ecosystem. Digital inclusiveness has to become a reality in our cyber island.

Intervening during the G20 Summit held in Bali last year, the current Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, rightly pointed out that the digital transformation should not be confined to a small part of human race and its greater benefits will be realised only when digital access becomes truly inclusive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, 21st century citizens do not only need social and emotional intelligence and skills, but they also need digital skills and proficiencies. Education systems, I mean both formal and informal education, for the literate and those who are not educated, need to take an inclusive and holistic approach to ensure access to the most economically and socially disadvantaged Mauritians and help foster the skills that all Mauritians need.

Mr Speaker: Conclude!

Dr. Gungapersad: I am concluding. Allow me to conclude it now. We have many challenges facing the digital sector –

- (a) lack of competitive and high skilled local labour force;
- (b) low ICT enrolment at secondary and tertiary levels;
- (c) lack of rewards and incentives for quality work;
- (d) lack of women participation in the digital sector;

- (e) lack of digital entrepreneurial culture;
- (f) lack of digital infrastructure, and
- (g) lack of funding.

Those who will pilot the agency will have to handle all these. Thank you for your kind attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Teeluck!

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday, 09 May 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Adjournment matter!

MATTERS RAISED

(8.10 p.m.)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 1 - AERIAL FOOTBRIDGES MAINTENANCE

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête de ce soir s'adresse au vice-Premier ministre et ministre des Collectivités locales et elle concerne deux passerelles piétonnes aériennes qui se trouvent dans ma circonscription et qui se trouvent à environ un kilomètre l'une de l'autre. La première passerelle se trouve à Résidence Vallijee et la deuxième dans ce qu'on appelle communément le quartier de Venus.

M. le président, ces deux passerelles sont très régulièrement dans un état d'insalubrité déplorable. Certes, je dois reconnaître que c'est à cause de l'incivilité de certains, mais aussi la faute d'un entretien régulier. De plus, ces deux structures sont dépourvues de lumière, ce qui crée un sentiment d'insécurité surtout lorsque les piétons les empruntent en soirée sans parler de certaines parois qui ont été arrachées notamment à Vallijee et qui permet à l'eau de pluie d'inonder les passerelles lors de grosses averses.

Puis-je solliciter l'intervention du ministre auprès de la municipalité de Port Louis pour un meilleur entretien et pour l'amélioration de ces deux passerelles ? Et je termine avec une suggestion, celle d'un éclairage des passerelles via des panneaux solaires. Merci.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun): M. le président, je transmettrai la requête de l'honorable membre à mon collègue, le vice-Premier ministre. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

(8.11 p.m.)

MONTAGNE LONGUE HOSPITAL – CORRIDOR AMENITY

Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable Dr. Jagutpal, le ministre de la Santé. Le couloir qui mène vers les urgences de l'hôpital Montagne Longue n'est pas couvert. Du coup, quand les véhicules ou même les ambulances déposent les patients, ces derniers ne sont pas protégés de la pluie en cas de mauvais temps. Je demande donc au ministre de bien vouloir faire couvrir ce couloir afin de protéger les patients ainsi que ceux qui les accompagnent afin qu'ils soient protégés en cas d'intempéries. Merci.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Thank you, hon. Member for addressing this question. In fact, two weeks back, we visited Montagne Longue Hospital where we inaugurated a Tobacco Cessation Clinic. I have already taken up this matter with hon. Minister Hurreeram. We are going to have a meeting on the project implementation tomorrow. You are invited to join us and then we can discuss this project in that meeting.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

(8.12 p.m.)

PAGODA & AIL DORE STREETS –SPEED BUMPS INSTALLATION

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, if I can catch his attention, thank you. It relates to a dangerous junction, that is, the crossing of two streets which is found in my Constituency, namely la Rue Pagoda and la Rue Ail Doré, which is found in Plaine Verte next to the Masjid Al Aqsa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this junction is a very busy one due to the commercial nature of La Rue Pagoda and also the fact that Masjid Al Aqsa is in the corner of those two streets, that is, Ail Doré and Pagoda streets. Therefore, on behalf of the inhabitants of Plaine Verte and the public in general, I am making an appeal to the hon. Minister if *des ralentisseurs de vitesse*, that is, what we call speed bumps, could be installed in order to avoid the risk of accident. Thank you.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, my hon. colleague will appreciate that this issue pertains to the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, but I will convey the message to the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

(8.14 p.m.)

POUDRE D'OR HOSPITAL COMPOUND - CLEANLINESS

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable ministre de la Santé, le Dr. Kailesh Jagutpal. C'est une requête de la part de certains patients de ma circonscription qui ont séjourné à l'hôpital de Poudre d'Or souffrant de maladies respiratoires ces derniers temps. Alors, c'est une requête non seulement pour les habitants de ma circonscription, mais de la part de tous ceux qui visitent cet hôpital, qui y séjournent et qui demandent à ce qu'il y ait plus d'entretien dans la cour de l'hôpital.

C'est un hôpital qui se trouve en bord de mer et qui offre une belle vue sur le lagon de Poudre d'Or. Ce serait bien de pouvoir faire un travail d'élagage et de nettoyage. Certains en ont parlé au président du Conseil du district de la région, mais il faudrait apparemment tomber

d'accord avec le ministère de la Santé. Donc, je demanderai humblement à mon collègue, l'honorable ministre, de faire le nécessaire. Merci.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Poudre d'Or Hospital, which I visited probably end of last year, at that time, the compound was clean. So, I will look into the matter about the cleanliness of the compound.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(8.15 p.m.)

B3 CLASSIFIED ROADS - DRAINAGE SYSTEM & PAVEMENTS REHABILITATION

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, hon. Hurreeram. It concerns the drainage system and pavements along the B3 classified road, the Candos-Vacoas Road passing through Candos, Paillotte, Bonne Terre, which are now obsolete and major rehabilitation works need to be done over there because after every heavy rainfall, it become impracticable for the inhabitants and the users of the road. The drains and the pavements are out of date. If you could kindly use your good office to liaise with the Road Development Authority so that remedial works could be done at the earliest. Thank you.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleague will agree that there have been some huge works that have been done in the vicinity of La Caverne. During last Mahashivratri, we have upgraded some. Of course, there is still a lot to be done and we will take note and we will make sure that this happens next financial year. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(8.16 p.m.)

UPPER CREVE COEUR – ROAD – LAMENTABLE STATE

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, hon. Hurreeram. It is on behalf of the inhabitants and users of

Lallman, Upper Crève Coeur till Pieter Both Store, on behalf of the councillors and users of the road. There were some major works which were undertaken by a contractor, leaving the road in a lamentable state, as we say.

So, I shall be grateful if the hon. Minister could look into the matter urgently as the road is not so easy and not accessible for the inhabitants and this is causing a huge problem for the inhabitants of Crève Coeur. Thank you.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): I will look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(8.17 p.m.)

VALLÉE PITOT & TRANQUEBAR – WATER SUPPLY ISSUES

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Energy and Public Utilities regarding irregular and sometimes no water supply at all along certain streets of Vallée Pitot and in Bangladesh in Tranquebar. If I were to list out the streets, it will take a long time but suffice it for me to say that I have been regularly in touch with the Public Relations and Communication Officer of the CWA and sometimes with the technician on call for the region and they are fully aware of the specific streets that I am referring to. So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister if he could ask the General Manager of the CWA to look into these water supply issues. The last time we had a major issue was on Eid day when many people could not even go for prayers because they could not take a normal shower on that particular day and had to call for *camion citerne* and it came quite late, actually.

Thank you.

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Mr Speaker, Sir, this has been brought to my attention and I did follow the situation during Eid day to ensure that there were water tankers giving the inhabitants of certain regions of Vallée Pitot where they were affected, water. But since then, I have requested the CWA to look closely into the matter and see where the problems are and bring solution so that the inhabitants be provided with adequate water.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(8.19 p.m.)

MARE LA CHAUX – SPEED CAMERA

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

My request tonight is addressed to hon. Alan Ganoo, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail and it concerns the village of Mare La Chaux which is in my constituency – a small village but with a very high traffic flow and very often the vehicles there run at very high speed. So, my request on behalf of all the inhabitants to the hon. Minister tonight is if he can place a speed camera in the vicinity of the Mare La Chaux Government School, after the Mare La Chaux Government School, going towards Belle Mare.

Thank you.

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of the request from hon. Nuckcheddy and I shall convey same to my colleague responsible for this matter. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(8.20 p.m.)

JAMES TOOLSY GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – NEW TOILET BLOCK

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

My request is addressed to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun. Myself and my colleague, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister have got a request on behalf of the Parents-Teachers Association of James Toolsy Government School.

I would also like to thank Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun for the good work being done in the constituency with regard to Robinson Government School, but we have got a request for a new toilet block. I know the Ministry is already doing what it can to help with regard to the construction of the new toilet block. Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been made aware that we have already started working with the MNI for putting up a new toilet block in the school.

(8.21 p.m.)

MÉDINE, MONT IDA, BEL ETANG, UNITÉ & CAMP DE MASQUES – MUDDY & BROWN TAP WATER

Mr M. Z. Nazurally (Second Member for Montagne Blanche & Grand River South East): My request is addressed to the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities. In fact, since a couple of weeks there have been issues with running water from the tap. The water appears to be muddy and brown. I have contacted the Chairman of the CWA and he has reassured that he shall look into the matter. However, over the last few days the water coming from the tap has still been a little bit brown and muddy. I humbly request the hon. Minister to use his good office to look into the matter. It concerns the regions Médine, Mont Ida, Bel Etang, Unité and Camp de Masques.

