



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 25 JUNE 2024

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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
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional

Integration and International Trade

Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
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Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Marie Christiane Dorine Chukowry	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Anjiv Ramdhany	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms
Hon. Ms Naveena Ramyad	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Ashley Ittoo
Clerk of the National Assembly	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit, CSK
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 16 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 25 June 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

OBITUARY

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with deep sadness that we have learnt of the demise of –

- (i) Dr. Rohit Niemo Beedassy, former Member of Parliament, on Thursday 20 June 2024 at the age of 82, and
- (ii) Dr. Mohummud Siddick Chady, former Member of Parliament, on Sunday 23 June 2024 at the age of 73.

DR. ROHIT NIEMO BEEDASSY

Dr. Beedassy was born on 02 November 1941 in Floréal. He studied medicine at Wadia College, Pune and at Kharkov State Medical Institute. He subsequently began his career as medical officer at the Ministry of Health.

Dr. Beedassy's political journey started in 1976 when he stood as candidate for the General Election under the banner of the Independence Party in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal. He was elected as First Member.

In the year 1977, he was designated to serve on the Public Accounts Committee.

In 1982, Dr. Beedassy was again elected as First Member in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal, under the banner of the MMM/PSM Alliance.

On 18 June 1982, Dr. Beedassy was appointed Minister of Works, a post which he held until June 1983.

In August 1983, Dr. Beedassy contested the General Election in the same Constituency, Vacoas and Floréal, under the banner of the MSM/Labour Party Alliance and was elected as Third Member.

He was appointed Minister of Works in September 1983. He resigned as Minister in July 1986 but kept his seat as Member of Parliament until the dissolution of Parliament in July 1987.

In 1995, Dr. Beedassy stood as a candidate of the MSM/RMM Alliance at the General Election in Constituency No. 14, Savanne and Black River, but was not elected.

He also contested the 2014 General Election in Constituency No. 16, Vacoas and Floréal as an MMSD candidate but was not returned.

In 2016, Dr. Beedassy founded a new political party, the *Parti Socialiste*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request you to kindly direct the Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family, in particular to his children.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, on behalf the Opposition, I associate myself with the tribute paid by the hon. Prime Minister to the late Dr. Rohit Beedassy. Mr Speaker, Sir, kindly direct the Clerk of the National Assembly to convey our deep condolences to members of the bereaved family.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself with the tribute paid to the memory of late Dr. Rohit Niemo Beedassy, former Member of Parliament, by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I direct the Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

DR. MOHUMMUD SIDDIK CHADY

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Dr. Chady joined active politics after his medical studies in Dublin. In the year 1991, he stood as candidate for the General Election under the banner of Alliance Parti Travailleiste/PMSD in Constituency No.19, Stanley and Rose Hill. He was not elected but was nominated to serve the then Legislative Assembly under the Best Loser System.

In December 1995, Dr. Chady contested the National Assembly Elections again in Constituency No.19, under the banner of Alliance Parti Travailleiste/MMM and was elected as Second Member.

On 30 December 1995, Dr. Chady was appointed Minister of Works, a portfolio which he held until 01 July 1997. On 02 July 1997, he was assigned the portfolio of Minister of Public Infrastructure which he occupied until October 1998. From October 1998 until August 2000, Dr. Chady was the Minister responsible for the Ministry of Environment, Human Resource Development and Employment, which was later re-styled as Ministry of Environment and Urban and Rural Development.

At the September 2000 National Assembly Elections, Dr. Chady was re-elected as Second Member in Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East, under the banner of Alliance Parti Travailleiste-PMXD. In September 2004, Dr. Chady resigned as Member of the National Assembly.

Dr. Chady contested the 2005 National Assembly Election in the same Constituency No. 3 under the banner of Alliance Sociale, but he was not elected.

From 2006 to October 2008, Dr. Chady served as President of the Mauritius Ports Authority.

In December 2014, Dr. Chady ran for the National Assembly Elections in Constituency No. 2, Port Louis South and Port Louis Central, under the banner of Muvman Travayis Militan, but was not elected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I kindly request you to direct the Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family, in particular to his wife and children.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on behalf the Opposition, I associate myself with the tribute paid by the hon. Prime Minister to the late Dr. Siddick Chady, former Member of the National Assembly. Mr Speaker, Sir, kindly direct the Clerk of the National Assembly to convey our deepest condolences to members of the bereaved family.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself with the tribute paid to the memory of late Dr. Siddick Chady, former Member of Parliament, by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon.

Leader of the Opposition and I direct the Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRESS ARTICLE – *L'EXPRESS* – FRIDAY 21 JUNE 2024 – BUDGET 2024-25 – COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – IMPARTIALITY

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have one announcement, for the time being.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a press article which appeared in daily *l'Express* of Friday 21 June 2024, under the caption –

“Committee of Supply” Budget 2024-25 – *Présidence: Nazurally boycotté!*

The said press article purports to cast aspersions on my impartiality as Speaker in the discharge of my duties and has also cast doubts on my discretionary powers of requesting hon. Ashley Ittoo to chair the Committee of Supply in his capacity as Deputy Chairperson of Committees in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 8(2).

Hon. Members, I view this matter with serious concern as this amount to an external interference and an invasion of the privileges of the House and that of the Speaker in the discharge of his functions. I have therefore deemed it fit to set record straight.

Hon. Members, the House will recall that hon. Ashley Ittoo was elected Deputy Chairperson of Committees at the Sitting of Tuesday 26 March 2024 by the Assembly pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 7(7) and has not had the opportunity of chairing any Committee of Supply until Tuesday 18 and Wednesday 19 June 2024.

Hon. Members, it is clear from the provisions of Standing Order 8(2) that the discretion of giving the Chair to the Deputy Chairperson of Committees for chairing the Committee of Supply rests with the Speaker, the more so that the duties of the Deputy Chairperson of Committees is to chair the Committee of Supply.

The House may also wish to note that on numerous occasions when the Speaker was chairing the Committee of Supply, questions have been put to the hon. Prime Minister as to the number of Committees chaired by the Deputy Chairperson of Committees, thereby prompting the Speaker to take this decision in all fairness of giving the opportunity to hon. Ashley Ittoo to chair the Committee of Supply.

