



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 20 MARCH 2020

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 09 of 2020

Sitting of Friday 20 March 2020

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 3.00 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - ORDER PAPER -
AMENDMENT**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, as we are all aware, the World Health Organisation has declared COVID-19 as a pandemic and has assessed the risk to be very high, both at regional and international levels.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 presents a major challenge for the country and decision has been taken for confinement in an endeavour to prevent and contain the spread thereof by virtue of General Notice No. 457, 458, 459 and 460 of 2020, published in the Government Gazette of Mauritius Extraordinary No. 28 of Thursday 19 March 2020.

In this context, I would appreciate if hon. Members would concur in the best interest of one and all that the business on today's Order Paper be dealt with expeditiously.

I wish to thank you for your understanding and collaboration.

Thank you.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development

- (a) The Financial Statements of the Road Development Authority for the year ended 30 June 2009.
- (b) The Financial Statements of the Road Development Authority for the 18-months period ended 31 December 2010.
- (c) The Financial Statements of the Road Development Authority for the year ended 31 December 2011.
- (d) The Financial Statements of the Road Development Authority for the year ended 31 December 2012.
- (e) The Financial Statements of the Road Development Authority for the year ended 31 December 2013.
- (f) The Annual Report of the Road Development Authority for the year ended 31 December 2014.
- (g) The Annual Report of the Road Development Authority for the 18-month period 30 June 2017.

B. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The Quarantine (Quarantinable Diseases) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 57 of 2020)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(3.10 p.m.)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - PNQ - WITHDRAWAL

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Speaker, in the light of what you have just said and, indeed, in the paramount national interest, exceptionally, I am not proceeding with the PNQ of which I gave notice this morning.

However, with your permission and that of the House, may I say a few words. I wish to place on record that right from the very outset, the Opposition had drawn attention of Government to the gravity of the situation and to urgently adopt proportionate measures to help psychological and economic risks. The fast will be assessed in due course. Let us instead focus on how to pull our resources together to combat the common enemy. Let us look dispassionately at the future, beyond of our political divide. Our country needs to be united now more than ever. These are testing times and it is during these times that none of our citizens should be left behind. I pray that measures will be taken to airlift all those who are stranded.

Yesterday, I met the Prime Minister at his request. He gave me the firm assurance that Government will act fast to take urgent and aggressive measures to stop the spread of the virus. We shall closely monitor Government's action and will not hesitate to step in when the need arises. We shall do so in the national interest for the good of the people. We are living exceptional times when our great little country has been reduced to its most vulnerable state. The lockdown, social distancing, and test of the strong links in the conveyor belt. Exceptional times need exceptional measures. I appeal to the population to comply strictly with the confinement measures that have been imposed. Protect yourselves and your families.

This is the very least that can be expected of responsible citizens of a great democratic nation. I appeal to us all to come together as one people, as one nation, to fight an invasive virus, whose scale, scope and death has no frontiers. As a nation, we stand united and pledge not to let our beloved country cry. There are many unsung heroes who are working relentlessly day and night to contain and mitigate the effect of the Coronavirus. They deserve our unflinching support. We need to equip and fully support them to combat this plague. To all of them, we are forever so grateful.

I wish to convey my wishes for a prompt recovery to our fellow compatriots who have been afflicted by the virus. I urge all Mauritians to stay vigilant until the virus has been vanquished. I wish the country good health. God bless Mauritius!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(3.13 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – PREPAREDNESS PLAN & MODELLING STUDY

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has, on Wednesday 11 March 2020, declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a global pandemic as the virus is spreading rapidly across the world. As at today, Friday 20 March 2020, 181 countries have been affected and reported cases of COVID-19 infection, with 245,768 persons infected, out of whom there have been 10,046 deaths and 88,441 are reported to have recovered. In the Republic of Mauritius, as at now, we have 12 infected cases of COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as at Tuesday 17 March 2020, Mauritius had had no case of COVID-19. However, I always stated that Mauritius is vulnerable and at risk. I wish to highlight the fact that as far back as Friday 31 January 2020, when the WHO confirmed the infectious new Coronavirus in Wuhan, Government enhanced all necessary precautions, which had already been taken well before that date, that is, as from Tuesday 07 January 2020, to prevent the virus from entering our country.