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of the concern of the hon. Member with regard to muddy water in the taps in the regions of Médine, Camp de Masques and around. I shall convey same to the General Manager of the CWA for him to find a solution to the problem.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting.

At 8.22 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 09 May 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**DRUG TRAFFICKING & DRUGS USE – CHILDREN INVOLVED – POLICY**

(No. B/299) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to children involved in drug-trafficking and drugs use, he will state Government policy to tackle same.

Reply: As the hon. Member surely knows, and I must recall the umpteen times I have, in no uncertain terms in this august Assembly, stated unequivocally our unflinching fight against drug traffickers, our relentless determination to rid the State of Mauritius of the drug hydra, and our no retreat no surrender stance in our steadfast objective of weeding out from our land and our shores the seeds of death and decay, and the merchants of destruction and death. I must also repeat that my Government is and remains fully alive to the threat faced by our citizens, particularly the young, the unsuspecting and the vulnerable, and we are indeed particularly sensitive to the plight of many families whose children have fallen into the traps of drug barons and of their henchmen, peddlers and predators.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that between January 2000 and Thursday 20 April 2023, no child has been reported or arrested for the offence of drug trafficking. However, a total of six hundred and three children have been reported for unlawful use of drugs.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that whenever a person, including a child is found or reported to be under the influence of illicit drugs or reported for illicit drug offences, police enquiry is initiated forthwith. Depending on the facts and circumstances of a case such as age of accused, the amount of drugs seized, the involvement of other accused parties and the absence of responsible party/legal guardian to take charge of the child, such a person can be arrested and detained and a provisional charge lodged against him or her.

However, with the coming into operation of the Children's Act 2020, with effect from Monday 24 January 2022, arrest and detention of a child under the age of 18 are resorted to as a last resort. The Probation Office is requested to make an assessment of and to submit a report on such a child. Following completion of this process and of the enquiry, the case is referred to the Office of Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that combatting drugs is one of the priorities outlined in the Police's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. In this connection, relevant police

actions are multifaceted. These include the implementation of enforcement and preventive measures.

I am also informed that the various units of the Police have conducted about 6,762 sensitisation programmes against drugs in primary and secondary schools as well as in Youth Forums between January 2018 and 20 April 2023.

In addition, I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness that there are 14 different treatment and rehabilitation centres across the island which facilitates access to health services by people who use drugs.

One of these centres, namely the Nenuphar Centre, which was set up in August 2018 at Long Mountain Hospital, is dedicated for minors and young people with substance abuse.

Furthermore, counselling services and activities and psychosocial support are carried out at the Nenuphar Centre by a multi-disciplinary team comprising psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, nursing officers and social workers from NGOs.

As the House is aware, the Government has taken a major policy decision with regard to people who use drugs. Amendments have been brought to the Dangerous Drugs Act with a view to diverting people who use drugs from the criminal justice system towards treatment and rehabilitation.

The setting up of the Drug User Administrative Panel (DUAP), under the Ministry of Health and Wellness, is one of the milestones of my Government in the fight against drugs. The DUAP would enable drug users to be diverted from the criminal justice system towards treatment and rehabilitation services to facilitate their reintegration in the mainstream society.

Additionally, I am informed by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology that the Ministry's Student Behaviour Policy provides for the protocol and guidelines to be adhered to by both the state and private secondary schools in addressing drug-related offences.

That Ministry has also formulated a draft policy framework for Drug Free Schools in close collaboration with key stakeholders such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, ADSU and the Harm Reduction Unit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness with a view to protecting our youth from substance abuse and making every school a safe and drug free zone. Following consultations with the stakeholders, the Ministry is currently reviewing and finalising the draft policy.

**CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – LETTER FROM MRS L. TRUSS –
NEGOTIATIONS**

(No. B/300) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Chagos Archipelago, he will state if the Government of Mauritius has received a letter from Downing Street, London, UK, at the time when Mrs L. Truss was Prime Minister, relating to starting negotiations on the sovereignty issue thereof.

Reply: The International Court of Justice, the United Nations General Assembly and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea have made it clear that under international law, the Chagos Archipelago forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius and that Mauritius is the only State which is lawfully entitled to exercise sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

In its Advisory Opinion of 25 February 2019, the International Court of Justice found that the process of decolonisation of Mauritius was not lawfully completed upon its accession to independence in view of the unlawful excision of the Chagos Archipelago by the United Kingdom from Mauritius in 1965. The Court also determined that the United Kingdom is under an obligation to bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible.

While the Rt hon. Elizabeth Truss was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Government did not receive from her any letter relating to starting negotiations on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

When I met the Rt hon. Elizabeth Truss in her capacity as the UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs in November 2021 in Glasgow in the margins of the 26th Session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), I conveyed to her that the United Kingdom should respect the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 25 February 2019, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/295 and the Judgment of the Special Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea of 28 January 2021. She undertook to look into the matter and the way forward.

Subsequently, when the Rt hon. Elizabeth Truss became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I met her on 21 September 2022 in New York in the margins of the UN General Assembly. During that meeting, I had discussions with her on how Mauritius and the United

Kingdom could engage in discussions for the completion of the decolonisation process of Mauritius.

As I had announced to the House on 03 November 2022, following my meeting with former Prime Minister Elizabeth Truss, Mauritius and the United Kingdom decided to begin negotiations on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

Through negotiations, taking into account relevant legal proceedings, it is the intention of Mauritius and the United Kingdom to secure an agreement on the basis of international law to resolve all outstanding issues, including those relating to the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago.

Mauritius and the United Kingdom have reiterated that any agreement between the two countries will ensure the continued effective operation of the joint UK/US military base in Diego Garcia which plays a vital role in regional and global security.

Since my statement of 03 November 2022 to the House, Mauritius and the United Kingdom have held constructive negotiations on 23 and 24 November 2022, 11 and 12 January 2023 and 23 and 24 February 2023 on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

These discussions have led to better understanding between the two sides and covered issues relating to ensuring the continued effective operation of the joint UK/US military base on Diego Garcia, resettlement of the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago, strengthening our cooperation on a range of issues such as environmental and marine protection, improving security and tackling illegal activities in the region, amongst others.

As agreed at the outset of the negotiations, Mauritius and the United Kingdom have taken stock of the negotiations and agreed on next steps. On 14 February 2023, I spoke to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. We welcomed the progress to date and agreed to continue negotiations with a view to arriving at an agreement in the coming months. The dates of the next round of negotiations are yet to be fixed.

**COMMISSION ON THE PREROGATIVE OF MERCY – GRANT OF PARDON
– 2019 TO APRIL 2023**

(No. B/301) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in

regard to the Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission for the period 2019 to date, information as to the number of applications for pardon received and determined, indicating in each case, the nature of the offence.

Reply: The Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy is established by section 75(2) of the Constitution to consider petitions for the following –

- (i) grant of pardon;
- (ii) grant of a respite either indefinite or for a specified period of the execution of any punishment imposed on any person;
- (iii) the substitution of a less severe form of punishment for any punishment imposed, and
- (iv) the remittance of the whole or part of any punishment imposed on any person for an offence or of any penalty or forfeiture otherwise due to the State on account of any offence.

I am informed that the Commission has received 2,511 petitions for grant of pardon for period January 2019 to March 2023, out of which, 2,254 have been granted.

| Year | Petitions Received | Pardon Granted |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2019 | 620 | 557 |
| 2020 | 478 | 443 |
| 2021 | 638 | 597 |
| 2022 | 591 | 518 |
| January to April 2023 | 184 | 139 |
| Total | 2,511 | 2,254 |

Information relating to the nature of offence is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

MR A. G. – DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL – INQUIRY

(No. B/302) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the alleged offence of driving a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol by one Mr A. G. on 09 January 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Monday 09 January 2023 at 21.50 hours, Police Officers from the Emergency Response Service (ERS) stopped private car number GN 518 driven by Mr G. G., commonly known as A. G., during a vehicle check exercise at Floréal.

When the Police Officers requested Mr G. G. to produce his driving licence, they noticed that he had a slurred speech and was smelling strongly of alcohol.

On ground of reasonable suspicion that Mr G. G. was under the influence of alcohol, the Police Officers requested him to have to a breath test which he flatly refused. They further requested him to come out of his car, but he resisted doing so.

The Police Officers accordingly informed him that he would be booked for the offences of “failing to provide specimen of breath for breath test” and “failing to provide specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis”. He locked himself in the vehicle and drove away.

The Police Officers looked for Mr G. G. in the region, but he could not be found. Consequently, he was booked for the following offences –

- (i) failing to provide specimen of breath for breath test;
- (ii) failing to provide specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis;
- (iii) driving motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol, and
- (iv) failing to remain stationary as long as required by Police.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Tuesday 10 January 2023, Mr G. G. called with his bar-at-law, Mr V. B., at the Floréal Police Station where he was interviewed. His statement in defence was recorded and he denied that he was driving under the influence of alcohol.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that enquiry has been completed in the case and the file has been submitted to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on 20 January 2023 for vetting purposes.

ELECTORAL PETITIONS 2020 – SUPREME COURT – COUNSEL FEES

(No. B/303) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the electoral petitions entered before the Supreme Court since 2020 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Electoral Supervisory Commission, information as to the amount of fees paid to Counsel in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE OFFICERS – SUSPENSION – 2018 TO APRIL 2023

(No. B/304) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police Officers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof under suspension, since 2018 to date, for alleged involvement in criminal offences, including drug trafficking.

Reply: It is assumed that by the word “suspension”, the hon. Member is referring to officers who are under “interdiction”.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from 01 January 2018 to 20 April 2023, 119 Police Officers suspected to be involved in criminal offences have been interdicted from duty. This includes four Police Officers allegedly involved in drug trafficking.