Therefore, the issue of boycotting the Deputy Speaker from this exercise does not arise. Although the contents of the said press article potentially amount to a contempt of the Assembly under Section 6(1)(s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and powers) Act, I am nevertheless making an appeal to members of the media to exercise caution while publishing articles which may be misleading and tantamount to casting doubts on the democratic processes of this august Assembly.

I thank you.

PAPERS LAID

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

**A. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning
Ministry of Tourism**

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Town and Country Planning Board for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Town Planners' Council (List of Prescribed Bodies) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 104 of 2024)
- (c) The Town Planners' Council (Levying of Fees) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 105 of 2024)

B. Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology

The Education (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 103 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Annual Report of the Accountant-General and the Annual Statements of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for the financial year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Employees' Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.

D. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The Medical Council (Medical Institutions) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 106 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 107 of 2024)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 14) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 108 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**PORT AREA – NEXTSOURCE CSPG (MAURITIUS) LTD – GRAPHITE REFINERY**

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*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 proposed setting up of a graphite refinery by NextSource CSPG (Mauritius) Ltd., in the Port Area, he will state –

- (a) the reasons as to why the said project was not entertained at Jin Fei and the date thereof;
- (b) if there is any unfavourable report against the project in the Port Area;
- (c) the security risks, if any, to the neighbouring population, the factories and the Ramsar site; and
- (d) the total estimated cost of the project and expected annual return thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Economic Development Board that NextSource CSPG (Mauritius) Ltd, a subsidiary of NextSource Materials Incorporation, is exploring the possibility of setting up a Battery Anode Facility in an existing building of 14,000 metre square at Mauritius Freeport Development Zone 5, Mer Rouge. The project involves the purification of 8,000 tonnes of flake graphite per annum to obtain 3,600 tonnes of Spherical Purified Graphite or Coated Spherical Purified Graphite per annum.

The subject site is of an extent of 33,840 metre square and has been leased to the promoter by Mauritius Freeport Development Ltd. A conditional lease agreement has been signed in November 2023 but will take effect once the promoter receives all the necessary permits and clearances, including an EIA Licence. The promoter intends to expand its capacity to 14,400 tonnes per annum of Coated Spherical Purified Graphite in the second phase.

The project will consist of an effluent treatment plant, a solid waste storage area, an acid/neutraliser storage area, a heavy fuel oil and liquefied petroleum gas storage area, a firefighting pump room, cooling towers, and offices and mess rooms. Upon arrival of containers

from the Mauritius Container Terminal, the bagged and containerised flake graphite will be transported to the Freeport zone for processing.

The promoter is engaging with Mauritius Freeport Development Ltd to act as logistics provider for the setting up of NextSource's business activity. It will entail the processing of graphite flakes imported from Madagascar prior to re-export of Spherical Purified Graphite and Coated Spherical Purified Graphite to Japan, the United States, and the European Union for manufacturing of batteries for electric vehicles.

NextSource is planning and forecasting 14,400 tonnes per annum of Coated Spherical Purified Graphite. The processing plant will consist of four lines producing 3,600 tonnes per annum. Initially, the promoter also apprised that annually, water usage will be up to 80,000 cubic metres and 21.4 million Kwh of power supply respectively. NextSource is working on a new methodology which is under progress for recycling of the overall water from the processing plants to avoid liquid wastage and discharge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that a project brief was submitted to the Economic Development Board on 20 December 2022 and initially the location of the project was at Jin Fei industrial site but, so far, no application for a Freeport Certificate has been submitted by the promoter to the Economic Development Board.

I am also informed that the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training had a meeting with the inhabitants of Baie du Tombeau in the former's Office in the presence of representatives of his Ministry on 25 August 2023 to hear grievances raised regarding the nature and location of the proposed activity at Jin Fei.

Following complaints from the inhabitants of Baie du Tombeau, the promoter changed the project location to Mer Rouge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the Mauritius Freeport Development Co. Ltd holds a lease from the Mauritius Ports Authority for carrying out freeport activities over a plot of land declared as Freeport Zone 5 in the port area.

The Mauritius Freeport Development has developed its leased site with building facilities, which the company rents to promoters for carrying out storage and light industrial activities.

At the lessee's request, a meeting was held by the Mauritius Ports Authority with representatives of the Mauritius Freeport Development Ltd, the Economic Development Board Ltd and the promoter as well as their consultants, on 18 September 2023, in connection with the project proposal to set up a Battery Anode Facility within part of the leased site.

The following observations were made in respect of this proposal –

- (i) a significant land area of around 3.4 hectares, including 1.4 hectares of building, representing more than 10% of the leased site, will be required for the implementation of the project;
- (ii) the process will involve manipulation of dangerous products (acids) and the proposed development will require tanks to store significant amounts of acids as well as a water treatment plant and a 25-metre high chimney;
- (iii) less than 50% of the imported grain sized raw material (graphite) will be processed into the final powdered product indicating a high percentage of losses and significant source of dust emission, and
- (iv) the facility/plant is intended to be constructed adjacent to the Mauritius Container Terminal and within a radius of less than 350 metres from the Rivulet Terre Rouge Bird Sanctuary, a declared Ramsar Site and an environmentally sensitive area.

In view thereof, on 20 March 2024, the Mauritius Ports Authority informed the Mauritius Freeport Development that the prevailing terms and conditions of MFD's lease is inadequate/inappropriate for allowing the implementation and monitoring of the proposed development of such magnitude and environment sensitive nature. The need for a separate industrial lease for the project was therefore warranted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that under section 20 of the Environment Protection Act 2002, a Public Notice was issued by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change on 21 March 2024 regarding an application for an EIA Licence submitted on 13

March 2024 by NextSource CSPG Mauritius Ltd for a proposed Battery Anode Facility. The location of the proposed undertaking is at Mer Rouge. The closing date for public comments was 13 April 2024.

On 27 March 2024, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change requested the Mauritius Ports Authority to submit its views for this proposed undertaking.

The MPA informed the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change on 24 April 2024 that the siting of the proposed undertaking of such complex chemical and industrial project within the Freeport Zone is not in line with the recommended land use plan of the area.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, in view of the scope and scale of the proposed project and the risks of environmental pollution, the generation of graphite dusts and waste mud cake resulting from the neutralisation, flocculation and desludging of the wastewater, the proposed project was declared as a scheduled undertaking requiring an EIA Licence under section 17 of the Environment Protection Act on 22 January 2024.