In fact, to remind, as already stated in this House by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the WHO has been monitoring the evolution of the COVID-19 since Tuesday 31 December 2019 once it had been informed by the Chinese Authorities of some cases of pneumonia of unknown origin in Wuhan city. On Tuesday 07 January 2020, the Chinese Authorities informed the WHO that they had identified a new Coronavirus as the causative agent.

The House will also recall that on Wednesday 22 January 2020, WHO had assessed the risk of the event to be very high in China, high at regional level and high at global level. Over a month later, precisely on Friday 28 February 2020, WHO assessed the risk of the event to be very high in China, very high at regional and global levels.

Subsequently, as from Wednesday 22 January 2020, WHO has called upon all Member States to have a preparedness plan to deal with the threats posed by the novel Coronavirus. Following WHO's call, the Government of Mauritius acted promptly and expediently reinforced surveillance at the port and airport.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since Tuesday 07 January 2020, with much foresight, we have been acting proactively and in all transparency to strengthen our overall preparedness and response. We have also been educating our people so that they know the symptoms and how to protect themselves and others. We have increased our testing capacity. We have prepared our hospital services and quarantine facilities so that they are able to cope effectively with the threat. We have addressed the issues of essential supplies and training and protection of our health workers. We have been monitoring the situation on a 24-hour daily basis.

Let me reassure the House that we have adequate stock of essential commodities and medicines and there is, therefore, no need for any panic buying and hoarding.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Wednesday 18 March 2020, I chaired a meeting of the High Level Committee on COVID-19, following which I gave a Press Conference to communicate the additional measures to strengthen our response to the threat. I announced that no travellers would be allowed entry in the territory of Mauritius after 10.00 hours local time on Thursday 19 March 2020 for a period of two weeks. I also informed the nation that all the travellers who would enter the country would be automatically quarantined, till 10.00 hours on that day. Unfortunately, on the same day, we were informed of the first three detected cases of COVID-19.

The House will appreciate that this restriction to enter our territory has been imposed in the national interest in order to prevent a danger to public health by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a decision that has been deemed necessary in order to protect the general public health by preventing possible entry and spread of the disease.

Besides, in view of the concerns over the alarming levels and severity of the spread of the Coronavirus worldwide, the World Health Organisation has called upon governments to take urgent and aggressive measures in order to stop the spread of the virus.

I would also like to point out that the case of all Mauritian citizens, who are stranded abroad, is being looked into as a matter of priority by Government. Our Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates have already been put on high alert and are in constant communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the identification of the first three infected cases, an exercise of contact tracing was immediately initiated. Thus, the Ministry of Health and Wellness team has so far identified some 39 persons who have been in contact with the infected persons. This is what led to the identification of five new cases. Tests are being carried out on the other cases and contact tracing is being effected in the regions where the five new cases were confirmed.

With a view to assessing the spread and impact of the COVID-19 on the needs of our health care services, a modelling study is being looked into. We are following the best and tested practices. We have closed the frontiers and are exerting stringent control at the airport and port.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these are very difficult and testing times for the whole nation. The COVID-19 pandemic is such a threat that it is a matter of national concern. The virus does not choose its victims. We are in a situation where we need the support and collaboration of one and all. In fact, this is a time when national solidarity and patriotism are vital. My Government and our health authorities are on high alert and we are sparing no effort to prevent the spread of this virus amongst the population. I again urge upon one and all to act as responsible citizens and follow the advice and guidance issued by the health authorities in order to protect others and ourselves.

Mr Speaker, Sir, together, our nation has always in the past overcome the worst of situations. Although COVID-19 represents an unprecedented and daunting challenge, I am confident that, once again, as a united nation, we will be victorious over this invisible enemy.

I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for not moving for his Private Notice Question and for his understanding of the current situation.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the gravity of the situation and the sanitary confinement in force, and in the light of your announcement, I move for the adjournment of the House to Friday 03 April 2020 at 3.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 3.23 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 03 April 2020 at 3.00 p.m.