RIOTS – PERIOD 2005-2009 – REPORTED CASES

(No. B/305) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to riots, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof registered over the period 2005 to 2009, indicating in each case the –

- (a) localities where same occurred, and
- (b) outcome of the inquiry initiated thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

SCRAP YARD, LA TOUR KOENIG – SEIZED COPPER INGOTS

(No. B/306) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the 20 tons or more of copper ingots seized on a scrap yard at La Tour Koenig on Monday 10 April 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the name of the company allegedly involved therein, and
- (b) if the sources thereof have been identified.

(Withdrawn)

DR. N. R., FORMER PRIME MINISTER – SEIZED COFFERS – ITEMS

(No. B/307) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the coffers seized at the Residence of Dr. N. R., GCSK, FRCP, former Prime Minister, in 2015, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the items of illegal nature other than bank note, if any, secured therefrom and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MBC – TV PROGRAMMES STRUCTURE

(No. B/308) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the new structure being implemented thereat regarding the programmes thereof, indicating the reasons therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that there had not been any major changes in the MBC's programming and channel positioning policy since 2013. The only modifications brought in 2013 comprised the addition of two TV channels, namely the *Senn Kreol*, which was positioned as channel 17 and the Bhojpuri channel, which was placed on channel 8.

The situation led to extensive simulcasting and repeats of TV programmes across the various other channels. Consequently, a decrease in audience rating was observed over the past few years.

In order to address the issue of audience rating and in line with its public service mandate, the MBC has, with the approval of its Board, devised and implemented a complete rebranding exercise since 03 April 2023.

The whole rebranding exercise is built around three elements, namely –

- (i) emphasising on the MBC Brand;
- (ii) promoting languages spoken and taught, and
- (iii) grouping of Channel Category.

Presently, the MBC TV channels bear names such as BTV, *Senn Kreol*, Bhojpuri channel, YS TV or Cine TV which do not indicate that they are MBC channels. The new strategy is to use the MBC Brand for all the channels which the MBC offers.

Moreover, with a view to addressing the issue of duplication of simulcasting on various channels which had led to an erosion of TV audiences, the MBC now aims to promote, as far as possible, all spoken languages among its prime channels.

It is in this context that the former *Senn Kreol* has been upgraded to MBC 2 and the former Bhojpuri channel has been promoted to MBC 3. Other language-based channels have also been repositioning for better visibility.

The new strategy also aims to re-arrange the channels such that there are Language-based group of channels and Information-based group of channels. The content of Language-based channel (Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Urdu and Chinese) is being enriched with local programmes and films/serials at prime time (20h00) with the aim of promoting these ancestral languages together with Bhojpuri and Kreol. MBC's content is broadcast in ten ancestral/Mauritian languages on a daily basis.

It should also be brought out that, in response to numerous requests, MBC has integrated French novella soaps in the programming on MBC 2. Similarly, Hindi soaps and Hindi films are also broadcast on MBC 3.

Hence, there has been an uplifting of a number of TV channels, including the former *Senn Kreol* and Bhojpuri channel, language-based channels and the general, sports, educational/learning and entertainment channels, as well as an enrichment of their content with more local production to cater for the multiple needs, tastes, expectations and aspirations of the plural audience.

PRISONS INCIDENTS – 2019 TO APRIL 2023

(No. B/309) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the prisons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to the number of incidents that occurred between rival gangs of inmates thereat since 2019 to date, indicating where matters stand as to the inquiries initiated thereinto.

Reply: I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that since 2019 to date, there has been one incident which was actually a spontaneous fight among some detainees.

The incident occurred on Sunday 02 April 2023 at around noon in one of the association yards of the Central Prison, Beau Bassin where detainees were gathered after their meal had been served. One detainee on remand attempted to snatch from two other detainees' goods purchased by them from the canteen. When they resisted, he assaulted them. Some inmates intervened to prevent this detainee from doing so, but the latter was supported by other detainees who joined in the fight. The Head Prisons Officer, who is on sentry at the Association Yard, raised the alarm to summon assistance. All evening shift Prison Officers, including those in the Prison Security Squad, were immediately deployed to the association yard.

The Correctional Emergency Response Team along with Dog Handlers and Intelligence Officers promptly intervened and the situation was brought under control. The Head Prisons Officer and four other detainees sustained injuries.

I am also further informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that the matter was referred to the Barkly Police Station and that the Police enquiry is in progress. In addition, the Acting Commissioner of Prisons had instituted a Departmental Inquiry to look into the matter

and submit its findings including recommendations and remedial actions. The Report of the Departmental Inquiry has been submitted. The Report has proposed remedial actions as well as made recommendations, and these are being considered.

AIR CONNECTIVITY POLICY – FLIGHTS & ROUTES REDEPLOYMENT

(No. B/318) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether he will state if our air connectivity policy will be redefined to cater for the increase in the number of tourist arrivals and, if so, indicate if –

- (a) the number of flights which will be rehabilitated, and
- (b) there will be re-opening of past scheduled service routes.

Reply (The Prime Minister): As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/626 on 16 July 2019, Mauritius is pursuing a gradual liberalisation of its air access.

To date, Mauritius has signed or initialled Bilateral Air Services Agreement for scheduled air services with the following 60 countries and a Memorandum of Understanding with Dubai as well as three codeshare agreements with Canada, Chile and Japan.

Over the years, existing and new BASAs have been re-negotiated and signed with several countries reflecting a more liberal air access policy. Thus, bilateral provisions have been relaxed to allow for multiple designations of airlines on routes, increase in frequency and capacity entitlements, routing flexibilities and code-sharing possibilities.

I am informed by the Ministry of Tourism that in 2019, Mauritius recorded 1,383,488 tourists, out of which, 1,338,235 arrived by air. The seat capacity deployed by all airlines amounted to 2,473,423.

Following the re-opening of border after the COVID-19 restrictions, EW Discover, FlySafair, Neos SPA, Air Belgium and Vistara have been operating to Mauritius.

I am further informed that the targeted tourist arrival has been set at 1,383,000 tourists to reach pre-pandemic levels. At this stage of 2023, the seat capacity on record amounts to 2,191,719 seats indicating a recovery of 88.6% of 2019 seat capacity.

I wish to also inform the House that the request of Turkish Airlines to operate additional flights over and above their entitlement in the BASA has already been approved.

In addition, Kenya Airways has made a similar request which is presently under consideration.

Qatar Airways and Etihad have also signified their intention to operate flights to Mauritius. However, their authorities will have to sign a BASA with Mauritius so as to have the right to operate scheduled flights to Mauritius.

Government is, therefore, doing its level best to increase the seat capacity of our airlines with a view to achieving our target.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that it is for the contracting parties to designate their airlines in order to re-open the past scheduled service routes. However, in the longer run, if need be, consideration will be given to the planning of additional flights within BASA entitlements or outside BASA entitlements on an exceptional basis.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER – DIAGNOSIS

(No. B/328) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to patients suffering from autism, he will state the reported number thereof as at to date.

Reply: Autism spectrum disorders are a group of conditions characterised by neurodevelopmental impairment manifested in social behaviour and communication deficits. Autism can be detected as from infancy and in some cases in late adulthood.

The abilities and needs of people with autism may vary and change over time since the pathology is in social, behavioural and communication.

While some people with autism are able to live independently, others have severe disabilities that require lifelong care and support. People suffering from autism are often disadvantaged when it comes to their education and job opportunities.

In addition, the demands on families providing care and support can be significant. Societal attitudes and support from local and national authorities are important factors that determine the quality of life of people with autism.

People with autism often suffer from comorbidities, including epilepsy, depression, anxiety, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, and challenging behaviours like sleep

disturbances and self-harm. The level of intellectual functioning is extremely variable and can range from profound impairment to superior cognitive abilities.

Based on the WHO publication on autism dated 29 March 2023, around one in 160 persons in the world has an autism spectrum disorder. Hence, according to this estimate, approximately 7,800 persons may suffer from autism spectrum disorders in Mauritius.

There are 379 patients suffering from autism who are known cases following treatment in our public hospitals –

- (i) 73 at Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre;
- (ii) 37 at Dr. A.G Jeetoo Hospital;
- (iii) 80 at Victoria Hospital;
- (iv) 150 at Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital;
- (v) 5 at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital, and
- (vi) 72 at SSR National Hospital.

Moreover, there are patients suffering from autism who are followed by private medical practitioners. I am informed by Autisme Maurice that the SEDAM (*Service d'Évaluation et de Diagnostique de l'Autisme à Maurice*) has diagnosed around 191 patients suffering from autism from 2018 to date. The SEDAM has diagnosed around 180 individuals from 2012 to 2016.

In total, Autisme Maurice has diagnosed 371 patients suffering from autism. There are many undiagnosed cases of autism as people are still reluctant to disclose or are unaware that they have children who are in fact suffering from autism.

In the context of the World Autism Awareness Day, my Ministry has proceeded with the opening of a first Autism Day Care Centre at Ex-Triolet Area Health Centre under the aegis of SSR National Hospital on 01 April 2022. The multidisciplinary centre provides psychological support to children and adults living with autism spectrum disorders as well as their caregivers. The Centre has an Occupational Therapist who helps them to increase their autonomy and equip them with daily life skills. The Centre also has a Speech Therapist to help people with autism spectrum disorders develop their social and communication skills.

The Autism Day Care Centre became operational on a full week basis as from 30 May 2022. The services available at the Autism Day Care Centre include general consultation, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychiatry and psychology. There are 31 children who follow treatment for autism at the Centre.

NATIONAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN – GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

(No. B/329) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, she will state the work progress in the implementation thereof, since 2020 to date.