The EIA application from the promoter was received at the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change on 13 March 2024. As per the application, the nearest residential area is 446 metres from the site. Moreover, the Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary, which is a Ramsar site, is located at around 344 metres.

I am informed that following the Public Notice of 21 March 2024, comments have been received, amongst others, from Movement Anti-Pollution and Platform Moris Lanvironnman raising concerns regarding the implementation of the project on the proposed site. These comments have been forwarded to the promoters on 16 April 2024 for their views and same were received on 18 June 2024.

I am further informed that the views of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, the Commissioner of Police, the Water Resources Unit, the Wastewater Management Authority, the Mauritius Ports Authority, the Geotechnical Unit, the Municipal Council of Port

Louis and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre, amongst others, have been sought by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. The promoter was requested to submit additional information on 30 April 2024 and 31 May 2024. The additional information has been received on 18 June 2024.

I am informed that the views of certain institutions are still awaited, namely from the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, the Commissioner of Police, the Dangerous Chemical Control Board, the Solid Waste Management Division, National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre, the National Environmental Laboratory and the Land Drainage Authority.

Based on the additional information received from the promoter, the relevant authorities will be requested to send their final views and recommendations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that upon receipt of all views and recommendations from the authorities, a Director Review is drafted whereby the scale, scope site of the project is described. Furthermore, all the possible environmental pollution that may occur is also clearly stipulated. The mitigating measures are emphasised.

The Director Review also contains the proposed list of conditions that should be included in the EIA Licence in the eventuality that the project is positively recommended by the EIA Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the application is still under process as some authorities have still to provide their final views. It is only upon receipt of all views from these authorities that the application will be tabled to the EIA Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (d) of the question, I am informed that as per the project proposal, the initial investment is to the tune of USD 50 million and is expected to create over 120 jobs directly and some 300 jobs indirectly. An annual turnover to the tune of USD 100 million is expected to be generated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the population at large that every single process and legal requirements will be strictly adhered to in considering a project of such complexity with environmental and societal risks.

For any such project, the EIA clearance is the *sine qua non* condition for further consideration.

We are, I can say, a responsible Government and we will act responsibly.

Thank you.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is precisely because we are all responsible and we want to act responsibly, and in the light of what the hon. Prime Minister has stated and the arguments he has put across very forcefully. Can I impress upon him, in the light of the hazardous substances and dangerous chemicals being used by the promoter and the serious health and security risks that the proposed activities posed to the neighbouring population, the factories and Ramsar site; will the Prime Minister reassure the House, the country and the nation as a whole that he will make sure that the activity is not carried out; that this project should be set aside and shelved?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying that he impress on me. I see the contrary; I have already impressed on him because he has commented on my answer which is very clear, which has already indicated what the issues that are going to be considered by the different stakeholders are. But let me reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Nous sommes un État de droit, nous avons des lois. Lorsqu'il y a une application au niveau de l'*Economic Development Board* pour faire un projet, cette application doit suivre son cours. Il y a des ministères qui sont concernés, il y a des autorités, il y a des départements, et dans ce cas, comme je viens d'expliquer, même si au préalable, nous comme *lay persons*, nous avons des réserves, mais c'est aux techniciens, aux experts de venir nous donner leur point de vue afin que nous puissions prendre une décision.

Et dans ce cas, l'application est en train d'être examinée par les autorités concernées et bien sûr, l'autorité principale, comme je viens de dire, c'est le ministère de l'Environnement. Le comité qui est en train d'étudier l'application pour un *EIA* - je ne vais pas répéter tout ce que j'ai dit ; on a des observations, on a des points de vue qui ont été soumis et on a des éclaircissements qui ont été demandés de la part des promoteurs aussi, et les *stakeholders* sont en train de faire leur travail. Le comité va examiner tout ce qu'il y a en ce qui concerne les risques, surtout ; les risques de pollution, les risques environnementaux.

Donc, allons laisser - j'espère que le leader de l'opposition va être d'accord - les autorités, le comité faire son travail et éventuellement faire la recommandation pour que le gouvernement puisse prendre une décision.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, you know, it's coming from deep talk to all stakeholders that there is no need for the committee to entertain this project. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that in countries like Sweden, such installations, as the proposed graphite refinery, which are constructed as per rigorous standards, they are constructed in areas which are 30 kms away from any residents. And much to the dismay of the population, the hon. Prime Minister is saying that if this project is going to be entertained, it will be located in a strategic location where there are strategic assets and industries in the Port.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in Sweden, if it is 30 kms from any residential or any other areas, who am I to be in a position to say whether it should be 30 kms? I don't know! I believe such activities are also being done in other countries. But, again, it is neither for me nor for the Leader of the Opposition to say, if ever - I say if ever - this project is to be entertained and to be approved, what are the conditions that will be imposed. It's not for us to say so. It will be for the experts, for the technical people to say whether it is going to be how many kilometres, whether it's going to be 30 kms. If that is going to be the case, for argument sake, let say it has to be 30 kms, then *c'est un mort-né*.

It stands to reason how you can have such an activity when you will require to have such activities within 30 kms from either residential, commercial or industrial area. So, let us leave it to the technical people, the committee. Once they make their recommendation, then we can, maybe debate over a recommendation and eventually a decision that will be taken by Government.

Let me reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition. This activity was not even in any of the Schedules of the Environment Protection Act, but, of course, the hon. Minister of Environment has assumed his responsibility and he has requested that the applicant has to submit an application for an EIA. So, the matter is being considered, and we will leave the committee to do its work.

Dr. Boolell: Since the hon. Prime Minister has stated that it is not in the Schedule of the Ministry of Environment, can I ask him why is it that in June 2023, in the Annex to the Budget, Government proposed to amend the law and include as a new Freeport activity the very substance of this project?

The Prime Minister: That does not mean to say that an authorisation is given. Mr Speaker, Sir, any proposed activity, either to be done in the Freeport area or in the Port area, will have to go through a series of clearances. One main clearance is, from an environment point of view, an EIA, and this is what is being done. So, I hope you are not going to *nous faire un procès d'intention* when I have clearly given you all the information with regard to what is being done for this application.

Again, let me reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that all the risk factors will be taken into consideration by the Committee when they are going to make their recommendation, and I think I have already given a cue. If you want me to go further, I have already given a cue. In my reply, I have given the preliminary view of the Mauritius Ports Authority.