Reply: The National Strategy and Action Plan (NSAP) on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) was launched on 25 November 2020, on the occasion of the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

It constitutes strategic, sustained, long-term and multi-sectoral activities designed to address GBV and strengthen the systems that prevent and respond to it.

The NSAP comprises 4 sub-strategies, namely –

- a) change societal norms and beliefs that are against principles of gender equality and equity;
- b) provide priority support services for survivors of gender-based violence while holding perpetrators accountable for their acts;
- c) identify and redress discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender-based violence, and
- d) coordinated monitoring and evaluation.

Under the 4 sub-strategies of the NSAP, there are 60 ‘Outputs,’ 156 ‘Output Indicators’ and 178 corresponding ‘Activities’ which need to be implemented over the period 2020-2024. Lead Agency(ies) and Collaborative Agency(ies) have been assigned for each ‘Output Indicator’ and they are responsible for the implementation of activities falling under their respective purview.

I am informed that since the launching of the NSAP in November 2020 till March 2023, out of 156 output indicators, 90 (57.8%) have been “completed”, 62 (39.7%) are set as “in progress”, 3 (1.9%) have not yet been implemented whilst only 1 (0.6%) action was set as “in mitigation”, as per terminologies used in the NSAP for monitoring achievement status.

I wish to assure the House that my Ministry is closely following up on the implementation of the NSAP.

INFANT MILK – INCREASED PRICE – ACTIONS TAKEN

(No. B/330) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to baby milk, he will state the reasons for the high percentage increase in the price thereof, indicating if Government proposes to take any action in relation thereto.

Reply: The Price Fixing Unit of my Ministry is responsible for the approval of returns of costing in order to determine a maximum retail price through the maximum mark-up system for controlled goods. Currently, 37 products are under price control in Mauritius, of which, 9 are under the Maximum Price (fixed prices), 26 under the Maximum Mark-Up Regulations. Those products are controlled and require the submission of costing returns on the Price Fixing Information System.

As from 01 July 2022, seven essential commodities which were previously under a subsidy mechanism, namely Pulses, Margarine, Edible Oil, Powder Milk, Canned Tomatoes, Canned Fish and Cheese, and five new commodities, namely Pasta, Cereals, Infant Food, Baby Diapers and Adult Diapers, have been placed under the maximum mark-up mechanism. The introduction of those consumer goods under price control is to ensure accessibility of same to consumers at an affordable price and to limit any excessive or abusive increases in their retail prices.

As regards infant food, it has been observed that from January 2023 till March 2023, the maximum retail prices of infant milk powder have been increasing by a monthly average of 5.7%; a rise of 2.7% in January, 8.6% in February, 3.4% in March and 7.8% in April. From an analysis conducted on the import prices of infant milk powder, a monthly average increase of

5.5% has been witnessed. The import cost has increased by 3.1% in January, 8.6% in February, 2.9% in March and 7.2% in April.

The global freight cost has been on a constant fall from year 2022 and for the year 2023, a further decrease of an average of 12.40% has been noted in the Global Freight Index. However, since July 2022 to March 2023, it has been observed that the value of US Dollar vis-à-vis the Mauritian rupee has appreciated about 4.8% in March 2023 as compared to its previous corresponding period in March 2022 and with a monthly appreciation in the value of US Dollar vis-à-vis the Mauritian rupee of 0.4%.

In addition, for the year 2022 and 2023, about 1.53 million of infant milk products have been imported and there are seven importers of infant milk powder. For the year 2023, eight new infant milk products have entered the market.

My Ministry is constantly monitoring the prices of essential commodities and carries out consumer education awareness campaign. In addition, in the context of the forthcoming Budget 2023-2024, my Ministry is looking into different possibilities and alternative mechanisms to protect the purchasing powers of consumers and has engaged in dialogue with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for the possibility of additional support to consumers.

VICTORIA HOSPITAL – MS N. B. DEATH – PEST CONTROL EXERCISE

(No. B/331) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Ms N. B. who passed away on 10 April 2023 at the Victoria Hospital, he will state –

- (a) if she was bitten by a rat in the hospital ward prior to her death and, if so, indicate –
 - (i) the treatment given to her;
 - (ii) if the rat bite caused or accelerated her death;
- (b) when was the last pest control exercise carried out at the said hospital, and
- (c) the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) score of the said hospital.

(Withdrawn)

PSAC & NCE EXAMINATIONS - MINIMUM PASS MARK

(No. B/332) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the introduction of the Primary School Achievement Certificate and National Certificate Education Examinations in 2017 and 2021 respectively, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to the minimum pass marks for each subject thereof.

Reply: The Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) is recognised as a Level 1 Qualification on the National Qualifications Framework and is awarded at the end of 6 years of schooling.

The National Certificate of Education (NCE) is awarded following the end of cycle assessment for the lower secondary level (Grade 9) and is pitched at Level 2 on the National Qualifications Framework.

I am informed by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) that the minimum pass mark for both the PSAC and the NCE Examinations for all subjects is pitched at 30 marks.

MALAKOFF – DRAIN PROJECT STATUS

(No. B/333) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the implementation of the drain project at Malakoff, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

RIVIERE DES ANGUILLES DAM – CONSTRUCTION – CONTRACT

(No. B/334) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Rivière des Anguilles Dam, he will state if the contract for the construction thereof has been awarded and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

**KOLEKTIF RIVIER NWAR – REGISTERED NGO – BOARD COMPOSITION
& SPONSORS**

(No. B/335) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Non-Governmental Organisation *Kolektif Rivier NWAR* (KRN), she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Social Inclusion Foundation, information as to –

- (a) if the said NGO is registered therewith and, if so, indicate the assistance granted thereto since 2016 to date;
- (b) composition of the board thereof, and
- (c) the main sponsors thereof.

(Withdrawn)

RODRIGUES – OFFICIAL VISIT – PURPOSE & OUTCOME

(No. B/336) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the last official visit of his good self and accompanying delegation undertook to Rodrigues, he will state the purposes and outcomes thereof.

Reply: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the delegation that was on official visit to Rodrigues from 14 to 16 April 2023.

I wish to inform the House that the delegation was actually led by the former Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry and comprised representatives of the National Development Unit (NDU), the Road Development Authority (RDA), the Land Drainage Authority (LDA) and the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB).

The main purpose of the visit was to take stock of progress made with respect to projects being implemented by the National Development Unit in Rodrigues and also to follow up and further consolidate the collaboration between my Ministry and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA).

During the visit, the representatives of the RDA made a presentation to the representatives of the RRA on the recommendations of a technical committee which surveyed the roads in Rodrigues in September 2022 for classification purposes. This exercise was carried out in

furtherance of a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the RRA and the RDA in May 2022.

The representatives of the CIDB apprised the Rodriguan Authorities of the introduction of the E-Registration platform for online registration of contractors, consultants, suppliers as well as CAD operators and the need to conduct an awareness campaign among those stakeholders in the industry in Rodrigues.

It was agreed that a team of technical officers from the CIDB would conduct working sessions with the relevant stakeholders shortly and on the same occasion, carry out inspections as well as gather further information in order to develop a strategy to improve service delivery in the construction industry in Rodrigues.

With regard to projects implemented by the NDU and the LDA, discussions were focused on the following forthcoming projects –

- (i) Raising of ford at Mourouk;
- (ii) Drainage works at Anse aux Anglais;
- (iii) Raising of ford at Baie Diamant Phase 1 and Phase 2;
- (iv) Raising of ford at Baie du Nord;
- (v) Drainworks at Accacia;
- (vi) Raising of ford at Baie Topaze;
- (vii) Raising of ford at Rivière Coco, and
- (viii) Drainworks at Quatre Vents/Dandarisse.

A presentation on the preliminary design of the above projects was made to the RRA by the consultant, Servansingh Jadav Partners Consulting Engineers, who was also present.

In view to implementing these projects, a Memorandum of Understanding between the RRA and the LDA was finalised during the visit. Same was subsequently signed on 19 April 2023 in Mauritius during an official visit effected by a delegation from Rodrigues, led by the Deputy Chief Commissioner, RRA.

**MAHEBOURG MUSEUM – BUS SHELTER & LAYBY CONSTRUCTION –
WORKS PROGRESS**

(No. B/337) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the construction of a new bus shelter and layby near the Mahebourg Museum, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, information as to the –

- (a) scope of works;
- (b) cost, and
- (c) work progress thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 VACCINES – EXPIRY DATE & IN STOCK

(No. B/338) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 vaccines, he will state the number thereof presently available in stock, indicating –

- (a) the respective expiry dates thereof;
- (b) quantity thereof having expired since January 2023 to date, and
- (c) quantity to be purchased, indicating –
 - (i) the number thereof, and
 - (ii) reasons therefor.

Reply: I am informed that as at 21 April 2023, there were in stock 174,291 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, of which –

- (i) 106,675 doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccines, and
- (ii) 67,616 doses of Sinopharm vaccines.

In reply to part (a) of the question, the expiry date of the Johnson & Johnson vaccines is August 2023 while the Sinopharm vaccines will be expiring in June/August 2023.

In reply to part (b) of the question, I am further informed that 198,822 doses of donated Pfizer vaccines have expired since 31 January 2023.

In reply to part (c) (i) and (ii) of the question, I wish to inform the House that on 05 April 2023, the WHO Local Office submitted a copy of the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) Roadmap on uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of Omicron and substantial population immunity.

The National COVID-19 Vaccination Committee met on Friday 07 April 2023 and endorsed SAGE Recommendations. Accordingly, the Committee recommended that the following vaccines be procured for administration to the target group –

- 50,000 doses (25,000 doses in 2 batches) of adapted bivalent variant Pfizer vaccines, and
- 5,000 doses of Paediatric Pfizer vaccines.