Dr. Boolell: I do not know what the intention of Government was, but can I remind the Prime Minister that this was surreptitiously introduced in the Finance Bill of 2023. Sections 57 and 34 of the Freeport Act were amended to make of the proposed project of NextSource a new Freeport activity. That is what was done. Can I ask the Prime Minister to revisit his policies? Because the intention of Government was clear and it was inserted in the budget. So, the intention is clear. Can the Prime Minister state clearly that this Government is not going to go ahead with this project? Otherwise you are condemning yourself.

(Interruptions)

Inn met sa dan bidze!

The Prime Minister: M. le président, le leader de l'opposition ne comprend pas ce que je viens d'expliquer.

(Interruptions)

When you asked your question, I did not interrupt or make any comment. I hope you will also be polite to allow me to reply to your question! Yes?

Dr. Boolell: With all due respect.

The Prime Minister: *Je viens d'expliquer que nous avons une procédure quand il y a une application ou une demande pour une activité économique au niveau de l'Economic Development Board.* They are foreign investors. So, we have to treat them in the same manner that we treat everybody.

When the application is being considered, that does not mean to say that it is being approved. I hope I can make this point clear to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. An application is being considered; all stakeholders will give their views. Once the views are taken into consideration and recommendation is being made... I want to try to make it simple because I think it is difficult for the Leader of the Opposition to understand.

Dr. Boolell: Yes. You agree.

The Prime Minister: Once the views are sent, the Committee will look at all the views of the stakeholders, and the Committee will make a recommendation to the hon. Minister of Environment. The hon. Minister of Environment has also no obligation to go according to the recommendation. It will be looked at, at his level, at the level of Government, and a decision, of course, will have to be taken. I cannot be clearer than that.

Mr Speaker: Time over! Thank you very much. Questions to the hon. Prime Minister! I now call hon. Dr. Aumeer!

CID TERRE ROUGE – POLICE BRUTALITY – SANCTIONS

(No. B/444) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police inquiry initiated, in or around June 2022, into alleged cases of Police brutality by Police Officers of the Central Investigation Division of Terre Rouge, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand, indicating the sanctions taken, if any, against the Police Officers involved therein.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to my replies to Private Notice Questions of 15 and 29 June 2022, respectively, wherein I stated that the Commissioner of Police had informed that, in the aftermath of the video clips about alleged Police brutality released on social media during the month of May 2022, cases of Police brutality were reported by certain persons.

Accordingly, three cases of alleged brutality were reported against officers of the Terre Rouge Central Investigation Division (CID) as follows –

- i) On Saturday 28 May 2022, one Mr J. C. J. P. L., aged 34, self-employed and residing at Goodlands, reported at Piton Police Station in the presence of his counsels, that in the year 2019, he was arrested by personnel of Terre Rouge CID in connection with a case of larceny, and that during his interrogation, he was allegedly tortured by means of a taser gun and forced to confess the case of larceny;
- ii) The second case was reported on Tuesday 31 May 2022 by Mrs M. A. J., Handy Worker, residing at Baie du Tombeau, to the effect that her son D. J. was arrested on 27 December 2018 by officers of the Terre Rouge CID in a case of murder and he was allegedly tortured by four Police Officers, and
- iii) The third case was reported on Monday 06 June 2022 by Mr K. S., aged 29, stone mason, residing at Arsenal, who stated that on 01 February 2020, he was arrested by a team from CID Terre Rouge for unknown reasons and was brought to the Terre Rouge CID Office where he was allegedly assaulted with a device that discharged electric shock. Mr K. S. also informed that he had already reported the case to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in the year 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that in the case of Mr J. C. J. P. L., in view of the seriousness of the offence, the CCID took over the case for an in-depth investigation. Subsequently, on Monday 30 May 2022, CCID arrested three Police Officers in connection with the case, namely –

- 1) Inspector H. D.;

- 2) Police Sergeant P. R., and
- 3) Police Constable K. G.

And they were detained in Police cell.

With regard to the case of Mr D. J., the initial enquiry revealed that the three Police Officers, namely Inspector H. D., Police Sergeant P. R. and Police Constable K. G., who were already detained as well as Police Constable E. B. P. posted to CID Terre Rouge were involved in the case.

On 31 May 2022, Inspector H. D., Police Sergeant P. R. and Police Constable K. G. were provisionally charged with the offence of ‘Torture by Public Official’ in breach of Section 78 of the Criminal Code before the District Court of Pamplemousses. Police objected to their release on bail and they were remanded to Police cell up to Tuesday 07 June 2022.

On Thursday 02 June 2022, Police Sergeant P. R. and Police Constable K. G. were interdicted from duty. As regards Inspector H. D., he was already under interdiction since 20 August 2021 in connection with a case of Bribery by Public Officials being investigated by the Financial Crimes Commission, that is, the former ICAC.

On 06 June 2022, Police Constable E. B. P. was also arrested in the case, and on the same day, he was provisionally charged with the offence of Torture by Public Official before the District Court of Pamplemousses. Police objected to his release on bail and he was remanded to Police cell up to 14 June 2022. He was interdicted from duty on 10 June 2022.

As for the case of K. S., on Tuesday 07 June 2022, Inspector H. D., Police Sergeant P. R. and Police Constable K. G. appeared anew before the District Court of Pamplemousses. They were remanded to Police cell up to 14 June 2022.

On 07 June 2022, pursuant to Section 10(2) (b) of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) Act 2016, the three cases of alleged torture were referred by the Police to IPCC for continuation of the enquiry.

Subsequently, on Tuesday 14 June 2022, Inspector H. D., Police Sergeant P. R. and Police Constable K. G. appeared before the District Court of Pamplemousses anew. Their

counsels made a motion for their release on bail and the bail hearing was fixed for Friday 17 June 2022. On that day, the representative of the IPCC did not object to their release on bail. They were subsequently granted bail after having furnished a surety of Rs20,000/- and entered into a recognizance in the sum of Rs100,000/- each.