A survey will be carried out by officers of my Ministry and the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity to determine the number of persons who will be willing to get administered another dose of the vaccine to protect them from COVID-19. Consideration will, thereafter, be given to the procurement of the above vaccines.

CEB BOARD – STAFF & WORKERS PENSION FUND – QUANTUM

(No. B/339) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Electricity Board Staff Pension Fund and the Central Electricity Board Manual Workers Pension Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House obtain information as to the respective quantum of the deficit thereof as at 30 June 2022.

(Withdrawn)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROMOTION – GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

(No. B/340) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to Artificial Intelligence (AI), he will state Government strategy for the promotion, development and adoption thereof in Mauritius, indicating how his Ministry is ensuring that AI systems are developed and used in an ethical and responsible manner.

(Withdrawn)

**GRAND PORT DISTRICT – BENEFICIARIES OF STATE LANDS/PAS
GÉOMÉTRIQUES**

(No. B/341) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the District of Grand Port, he will table the list of beneficiaries of State land/Pas Géométriques thereat since November 2019 to date for both residential and commercial purposes.

(Withdrawn)

BUDGET 2022/23 – DRAINAGE SYSTEM – QUANTUM DISBURSED

(No. B/342) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Rs3.8 billion allocated in the 2022-2023 Budget for the drainage system, he will state the quantum thereof disbursed as to date for the implementation of the said system.

(Withdrawn)

METRO LINE EXTENSION – NORTHERN REGION

(No. B/343) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the proposed extension of the Metro line to the North, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Limited, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

STATE LAND – LEASED PLOTS – DILIGENCE EXERCISES

(No. B/345) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to State land, he will give the list of the beneficiaries of leases of plots thereof since December 2014 to date, including renewal of leases thereof, indicating if due diligence exercises

are carried out prior to the granting of the leases, particularly, regarding the criminal records of the applicants.

(Withdrawn)

**VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES & CHITRAKOOT – FLOOD MITIGATION
PROJECT**

(No. B/346) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the commissioning of a consultancy study for flood mitigation for the regions of Vallée des Prêtres/Chitrakoot, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand.

Reply: The region of Vallée des Prêtres has been declared a high-risk flood prone area by the Land Drainage Authority since April 2021. Accordingly, with a view to addressing the problem of flooding thereat, Benchmark Consulting Engineers Ltd has been appointed as Consultant by the National Development Unit (NDU) for the Design, Supervision and Contract Management for the ‘Construction of Drain at Vallée des Prêtres, Chitrakoot and Upgrading of Latanier River’ project for a consultancy fee of Rs6,935,000.

The Consultant has submitted its Detailed Design Report for the project on 13 March 2023. The proposed scope of works includes the construction of cut-off drains at Vallée des Prêtres and Chitrakoot as well as in the surroundings of Caroline and Caro Lalo. Other works include the replacement of drain covers along Bernardin de St. Pierre with metal gratings and the desilting and enlargement of Latanier River for the effective containment of the water discharged from the cut-off drain.

The Land Drainage Authority has approved the Detailed Design Report on 24 March 2023. The project will be implemented in phases by the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd, depending on site constraints, including land acquisition issues.

PRIME À L’EMPLOI SCHEME – BENEFITIARIES

(No. B/347) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the “*Prime à*

L'Emploi” Scheme, he will state the number of young persons and women, respectively, having benefitted thereunder since the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

DISABILITY BILL – INTRODUCTION IN PARLIAMENT

(No. B/348) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Disability Bill, in the House, she will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIAN CLUBS – REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION – POLICY

(No. B/349) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the participation of Mauritian clubs in African and other international competitions, he will state the policy of his Ministry pertaining to the financing thereof.

Reply: I would like to inform the House that upon assuming office in 2017, I noticed that only football clubs participating in the CAF Confederation Cup and the CAF Champions League were receiving financial assistance from my Ministry. This lack of fairness was evident, and I consider it to be discriminatory as clubs from other team sports such as basketball, handball, rugby, and volleyball were being left out.

Against this backdrop, my Ministry introduced a new policy in 2018, aiming at providing an annual team grant of Rs100,000 each to clubs participating in the National Leagues of basketball, handball, rugby, and volleyball. Additional funds are also provided, on a case-to-case basis, to clubs participating in competitions at regional and continental levels.

HAMMERHEAD INTERNATIONAL LTD. – LEASE APPLICATION – MACAQUE BREEDING & EXPORT

(No. B/350) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether he will state if the

Hammerhead International Ltd. submitted an application to Rose Belle Sugar Estate for the lease of land belonging thereto to set up cages to trap monkeys of the macaque species for export purpose and, if so, indicate when same was processed and table copy thereof.

Reply: I am informed that on 09 March 2022, Hammerhead International Ltd. submitted an application to Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board for the lease of agricultural land of around 234.32 arpents at Le Val for the purpose of breeding and export of long tail macaque species.

In line with the procedure in place at the Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board and following recommendation of the Business Project Development Committee, the Board approved that a letter of award be sent to the applicant and a pre-lease agreement was signed on 28 September 2022

A lease agreement would have to be signed between both parties within one year of the signature of the pre-lease agreement.

A copy of the application is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

I wish to highlight that one of the conditions of the pre-lease agreement was that it would be the responsibility of Hammerhead International Ltd. to seek all relevant permits from authorities concerned before starting operation, including an EIA Certificate and a license under the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act 2015.

According to records available, I wish to inform the House that as at date, no permit has been issued to Hammerhead International Ltd. by the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) of my Ministry.

I am also informed by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change that till date, Hammerhead International Ltd. has not applied for any EIA Certificate.

I also wish to inform the House that the Livestock and Veterinary Division of my Ministry proceeded for a site visit on 21 March 2023 at Le Val and there were no animal and monkeys on site.

As the House may be aware, a Police enquiry is underway on the subject matter.

STC – RATION RICE – PRICE, CONSUMPTION & STOCK

(No. B/351) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to ration rice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the –

- (a) quantity of monthly consumption thereof;
- (b) buying and selling price thereof, and
- (c) available stock thereof, indicating if -
 - (i) the storage thereof meets the required standards, and
 - (ii) same are good for consumption.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC HOSPITALS – CARDIOVASCULAR PATIENTS – SURGERIES & TREATMENTS

(No. B/352) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public hospitals, he will state the number of –

- (a) patients presently being treated for cardiovascular diseases, and
- (b) heart surgeries carried out thereat over the past five years.

(Withdrawn)

BAIN-DE-ROSNAY – PUBLIC BEACH PROCLAMATION

(No. B/353) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Bain-de-Rosnay, he will state if he is in presence of representations for the proclamation thereof as a public beach.

Reply: I am informed that my Office has indeed received a request, dated 12 April 2023, from a group of fishermen of the region of Bain de Rosnay to declare, as public beach, “the coastal region situated in the District of Rivière du Rempart, known as Bain de Rosnay”.

**MAURITIUS SHIPPING COOPERATION LTD. – CONSTRUCTION
MATERIALS**

(No. B/354) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Shipping Cooperation and other relevant authorities, information as to the quantity of construction materials and other related goods shipped thereto over the year 2022 compared to that of 2021.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. (MSCL), as the national shipping line, assists Government to fulfil its social obligations towards Rodrigues and Agaléga by ensuring shipping connections between these islands and mainland Mauritius.

The MSCL has two vessels, namely, the Mauritius Trochetia, owned by MSCL, which services mainly Agaléga and the Black Rhino, which has been chartered to service Rodrigues.

MV Black Rhino effected its first voyage to Rodrigues on 18 January 2023 and as at date, the vessel has effected ten back to back trips to Rodrigues and a total of 1,713 containers have been shipped to Rodrigues, including –

- (i) 317 containers of cement, and
- (ii) 659 containers of steel products, timber and pipes in PVC.

I would further wish to inform the House that MV Black Rhino is fully dedicated to Rodrigues for conveyance of fuel oil on account of the Central Electricity Board.

With a higher storage capacity of MV Black Rhino than the Mauritius Trochetia, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. has entertained all requests for shipment of commodities to Rodrigues.

In addition to the MV Black Rhino, the Mauritius Trochetia was also assigned two voyages to Rodrigues, while proceeding on her normal trip to Agaléga, with a view to conveying Heavy Fuel Oil on account of CEB to boost stock of these products in Rodrigues.

I wish to assure the House that there has been no disruption of supply of commodities to Rodrigues since January 2023 and there is normal business regarding trade between Mauritius and Rodrigues.

I am informed that the main exporters of cement to Rodrigues are Kolos Cement Limited and Cementis Mauritius Ltd. while the main exporters of steel and iron bars are Sunkur Steel Mauritius, Samlo Koyenco Ltd. and Kosto Limited.

I am placing the requested information regarding the quantity of construction materials and other related goods shipped to Rodrigues for years 2021 and 2022, respectively in the Library of the National Assembly.

STATE LAND – SHOOTING & FISHING LEASES

(No. B/355) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to State land, he will give the list of the beneficiaries of leases of plots thereof for shooting and fishing since 2019, indicating the extent and location thereof in each case.

Reply: I am informed that seven lessees have been granted shooting and fishing leases over a total extent of 1235.71Ha since the year 2019.

PAILLES-GUIBIES SEWERAGE PROJECT, PHASE 2 – CONTRACT, PRICE & PROGRESS

(No. B/356) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project – Phase 2, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to the –

- (a) price escalation thereof, if any, since the contract was awarded on 31 July 2019;
- (b) percentage work progress thereof as at date, and
- (c) schedule for completion of the remaining works.

(Withdrawn)

GYMNASTICS FEDERATION OF MAURITIUS – FUNDING

(No. B/357) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Gymnastics Federation, he will state the quantum of funds granted by his Ministry thereto since the creation thereof to date.