As regards Police Constable E. B. P., he appeared before the District Court of Pamplemousses anew on Thursday 16 June 2022. His counsel made a motion for his release on bail and the representative of the IPCC did not object to his release. He was subsequently granted bail after having furnished a surety of Rs20,000/- and entered into a recognizance in the sum of Rs100,000/-.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the IPCC that in accordance with section 16(1)(b)(i) of the IPCC Act, after completion of investigation, the Commission referred the case of Mr J. C. J. P. L. to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on 07 December 2022, with the recommendation that the four Police Officers involved be prosecuted for the offence of Assault in breach of section 230(1) of the Criminal Code and for the offence of Violence by Public Officer in breach of section 86 of the Criminal Code.

On 07 April 2023, the DPP requested the IPCC to proceed with further investigation. Thereafter, on 23 April 2024, after further investigation, the IPCC referred the case anew to the Office of the DPP, which, on 07 June 2024, advised prosecution against Inspector H. D. and Police Sergeant P. R. for the offence of Assault in breach of section 230(1) of the Criminal Code and for the offence of Violence by Public Officer in breach of section 86 of the Criminal Code and recommended disciplinary proceedings against Police Constable B. and Police Constable K. G.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to Mr D. J., the case was referred by IPCC to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on 19 January 2023, with the recommendation that the five Police Officers involved be prosecuted for the offence of Assault in breach of section 230(1) of the Criminal Code and for the offence of Violence by Public Officer in breach of section 86 of the Criminal Code. On 02 February and 14 July 2023, the DPP requested further investigations into the case, following which, on 20 February 2024, the IPCC referred the case file to the DPP, who has now informed that the case is under consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the case of Mr K. S., I am informed by the DPP that between 22 June 2022 and 23 November 2022, there were exchanges between the Office of the DPP and the IPCC. Following further investigations by the IPCC, the Commission referred the case file to the Office of the DPP on 09 May 2023. The DPP advised prosecution against six Police Officers for Violence by Public Officer in breach of section 86 of the Criminal Code and for the offence of Assault with Aggravating Circumstance in breach of section 228(1) of the Criminal Code.

On 27 June 2023, an information bearing Cause Number 4430/23 was lodged against the six Police Officers before the District Court of Pamplemousses. On 29 August 2023, they pleaded not guilty. Thereafter, on 11 September 2023, the case against the six Police Officers was fixed for trial for 16 April 2024 and on that date, the trial was postponed to 08 August 2024 and 12 August 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am additionally informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Wednesday 30 December 2020, a USB stick (pen drive) which allegedly contained video recordings of Police brutality, was remitted to the Police. On Wednesday 06 January 2021, the USB stick in sealed cover was remitted to Mr R. K., former Assistant Superintendent of Police posted to CCID who was directed to immediately initiate an enquiry. On Wednesday 01 June 2022, the Commissioner of Police set up a Special Enquiry Team to carry out an exhaustive enquiry into the unreasonable delay in the follow up actions after the remittance of the USB stick to Mr R. K. Subsequently, on 08 August 2022, the team forwarded a report to the Commissioner of Police on the outcome of the enquiry whereby it was observed, amongst others, that Mr R. K. had failed to properly handle the enquiry on the USB stick.

In view thereof, and following consultation with the DPP, disciplinary action was initiated against Mr R. K. under Regulation 37 of the Disciplined Forces Service Commission Regulations 1997 and he was retired from the Mauritius Police Force in public interest on 21 October 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, with a view to empowering Police Officers to exercise their duties effectively whilst safeguarding the rights of

persons in their custody, the following measures have been taken to prevent recurrence of police brutality –

- (a) Since 2019 to date, some 3,227 Police Officers have been provided with training on human rights principles, principles of policing in a democratic state, stress management and other protocols on detention;
- (b) CCTV Cameras have been installed in Police Stations and the footages are viewed regularly by Station Managers to uphold discipline;
- (c) Scientific-led investigation is being enhanced to improve the investigative skills of Police Officers to carry out enquiries in a more professional and systematic manner;
- (d) Accountability has been increased at all levels with regard to the movements of detainees whilst they are in Police custody;
- (e) Senior Police Officers are exercising their powers under section 12 of the Bail Act to release detainees on parole on a case-to-case basis and to avoid unnecessary detention;
- (f) Police Officers departing from established procedures, particularly care and treatment, and safe custody of detainees, are subject to disciplinary/criminal proceedings, and
- (g) Sensitisation and information campaigns are organised by the Independent Police Complaints Commission in the Police Department to sensitise new recruits and newly promoted officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the measures implemented by Police up to now have had a significant positive impact on the performance and conduct of our Police Officers, as evidenced by a decline in reported cases of Police brutality in recent years. This trend underscores the commitment of my Government to ensure that law enforcement agencies operate diligently, ethically and with respect for human rights.

I wish to emphasise once again that my Government has consistently condemned any form of human rights violation, including acts of torture or degrading treatment, committed by any

member of law enforcement agencies. Any deviation will be dealt with swiftly to uphold justice and accountability.

By upholding these principles and implementing effective and continuous training programmes, we strive to foster a culture within our Police Force that prioritises professionalism, ethical conduct, and the protection of human dignity. Our ongoing efforts aim to build trust and confidence between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, ensuring that justice is pursued in a manner that respects and upholds the rights of every individual.

Thank you.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the Disciplined Forces Service Commission has so far taken any sanctions against those who are being prosecuted by the DPP likewise as it has done for ASP R. K. who was also involved in that case under Regulation 37 of 1997?

The Prime Minister: Well, the Police will act according to the advice of the DPP. So, if in a case, it has been recommended that the matter is pursued by proffering formal charges, whereby there have been any criminal offenses, then there are formal charges that are proffered and eventually, of course, the case goes before a Court for a trial. But I mentioned in my reply that there have also been instances where there is a recommendation for disciplinary actions to be taken and, therefore, this has also been the case and we have seen, as I mentioned, what has been the outcome. And let me say that in the case of the Assistant Superintendent of Police, whereby it was reproached that he did not take immediate action and therefore had to be retired, let me say that that person had also sought remedy before the Court to contest his retirement, and the case was dismissed. That shows that the right decision was taken.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister state the number of cases of Police brutality reported at Police Stations between two different periods: from 2005 to 2009 and from 2014 to 2024?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is good for me to provide statistics, because I have said in my reply that there has been a major improvement. Let me give the figures. So, in –

- 2005: 217 cases;
- 2006: 183 cases;
- 2007: 203 cases;
- 2008: 290 cases;
- 2009: 256 cases.
- 2014: 33 cases;
- 2015: 23 cases;
- 2016: 27 cases;
- 2017: 19 cases;
- 2018: 25 cases;
- 2019: 35 cases;
- 2020: 31 cases;
- 2021: 25 cases;
- 2022: 16 cases;
- 2023: 21 cases, and
- 2024, as at 20 June, 2 cases only.

Now, *ceci dit, M. le président*, one case is too many already, because as I have said, as a Government, we are not going to condone any act of Police brutality, but, from these statistics,

we can clearly see that the actions, the measures that have been taken by the Police – I have detailed them – have brought results. But, of course, we need to improve further on this.

Dr. Aumeer: Merci, M. le président. Est-ce que je pourrais demander au Premier ministre s'il a des informations auprès du Commissaire de police concernant les *taser guns* qui furent utilisés ? Est-ce que ces *taser guns* furent utilisés dans un contexte ? Est-ce que ces *tasers* ont été saisis et non pas déclarés, car selon mes informations, la station de police de Terre Rouge n'est pas un *Office Police Armoury* ? Merci.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question relates to the cases that have been reported to the Police and eventually to IPCC, and what actions have been taken, that is, where we are, which I have replied. Now the hon. Member is asking a very different and very specific question about a taser.

Of course, I will need notice. I can assure the hon. Member that when he puts his question, I will provide him and the House with all the information. But, right now, I cannot just give any reply like that, out of nowhere, although I am aware about the circumstances that have led to the arrest of those officers in the first case. But I will need notice of that question.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to the number of alleged cases of Police brutality that have been reported at the IPCC since its inception and the outcome thereon? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since its inception on 09 April 2018 up to 20 June 2024, the Independent Police Complaints Commission has been dealing with 4,229 complaints of alleged Police brutality, including 277 former cases from the defunct Police Complaints Division of the National Human Rights Commission. Investigation has been completed in 2,375 of those cases. The remaining 1,854 complaints are still under investigation.

I am further informed that with regard to the 2,375 cases where investigations have been completed –

- 445 complaints have been withdrawn by complainants;

- 232 complaints have been settled by conciliation meetings conducted by the Commission;
- 7 complaints have been referred to the Disciplined Forces Service Commission for disciplinary action to be initiated against Police Officers concerned;
- 48 cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice, out of which 17 cases were lodged in Court, one case has been dismissed, and the remaining 16 are still at the Court's level, and
- 1,643 complaints have been disposed of after investigation and in line with section 10(4) of the IPCC Act of 2016.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/445 will be replied by the hon. Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

The following Questions have been withdrawn: B/445, B/446 and B/447.

I now call hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

EXTENDED PROGRAMME – ASSESSMENT – METHODOLOGY

(No. B/450) 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 Extended Programme, she will state the methodology devised for the assessment of the Extended Stream students of the 2024 cohort for the end of year National Certificate of Education examinations.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to the Private Notice Question on 05 December 2023, I informed the House that the mode of assessment for the Extended Programme was being reviewed so as to introduce the School-based Assessment in the evaluation structure as from the Academic Year 2024.

Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, as from this year, the award criteria for the National Certificate of Education Extended Programme has been amended to include this School-based Assessment component.

The School-based Assessment will be conducted by Educators, monitored and moderated by the MES. Technical committees, under the leadership of the MES, have devised tasks and activities subject-wise for implementation by Educators. The evaluation of candidates will be based on these activities. The School-based Assessment will carry a weighting of 40%, while 60% of the marks will be based on the end of year written assessment for NCE. The criteria for grading are as per the annual programme of this year.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the Vice-Prime Minister, given that, Educators working with the Extended Programme students received their booklet only a few days ago and they have to prepare the EP students for the School-based Assessment, when we know that candidates have to devote two terms on their project, aren't we penalising the present 2024 cohort EP students by tardily asking them to prepare for the School-based project only a few weeks before the end of the term?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the teachers have already been briefed and there were training sessions carried out in April this year and the School-based Assessment is based on practicals and has a continuous assessment process. So, teachers have already been engaged in the process earlier. The documents that have been submitted are certain guidelines, certain specimen papers, etc., but the students are being taken care of and there are no projects for end of year. It is a project that is being done ongoing, all the time, and teachers are supposed to be assessing the competencies and the learning outcomes of the students.

The School-based Assessment is based on learning outcomes, on students' ability to show their critical thinking, and so on and so forth. So, the teachers, the Educators have been made aware long time back and they were trained earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: May I ask the hon. Minister to explain how come both the Extended Programme students and the mainstream students who sit for the same NCE DT N550 end of year exams, be now assessed differently, that is, the EP students will have an additional School-

based Assessment apart from the end of year assessment for the final grading? Why this additional pressure on these EP students?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the very idea of bringing in a school-based component is to manage, to gage the competencies developed by the students during their schooling. The written paper is the same and has always been the same. Students having passed their NCE EP will get an NCE EP Certificate. Other students, the NCE students, will carry on with the written exam only. This additional component is not to make their life more difficult but to give them the possibility of demonstrating their competencies, skills and knowledge acquired during their schooling.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Uteem!

SAUDI ARABIA – DONATION – BUILDING & RENOVATION OF MOSQUES

(No. B/452) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the donation of USD 6 million by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the purpose of building new mosques and renovation of existing mosques, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that on 21 July 2020, my colleague, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, informed the House that the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had agreed to donate USD 6 million to Mauritius for the purpose of building of new mosques and renovation of existing mosques.

Subsequently, at the Sitting of 06 April 2021, my colleague, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, also informed the House that the Saudi Authorities are considering coordinating with the local stakeholders in Mauritius to determine the nature of the assistance needed by the various mosques before coming up with an appropriate Memorandum of Understanding. Thereafter, the Mauritian side put forward the proposal for the Islamic Cultural Centre to set up a foundation and a draft MoU was submitted to the Saudi Authorities.

I wish to inform the House that in June 2022, the Saudi Government dispatched an inter-ministerial delegation to Mauritius to conduct a visual assessment of the requirements of the mosques. According to information obtained by our Embassy in Riyadh, the report of the said Saudi delegation was finalised and its recommendations submitted to the Royal Court in Saudi Arabia for approval.