Reply: The federation responsible for the promotion of gymnastics in Mauritius is known as the Gymnastics Federation of Mauritius.

During Financial Year 2021-2022, a budget of Rs100,000 was earmarked for the Gymnastics Federation of Mauritius. In view of the fact that the local federation was still suspended by the *Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique*, only a sum of Rs44,338 was disbursed, including Rs25,338 for the payment of insurance of athletes and Rs19,000 for the payment of international affiliation fees.

An amount of Rs100,000 has been earmarked for Financial Year 2022-2023. No funds have yet been disbursed therefrom.

However, a contribution amounting to Rs550,000, including the budget of the Federation earmarked for Financial Year 2022/2023, has been approved by my Ministry to enable the Federation to meet expenses related to the organisation of the 2023 Rhythmic Gymnastics Senior African Championships and the Africa Cup 2023 scheduled in Mauritius on 19 and 20 May 2023 at the Côte d’Or National Sports Complex.

The budget allocated will cover, *inter alia*, transport costs, rental fees, anti-doping tests, as well as trophies and medals.

SOLFERINO NO. 3, VACOAS – DRAINS PROJECT

(No. B/358) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction and rehabilitation of drains along the road at Solferino No. 3, Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to the –

- (a) date of award of the contract;
- (b) name of the contractor, and
- (c) total project value thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD/REVENGE PORNOGRAPHY - ACTION PLAN

(No. B/359) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the phenomenon of child/revenge pornography, she will state the findings of the Technical Committee set up for the study thereof, indicating the Action Plan set up, if any, to prevent the recurrence thereof.

(Withdrawn)

GRAND GAUBE – DEAD FISH - REPORT

(No. B/360) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the fish found dead at sea in Grand Gaube on Saturday 15 April 2023, he will state if any report in relation thereto has been submitted to his Ministry and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

OVERSEAS TREATMENT SCHEME – CRITERIA & REVIEW

(No. B/361) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Overseas Treatment Scheme, he will state the eligibility criteria to benefit therefrom, indicating if consideration will be given for a review of the threshold thereof.

(Withdrawn)

HINDENBURG RESEARCH REPORT 2023 - INVESTIGATIONS

(No. B/362) Mr R. Utem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to

the report published by Hindenburg Research in January 2023 on the alleged use of Mauritius based entities as conduits for money laundering and share price manipulation for the Adani Group, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Financial Services Commission, information as to if it has conducted an investigation in relation thereto, indicating the actions, if any, taken following same.

(Withdrawn)

BANK OF MAURITIUS – MONTHLY STATISTICAL BULLETINS – CURRENCY IN CIRCULATION

(No.B/363) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the currency in circulation as published by the monthly Statistical Bulletins of the Bank of Mauritius, he will explain the increase thereof from Rs 35,91 billion in February 2019 to Rs 52,87 billion in February 2023.

Reply: La monnaie en circulation dans l'économie augmente généralement chaque année en raison de la croissance de l'économie et de l'augmentation du nombre de transactions.

Au cours de la décennie précédant la pandémie de Covid-19, la monnaie en circulation a, en moyenne, augmenté d'environ 8 % par an.

Pour répondre précisément à la question, permettez-moi de replacer la situation dans son contexte.

En 2020, en réponse au déclenchement de la pandémie, un ensemble de mesures de soutien, y compris des mesures monétaires et fiscales, ont été mises en place.

Ces mesures se sont montrées essentielles pour protéger notre population et notre économie.

Parmi ces mesures :

- La Banque de Maurice a réduit le taux directeur de 50 et 100 points de base en mars et avril 2020, respectivement, et a permis à la liquidité MUR de s'accroître dans le système

bancaire pour aider à maintenir le flux de crédit dans l'économie nationale. La Banque a également réduit le ratio de réserve de trésorerie de 9 % à 8 % afin d'augmenter l'offre de fonds prêtables par les banques ;

- En outre, pour soutenir les secteurs les plus touchés, la Banque de Maurice a mis à la disposition des banques un Fonds spécial de 5 milliards de roupies.
- En juin 2020, la Banque a créé la *Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd (MIC)* pour investir dans les opérateurs économiques systémiques nationaux viables mais impactés par la crise. Cela a ainsi permis de veiller à ce qu'ils soient maintenus à flot pendant cette période difficile et que les emplois soient préservés.
- En parallèle, le Gouvernement mauricien a introduit d'importantes mesures de soutien fiscal, telles que le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*.

Conformément aux mesures de soutien prise en faveur du pays, la croissance annuelle moyenne de la monnaie en circulation en 2020 s'est établie à environ 13 %.

Suite à la normalisation progressive de l'économie, la croissance annuelle moyenne de la monnaie en circulation est retombée à son taux d'avant la pandémie, atteignant 9,0 % en 2021 et 8,0 % en 2022.

La croissance annuelle de la monnaie en circulation s'est également ralentie en 2021 et 2022 et est revenue aux taux de croissance pré-pandémique, soit environ 8 %.

SPORTS ACT - AMENDMENTS

(No. B/364) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of amendments to the Sports Act, he will state where matters stand, indicating if his Ministry has had scheduled meetings with sports federations in connection therewith and, if so, give details thereof and, if not why not.

(Withdrawn)

SUPPLY TEACHERS' RECRUITMENT – JAN 2015 TO APRIL 2023

(No. B/365) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the secondary schools, she will state the number of supply teachers recruited therefor annually subject-wise, since January 2015 to date.

(Withdrawn)

**POINTE AUX SABLES COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE – STAFF &
EQUIPMENT**

(No. B/366) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Pointe aux Sables Community Health Centre, he will state when same will be operational and table a list of equipment and number of staff attached thereat.

Reply: Let me first express my surprise after receiving this question from the hon. Member, who is also an elected Member of Parliament for Constituency No. 1, that is, Grand River North West and Port Louis West.

The project for the construction of Pointe aux Sables Community Health Centre forms part of the vision of our Prime Minister, to render health care services more accessible for all inhabitants of our Republic. The construction project of a contract value of around Rs29 m. started in November 2021.

As you are all aware, the new Pointe aux Sables Community Health Centre was inaugurated on 23 February 2023 in the presence of hon. Dr. Mrs Dorine Chukowry, Private Parliamentary Secretary, and the Lord Mayor of Port Louis.

This new Community Health Centre at Pointe aux Sables is a G+1 building of a surface area of 560 m² comprising *inter alia* general consultation rooms, family planning, vaccination and well-baby clinic.

I am also informed that the Community Health Centre is presently equipped with an electrocardiogram (ECG) machine and a suction apparatus. With regard to the staffing, there is one nursing officer male, one nursing officer female and one general worker on a permanent basis. Visiting staffs include medical health officers, dietician, non-communicable disease (NCD) nurse, vaccination staff and family planning officer.

As at date, 1,252 patients have visited the Community Health Centre. 115 patients visited the CHC in February, 750 in March and 387 so far in April. This makes an average attendance of 40-50 patients on a daily basis. I am also informed that mobile dental services would start as from May 2023 on every 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month.

FOREIGN WORKERS - WORK PERMITS – 2014 TO 2023

(No. B/367) Mr Richard Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to foreign workers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Work Permit Unit of his Ministry, information as to the number of –

- (a) work permits delivered annually since 2014 to date, indicating the
 - (i) country of origin;
 - (ii) name of employer; and
 - (iii) name of agent;
- (b) valid work permits per country as end of March 2023, and
- (c) foreign workers declared missing at his Ministry, indicating the actions taken, if any.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL GENDER POLICY 2022-2030 PLAN

(No. B/369) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the National Gender Policy 2022-2030, she will state the recommendations contained therein and the implementation plan thereof.

(Withdrawn)

HUMAN TISSUE REMOVAL PRESERVATION AND TRANSPLANT ACT 2018 – PROMULGATION

(No. B/370) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Human Tissue

Removal Preservation and Transplant Act 2018, he will state when same will be promulgated *in toto*.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) Act 2018 provides a legal framework for the removal, preservation and transplant of human tissue, other than blood products, under appropriate medical supervision. The Act has only been partly proclaimed as at date. By virtue of Proclamation No. 3 of 2019, only certain provisions of the Act have been made effective since 22 January 2019 namely, Parts I and II, that is, sections 1 to 7 and section 30.

Sections 1 to 7 of the Act provide for the establishment of the Tissue Donation, Removal and Transplant Board. Section 30 of the Act provides that the Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) Act 2018 shall come into operation on a date to be fixed by Proclamation and that different dates may be fixed for the coming into operation of different sections of the Act.

The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) Act 2018 makes provision for the conditions under which a live donor as well as a cadaveric donor can donate their tissue for transplantation into a recipient. The Act requires a number of matters to be prescribed such as the application form for the donation of tissue, the place and conditions for the preservation of tissue and the procedure for certifying the brain death of a cadaveric donor. Regulations have been made so that the remaining provisions of the Act may be proclaimed, for the law to enter fully into force.

In this context, four sets of regulations have been prepared by the Tissue Donation, Removal and Transplant Board in consultation with a panel of medical specialists in various fields to regulate organ donation and improve the lives of patients especially those living with chronic kidney diseases. The regulations are as follows –

- (a) The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) Regulations 2022;
- (b) The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) (Prescribed Forms) Regulations 2022;
- (c) The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2022, and

- (d) The Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) (Approved Health Institutions) Regulations 2022.

On 23 May 2022, Government has taken note of the regulations. It was decided that the set up for renal transplant would be established and then the remaining sections of the Act would be proclaimed. In this context, Dr. Rajasekhar Perumalla (Transplant Surgeon) came to Mauritius as from 19 October 2022 to carry out 3 live renal transplants at Victoria Hospital and to provide this Ministry with guidance on renal transplantation.

As far as the regulations concerning live donor transplantation is concerned, my Ministry has all the required infrastructure and human resources to carry out live donor transplantation. I wish to inform the House that Professor Nizam Mamode, Transplant Surgeon from Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital in UK, has been appointed as Adviser in Renal Transplant for a period of six months. He came to Mauritius on 29 October 2022 and has conducted 16 live renal transplants and is training our surgeons in transplant surgery. He is also working on the setting up of our renal transplant unit at Victoria Hospital pending the construction of the Renal Transplant Unit at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital.

As far as deceased donor transplantation is concerned, my Ministry has already worked out the modalities to certify brain death of a donor. My Ministry has also set up brain death committees in each of the five regional hospitals comprising medical specialists to familiarise themselves with the mode of declaration of brain death.

Once the setup is complete, the Human Tissue (Removal, Preservation and Transplant) Act 2018 would be proclaimed *in toto*.

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES – WOMEN'S & MEN'S FOOTBALL TEAMS – TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

(No. B/371) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the forthcoming Indian Ocean Island Games, he will state the training arrangements made for the women and men football teams respectively, indicating the preparation plan thereof.

Reply: As the House may be aware, the national coaches for the women's and men's national football teams have been presented to the press at my Ministry last week. For the women's team, the national coach is Mr Kersley Levrai and the assistant national coach is Mrs Marie Aurielle Collet while for the men's team, the national coach is Mr Fidy Rasonaivo and the assistant national coach is Mr Sakoor Boodhun.

A meeting with the MFA and the national coaches was held yesterday to look into the preparation plan for both the women's and men's teams and its financial and technical implications.

In line with the usual practice, my Ministry will provide its full support for the preparation of all our national teams for the forthcoming Indian Ocean Islands Games.

NOTRE DAME RELAY SHELTER - BABY C. P. - ADMISSION PROTOCOL

(No. B/372) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Notre Dame Relay Shelter, she will state since when Baby C. P. is admitted thereat, indicating if the admission protocol has been respected and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

CEB (GREEN ENERGY) CO. LTD – BOARD COMPOSITION

(No. B/373) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the CEB (Green Energy) Co. Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the present composition of the board thereof, indicating the monthly remuneration payable to members of the board thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**MOKA TO LA VIGIE – STATE LAND ALLOCATION – CULTURAL
CENTRES**

(No. B/374) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the transfer of State land allocated to Cultural Centres from Moka to La Vigie, he will state the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

**COVID-19 – RONAPREVE DOSES – SUPPLIER –
QUANTUM OF PAYMENT**

(No. B/375) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Ronapreve, he will state the name of the supplier thereof in December 2021 to his Ministry, indicating the number of doses thereof delivered, quantum of payment effected and number of doses thereof used as at to date.

Reply: Allow me to remind the House that Ronapreve (Casirivimab-Indevimab) is a monoclonal antibody dual therapy, capable of binding the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 and thus preventing the attachment of the historical strain of the virus to human cells. By inhibiting penetration into human cells, Ronapreve considerably reduces serious forms in patients at risk.

The benefit brought by Ronapreve in those patients led to a recommendation for use in the third quarter of 2021 by the WHO, the FDA and the European Medicines Agency.

In order to allow access to effective drugs as quickly as possible, and given the seriousness and frequency of serious forms of SARS-CoV-2 at that particular time, my Ministry, after recommendation of the Trade and Therapeutic Committee and positive opinion of the Pharmacy Board, decided to order this medication.

Ronapreve is a drug marketed by the Roche Laboratory. 3,150 doses were pre-ordered, calculated according to the number of cases and the trend of the epidemic present in our country at that time, for which 3,004 doses were for my Ministry and 146 for all private clinics.

I would like to inform the House about the conditions for purchasing Ronapreve worldwide. Given the importance of this drug in the prognosis of patients at risk, the WHO has

concluded with the Roche Laboratory a unique procurement system in the world, based on the ACT Accelerator Partnership, between WHO and COVID treatment manufacturers, on how to make treatments more accessible and have an equitable distribution around the world.

Each Country was priced based on the World Bank Classification as per the ACT Accelerator program to make Ronapreve accessible across the world.

There is also a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) between Roche and all Countries that have procured Ronapreve directly through the only system procurement put in place by the company.

Accordingly, a purchase agreement was concluded between my Ministry and the Roche Laboratory on 01 December 2021. A first consignment of 500 packs (equivalent to 1000 doses) of Ronapreve was delivered on 23 December 2021. Payment has already been effected to Roche for the first consignment.

In 2022, one of the variant strains of SARS-CoV-2, the Omicron, spread around the world as well as in Mauritius. However, this strain has a mutation of the Spike protein, which makes Ronapreve ineffective.

When the historical and Omicron strains were still intermixed, Ronapreve retained its effectiveness but then, the Omicron strain became largely dominant, and then totally dominant. Ronapreve therefore lost its usefulness in the management of COVID.

At this particular stage in Mauritius, there were 696 doses left, which were therefore not used.

Following the loss of effectiveness of Ronapreve against the Omicron variant, negotiations took place between the Ministry and the Roche Laboratory, concerning the remaining amount owed to Roche.

It is to be highlighted that Mauritius is the only country in the world which has been able to negotiate with the Roche Laboratory and for which the remaining sum due in the contract, following the first instalment of payment, has not been lost. Other countries, such as, the UK, Brazil, France, the Netherlands and Indonesia had to take and pay their remaining doses of Ronapreve.

These negotiations resulted, on 06 February 2023, in the termination by mutual agreement, of the Ministry's contract with the Roche Laboratory and the remaining sum not yet spent by the Ministry for the rest of the doses of Ronapreve order could be recovered.

PLEASURE CRAFT OWNERS & SKIPPERS – ALLOWANCES

(No. B/376) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to pleasure craft owners and skippers affected by the MV Wakashio Oil Spill, he will state if allowances have been granted thereto for loss of business during the period of interdiction to venture the south east sea and, if so, indicate the quantum thereof.

(Withdrawn)

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & START-UPS – RESEARCH & INNOVATION MEASURES

(No. B/377) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to entrepreneurship and start-ups, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, information as to how the measures taken to ensure that research and innovation are aligned with the country's development goals and priorities to promote same.

Reply: The Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) has come up with several initiatives to ensure that Research and Innovation projects funded by it are aligned with the country's development goals and priorities with regard to creation, development and promotion of innovative start-ups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

A specific scheme that is operated by the MRIC is the National SME Incubator Scheme (NSIS) which was launched in 2017. The scheme promotes initiation and development of innovative start-ups in the Republic of Mauritius through a network of private sector-led accredited business incubators. It also consolidates the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Mauritius through a special Public Private Partnership in which Government and accredited private sector incubators work in collaboration to foster the growth and development of innovative businesses.

Since the inception of the National SME Incubator Scheme in 2017, the Government, through the MRIC, has invested an estimated Rs37 m. in the NSIS which has in turn facilitated the creation of 49 new and innovative start-ups and provided employment to some 123 people. Some of the start-ups created through the National SME Incubator Scheme are operating in different countries around the world and are performing very well.

The NSIS has trained 332 incubatees, accredited 7 incubators, and graduated 49 start-ups. Around 55% of incubatees trained are in the pre-incubation (ideation phase); 35% in the incubation (pre-start-up/start-up) phase and 9% in the full fledged start-up/micro-SME phase. Accordingly, the NSIS managed by the MRIC, since 2017, has been successful in consolidating the Innovative Entrepreneurial ecosystem in Mauritius based on the number of innovative start-ups created and the number of new jobs.

There are other MRIC Research and Innovation Schemes contributing to research and development promotion in Small and Medium Enterprises. Under these different schemes, the MRIC has approved and funded 88 initiatives, 58 of which have been to micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

The amount awarded by the MRIC for these 88 initiatives amount to Rs135 m. with a total project value of Rs280 m. Some of the areas that have been funded include: Information Technology, Circular Economy, Waste Management, Engineering/Manufacturing, Construction, Technology, Financial Services, Natural Sciences, Social Innovation and Medical/Health. Out of these 88 initiatives, 41 are still ongoing.

The MRIC held *les Assises de la Recherche et l'Innovation* last year and 375 projects have been identified for research and innovation. The short and medium terms projects will be implemented in the coming financial year.

Further to align with the country's development goals and priorities of Mauritius with regard to research and innovation, MRIC, through its Technology Transfer Office, provides advice to entrepreneurs and start-ups on searching for technological information related to their proposed inventions, and assists by carrying out searches through publicly accessible IP sources and research databases. MRIC also implements the Intellectual Property Promotion Scheme to boost creativity and innovation through support towards applications made for the grant of Patents, Utility Models and registration of Industrial Designs. Applicants benefit from a refund

of 50% of the costs of their application made to the Industrial Property Office of Mauritius. In this context, the MRIC Technology Transfer Office has supported over 90 start-ups, companies and individuals, resulting in the application for registration of 31 Industrial Designs and 1 Patent.

The Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation has been committed to promote research and development, especially with respect to the development of new small and medium enterprises to align with the development goals and priorities of the country.

QUEEN VICTORIA – FOOTBRIDGE – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/378) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a footbridge at Queen Victoria, he will state the work progress thereof.

(Withdrawn)

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES – RODRIGUAN ATHLETES – SELECTION & PREPARATION

(No. B/379) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the forthcoming Indian Ocean Island Games, he will state the number of athletes from Rodrigues who have been preselected for participation therein, indicating where matters stand as to the preparation thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the respective National Sports Federations that as at date, a total of 107 athletes in 12 sports disciplines have been preselected from Rodrigues for eventual participation to the forthcoming Indian Ocean Islands Games 2023 to be held in Madagascar from 25 August to 03 September 2023.