In March 2023, our Embassy in Riyadh requested for an update on the disbursement of the earmarked funds in a series of meetings with high level Saudi officials. On 07 April 2023, the Royal Consulate of Saudi Arabia in Mauritius sought for an update from my Ministry on the status of internal consultations with other relevant stakeholders in Mauritius in view of signing of the MoU on the grant. The House will note that following consultations with the relevant Ministries in Mauritius, a revised draft MoU establishing the modus operandi for the disbursement of the funds was prepared and submitted to the Saudi Authorities in October 2023.

On 14 December 2023, the Royal Consulate of Saudi Arabia in Mauritius submitted an amendment to the draft MoU and following the latest consultations between Mauritius and the Saudi Authorities as recently as May of this year, we are hopeful to see a positive development.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I know from the hon. Attorney General whether there is any timeline for the finalisation of that Memorandum of Understanding between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of Mauritius?

Mr Gobin: It is difficult for me at this stage to set a timeline, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have set out already the chronology. We are proceeding in bilateral discussion with the Saudi Authorities especially concerning the modus operandi for the disbursement of the funds. *Le principe est acquis, M. le président.* But we need the MoU concerning the disbursements.

Mr Uteem: According to previous answers to PQs in this House, the Government has been consistent that they are proposing the setting up of a foundation under the ageist of the Islamic Cultural Centre to monitor the implementation of any funds that is going to be received from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Is that still the plan to set up a foundation or is there another mechanism for the disbursement of funds that is being envisaged?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have informed the House that Mauritius had submitted a revised draft to the Saudi Authorities in October 2023, following which the Saudi Authorities in December proposed an amendment to the MoU. I do not want at this stage to disclose the contents of the bilateral negotiations.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/482 will be replied by hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. PQ B/455, B/459, B/477 and B/487 have been withdrawn. Still some minutes to go! I call hon. Lobine!

VACOAS – MARKET FAIR – CLEANING PROGRAMME

(No. B/453) 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 market fair of Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to the frequency of the cleaning thereof, indicating the cleaning programme put in place therefor and further indicating the actions being envisaged for the enhancement of hygiene thereat.

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 cleaning and sweeping of the Vacoas Fair are effected on weekdays and on fair days, that is on Tuesdays and Fridays and waste generated thereat are carried away either on the same day or on the following day.

Presently, there are 4 General Workers posted at the Vacoas Fair from 7 hrs in the morning to 16 hrs in the afternoon and they have been assigned the task of cleaning and sweeping of the Vacoas Fair and its surroundings including the parking space.

I am further informed that thorough washing of the Vacoas Fair is effected every three months and same was effected on the 22 of January 2024 and 29 of April 2024. The last exercise was done on the 08 June 2024 by a private contractor.

Besides, rodent control services are effected by a private service contractor, Mr Pest Ltd on a twice monthly basis. The rodent control service was effected on the 29 of May 2024 at the Vacoas Fair and the last one was carried out on the 12 June 2024.

I am informed that the following actions are being envisaged by the Council for the enhancement of the hygienic condition at the Vacoas Fair –

1. Presently bids received for the purchase of a high pressure washer is being evaluated and this will increase the frequency of washing by its in-house labour;
2. The frequency of rodent control service will also be increased in the next financial year.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware of complaints received by users of the Vacoas Market Fair with regard to proliferation of rats and mice, even after works carried after the 12 June by the contractor?

Dr. Husnoo: I don't know, I have not received specific like that but I have just mentioned we are going to increase the frequency of rodent control service. I mean they were just waiting by next week or the week after, we will try to do that.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware that all those rats, mice and rodents, in fact, it is coming from the bare state lands just adjacent to the Vacoas Market Fair; lands that were allocated for parking spaces for the Vacoas Market Fair? Is he aware of that?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, a sum of Rs3.59 m., that is nearly Rs4 m. was used for cleaning of all the plots of land including those pulled down – the pulling down of the abandoned building that took place in the vicinity of the market fair and this has been completed. So, we know there may be a problem and the money has been spent on the cleaning, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we are keeping an eye on that as well.

Mr Speaker: So, hon. Members, I will suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 1.01 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.21 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT**HON. MS J. BERENGER - PRESS ARTICLES - QUESTIONS**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have another announcement to make regarding two press articles which appeared in –

- first, the weekly *Le Défi Plus* on Saturday 22 June 2024 under the caption– ‘*Séance Parlementaire du mardi 25 juin: Une question de Joanna Bérenger sur les activités notariales du ministre Ramano rejetée*’; and
- second, the daily *L’Express*, in its edition of Monday 24 June 2024, under the caption – ‘*La question de Joanna Bérenger et tant d’autres qui disparaissent*’.

The said press articles purport to cast aspersions on the Speaker in the discharge of his duties regarding admissibility of questions.

Hon. Members, I have to once again reiterate that pursuant to Standing Order 27, admissibility of questions rests with the Speaker.

A Member whose question has been refused or amended, must make representations privately on the matter to the Speaker.

Notwithstanding the above, it is regrettable that some hon. Members instead choose to go to the press which is in violation of Standing Order 21(4).

I have to draw the attention of hon. Members that the Speaker ensures that all questions conform to the rules as provided for under Standing Orders 21 and 22.

In the present matter, the Parliamentary Question of the hon. Member had already been the subject matter of a Private Notice Question from the Leader of the Opposition on Wednesday 12 June 2024.

Consequently, in accordance with Standing Order 22(1)(b), the question could not be entertained.

Hon. Members, by reporting this matter to the press, it is clear that hon. Joanna Bérenger has breached Standing Order 21(4).

Moreover, for criticising and casting aspersions on the Speaker in the press, the hon. Member has verged on a potential contempt of the National Assembly. In so doing, the hon. Member has offended the dignity of the House.

Hon. Members, in the light of the above, I am therefore requesting the hon. Joanna Bérenger to present her unconditional apologies to the House, failing which I will have no other alternative than to request the hon. Member to withdraw from the Chamber.

Ms J. Bérenger: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: You apologise?

Ms J. Bérenger: Yes! I apologise.

Mr Speaker: Okay, hon. Joanna Bérenger has apologised and therefore that she takes that as a warning for next time.

Now, I will call the next question!

BOM – FOREIGN EXCHANGE – SHORTAGE

(No. B/454) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to foreign exchange, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to if there is any shortage thereof on the market and, if so, the reasons therefor, indicating the measures being envisaged to address same.