I wish to inform the House that the pre-selection exercise, including athletes from Rodrigues, falls under the purview of respective National Sports Federations. My Ministry ensures that all preselected athletes benefit from optimum facilities for their preparation, including participation in local and overseas training camps.

**SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION – YEARS 2020-2022, JAN 2023 TO 25 APRIL 2023–
FUNDS COLLECTED & SOCIAL BENEFITS PAID**

(No. B/380) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Social Contribution, he will state for each of the years 2020, 2021 and since January 2023 to date, the quantum of –

- (a) funds collected from –
 - (i) the self-employed;
 - (ii) employees of the private sector, and
 - (iii) public officers, and
- (b) social benefits paid therefrom.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, the detailed figures for each of the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and since January 2023 to date, are being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the social benefits paid are also being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

REAL WAGES FALL – 2020-2022 – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/381) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether he will state the measures being taken to address the fall in real wages over the past three years, indicating the figures in earnings after inflation is taken into account.

Reply: Inflation across the world has been on a rising trend since mid-2020 due to various factors, including disruptions in supply chain, surging demand as economies reopened and, more recently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict that disrupted production and trade. The global inflation rate went up from 3.2% in 2020 to 4.7% in 2021 and reached a peak of 8.7% in 2022. This is the highest inflation rate registered in the past two and a half decades.

Mauritius has not been spared by the global rise in inflation. However, as a caring Government, we have always endeavoured to ensure that our workers earn a decent wage and

improve their living conditions. In this context, we have taken a number of measures to increase the wage and enhance the purchasing power of the working population.

As a result, real wages fell by only 1.4% in 2020, 1% in 2021 and 2.7% in 2022. In fact, the fastest fall in real wages was in 2006 and 2007, when real wages declined by 4.7% and 3.8%, respectively.

In terms of the total earnings of employees, which includes overtime and other support provided by Government, it increased by 5.3% in 2021 and 1.5% in 2022.

The measures taken by Government to increase the wage and enhance the purchasing power of workers include –

- (a) the introduction of the National Minimum Wage in 2018. The minimum wage has been increased every year by more than the inflation rate;
- (b) the introduction of the Negative Income Tax, which has benefitted some 4,600 workers;
- (c) the payment of a Special Allowance to some 54,000 workers to ensure that they have a guaranteed income every month that is higher than the National Minimum Wage;
- (d) the award of salary compensation every year, with workers in the lower income group being fully compensated for the rise in prices, even when we were facing economic challenges with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (e) the provision of the Wage Assistance Scheme, Self-Employed Assistance Scheme and the Self-Employed One-off Grant to some 542,250 workers for a total amount of more than Rs27 billion to preserve employment and standard of living of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (f) the implementation of the salary review recommended by the Pay Research Bureau with effect from 01 January 2021;
- (g) the payment of the salary compensation for employees of SMEs and operators in the tourism sector, and

- (h) the introduction of a reduced income tax rate of 10% for some 75,000 employees earning an annual income not exceeding Rs700,000 and granting of enhanced income tax deductions and reliefs.

In the 2022-2023 Budget, we have taken a series of new measures to further raise the income of workers. These include –

- (i) the introduction of the CSG Income Allowance of Rs1,000 per month paid to some 338,000 employees and self-employed earning a monthly gross income of up to Rs50,000;
- (ii) the provision of a *Prime à l'Emploi* of a maximum of Rs15,000 per month for the first year of employment of 10,000 youths between 18 and 35 years and women up to 50 years;
- (iii) the employment of 2,000 workers by Mauri-Facilities Ltd for cleaning services, and
- (iv) the introduction of a new income tax band for those earning between Rs700,000 and Rs975,000 annually. These workers will pay income tax at the rate of 12.5% instead of 15% as from income year 2022-2023.

Furthermore, a wage relativity adjustment is currently being implemented in 17 sectors in the private sector to address the problem of distortion in wage distribution caused by the introduction of the National Minimum Wage. This concerns some 70,000 workers and the adjustment ranges up to Rs1,000 per month.

Over and above the measures I have just mentioned, we awarded a salary compensation of Rs1,000 per month across the board to all employees as from January 2023.

Government is providing financial support to Small and Medium Enterprises and Export Oriented Enterprises for the payment of the salary compensation 2023.

Thus, inclusive of the CSG Income Allowance of Rs1,000, the guaranteed income for a full-time worker has been increased to Rs13,075 per month as from January 2023.

To conclude, it is worth noting that in addition to these measures, we have provided various supports to workers to enhance their purchasing power such as the subsidy on rice, flour,

cooking gas and essential products. In addition, necessary funds have been provided to the STC for it to supply essential products such as milk and edible oil at a subsidised price.

NATIONAL COOPERATIVE COLLEGE – COURSES

(No. B/382) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs & Cooperatives whether, in regard to the National Co-operative College, he will state, since the establishment thereof to date –

- (a) the number of courses held and the number of persons trained thereat, and
- (b) if certificates or diplomas have been delivered.

(Withdrawn)

MUNICIPAL TAX – EXEMPTION

(No. B/383) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the municipal tax, he will state the number of households concerned with the exemption of the payment thereof, since the abolition thereof.

(Withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT LOANS DISBURSEMENT - YEAR 2021 TO 25 APRIL 2023

(No. B/384) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to loans advanced to statutory bodies and/or private and other bodies by Government since 2021 to date, he will give the list thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) duration thereof;
- (b) quantum thereof, and
- (c) period of repayment thereof.

Reply: L'information demandée par l'honorable membre est déposée à la Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale.

VACOAS MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – *SALLE DES FETES* – RENOVATION

(No. B/385) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government & Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the renovation and construction works done to the *Salle des Fêtes* of the Municipal Council at Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to –

- (a) when was the contract awarded;
- (b) the name of the contractor, and
- (c) the project value thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PORT LOUIS MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – SCAVENGERS - UNIFORMS & CLEANING EQUIPMENT

(No. B/386) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the scavengers of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to when uniforms and other cleaning equipment were last provided thereto.

(Withdrawn)

VICTORIA HOSPITAL – DECEASED PATIENT - INQUIRY

(No. B/387) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to deceased patient N.B. at Victoria Hospital on 10 April 2023, he will state if –

- (a) she has been victim of rat bites, and if so, indicate what actions have been taken regarding the –
 - (i) patient, and
 - (ii) rat infestation, and
- (b) an internal inquiry has been initiated.

(Withdrawn)

**ABDOOL RAMAN ABDOOL GOVERNMENT SCHOOL –
INFRASTRUCTURAL WORKS – PHASE II**

(No. B/388) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School, in Port Louis, she will state where matters stand as to the implementation of Phase II of the proposed infrastructural works.

Reply: I am informed that bids for the project have been launched on 23 April 2023 with 29 May 2023 as closing date.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS - OXYGEN SUPPLY

(No. B/389) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the supply of oxygen to public hospitals, he will state –

- (a) the amount thereof needed annually over the past four years, excluding increase demands during the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- (b) if the supply thereof is subcontracted to any company and, if so, indicate the name thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CYCLONE FREDDY – COASTAL HOTELS – DAMAGES

(No. B/390) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to coastal hotels, he will state the -

- (a) damages caused thereto by the passage of cyclone Freddy, and
- (b) estimated future impacts of sea-level rise thereto, indicating the adaptation strategy thereof in anticipation of sea-level rise being envisaged, if any.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS INVESTMENT CORPORATION - FUNDS DEPOSITED

(No. B/391) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Mauritius Investment Corporation, he will state the total amount of funds deposited therein since the creation thereof, indicating the quantum thereof given out to companies and balance standing as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

COMPETITION COMMISSION – ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER – RECRUITMENT PROCESS

(No. B/392) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the recruitment exercise for the post of Advocacy and Communications Officer at the Competition Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number of applications received;
- (b) selection criteria used, and
- (c) number of candidates selected for interview.

Reply: The Competition Commission is a completely independent body set up under the Competition Act. Accordingly, section 26 of the Act provides that the Commission may employ on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit, such members of staff as it deems necessary for the proper discharge of the functions of the Commission and of the Executive Director under this Act.

Pursuant to clause 37 of the Act, the powers of the Minister are only limited to giving written directions relating to additional public policy factors and such directions need to be published in the Government Gazette.

Notwithstanding the above, my Ministry has sought information from the Competition Commission regarding the recruitment exercise.

I am informed that the post of Advocacy and Communications Officer at the Competition Commission was advertised on 14 July 2022.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am further informed that 102 applications were received.

With regard to part (b), I am informed that candidates were assessed to ensure that they meet the following main criteria –

- a) they have at least a Bachelor's degree from a recognised body in Economics, Law, Political Science, Communications, Journalism, Marketing, or any other equivalent qualifications acceptable to the Competition Commission;
- b) they have a minimum of three years' experience preferably in advocacy and/or communication activities, and
- c) they have 6 credits at SC level, including English and French, and 3 principal subjects at HSC level.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Competition Commission that 8 candidates were retained and called for the interview after the above-mentioned screening exercise and a written test. Only 7 candidates attended the interview which was held on 21 December 2022.

I am informed that 1 candidate has been retained and offered the post of Advocacy and Communications Officer and the latter assumed duty on 02 February 2023.

NEW FLACQ TEACHING HOSPITAL - CT-SCAN - PROCUREMENT

(No. B/393) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the New Flacq Teaching Hospital, he will state where matters stand as to the procurement of equipment and furniture and of a CT-Scan therefor.

(Withdrawn)