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the closure of our borders in 2020 to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic had led the decrease in foreign exchange inflows the domestic foreign exchange market, resulting in a shortage of supply of foreign exchange. As a consequence, the Bank had to intervene on the foreign exchange market and sold a total amount of USD 4.1 billion to the market to alleviate pressure of foreign exchange shortage.

Without the support of the Bank of Mauritius, the domestic foreign exchange market would have been in a difficult state. I am informed by the Bank of Mauritius that since the reopening of borders in October 2021, the situation has improved compared to the pre-pandemic level with an increase in the level of foreign exchange inflows. It is observed that since January this year, the inflows on the domestic foreign exchange market are now higher than in the corresponding period of 2023 and more or less at the pre-pandemic level of 2019. In fact, in 2023 we registered a record level of tourism earnings of Rs86 billion as well as FDI inflows of Rs37 billion.

From January to mid-June 2024, foreign exchange inflows have exceeded outflows, which is a clear indication that there is no shortage on the market. As a stream of foreign exchange inflows is steadier, the bank has scaled back the size and frequency of its foreign exchange intervention. In fact, the bank only intervened once since January 2024 to sell foreign exchange on the domestic market to smooth out excess volatility in the rupee exchange rate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the bank continues to closely monitor market conditions and is in constant discussion with commercial banks regarding the good functioning of the foreign exchange market and has regular meetings with treasurers of commercial banks through the Financial Market Committee it has established.

Mr Juman: M. le président, je me demande si moi et l'honorable ministre nous vivons dans la même république. Comment se fait-il qu'il n'est pas au courant qu'il y a une pénurie de devises ?

Mr Speaker: No, no, no!

Mr Juman: Is the hon. Minister aware....

Mr Speaker: Wait! Withdraw all these comments.

(Interruptions)

Mr Juman: Is the Minister....

Mr Speaker: Now, let me guide you.

Mr Juman: I don't need your guidance.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You don't need my guidance?

Mr Juman: I don't need your guidance!

Mr Speaker: So, you do not have the floor. You do not have the floor. Next question!

CONSTITUENCY NO.1 – NATIONAL HERITAGE SITES – AMOUNT DISBURSED

(No. B/455) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the national heritage sites in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will state the total amount disbursed for the refurbishment and restoration thereof since 2019 to date, giving details of the works effected.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 – ASTRAZENECA VACCINES – COUNTRY OF ORIGIN – ADVERSE EFFECTS

(No. B/456) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to AstraZeneca Vaccines used for vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state –

- (a) the number of people inoculated therewith, indicating the country of origin thereof, and
- (b) if any case of adverse effects following the inoculation thereof has been reported at his Ministry.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius received 300,800 vials of AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccines from Korea, Italy, Spain and India, out of which –

- 161,289 adults received a first dose;
- 156,294 adults received a second dose, and

- 2,825 adults received a first booster dose.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am further informed that there were 869 cases of adverse events following immunisation among those who were administered the AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccines. They were referred to the National Pharmacovigilance Committee to investigate any causal link to the vaccine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the above mentioned Committee had concluded that out of 869 reported cases, there were five minor A1 adverse effects following vaccination and 2 major A1 adverse effect following vaccination. It is to be noted that the WHO classifies a minor A1 adverse effect following vaccination as an event that is not serious and has no potential link to the health of the recipient of the vaccine. On the other hand a major A1 adverse effect following vaccination is defined by the WHO as an event that potentially results in persistent or significant disability, incapacity or death. As per our records, I am informed that there are 2 such cases where one patient was diagnosed with Guillain–Barré syndrome and another one who was diagnosed thrombosis with thrombocytopenia.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. As you are aware about the admission by AstraZeneca concerning the serious side effects of Covishield namely, Thrombocytosis syndrome, has your Ministry considered having a hotline in an attempt to reach out to those recipients of Covishield so that we have a fair and clear idea whether this particular side effect has been encountered in the population?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we stand guided by the WHO. In the event that the WHO will recommend that we go for a hotline and start calling all those who have received the Covishield, the AstraZeneca vaccine, the Ministry will do so. But so far, there is no such recommendation from WHO.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. I do appreciate you are being guided by the WHO. However, can the hon. Minister see in the light of what is happening worldwide, particularly with these serious side effects as a class A legal action in the United Kingdom, should we not be proactive now to see whether there are these active cases or have been active in the population? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why in my reply, I already stated that there were 869 reported cases of adverse effects and the Committee has already given the recommendations about the serious adverse effects are, the not so serious adverse effects and we will stand by our report because all these reports were generated at the time the vaccines were conducted, following the WHO recommendations.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CEB – MANUAL WORKERS PENSION FUND – FINANCIAL STATE

(No. B/457) 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 Manual Workers Pension Fund and the Central Electricity Board Staff Pension Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the actual financial state thereof, respectively.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Central Electricity Board has two Defined Benefit Pension Schemes, namely the CEB Staff Pension Fund and the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund which were established on 01 January 1974 and on 01 January 1976 respectively and in accordance with section 8 of the CEB Act. Both funds, which are separate and distinct from the CEB, are governed by the Private Pension Scheme Act 2012, FSC Rules and Its Constitutive Documents.

Each Fund is administered by a governing body consisting of 6 members out of which, 3 members are appointed by the CEB and the remaining 3 members are elected by the members at the Annual General Meeting. As at 31 May 2024, both Pension Funds had a total of 1,429 pensioners and 1,486 members. Since 01 September 2016, the CEB is implementing a Defined Contribution Pension Scheme for all new employees and both the Defined Benefit Pension Funds are closed to new entrants since that date.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the information sought in the PQ regarding the actual financial state of the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund and the CEB Staff Pension Fund have been provided by the governing body of the Pension Funds through the CEB. I have been informed that the unaudited financial statements for year ended June 2023 for the CEB Staff Pension Fund reports an income of Rs258.8 million, additional CEB contributions of Rs484 million and expenditure

amounting to Rs307.6 million. Hence, the Financial Statements for 2023 show a surplus of Rs435.2 million.

As for the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund, unaudited accounts, as at 30 June 2023 report an income of Rs158.7 m., additional CEB contribution of Rs312.9 m., and expenditure of Rs345.2 m. Hence, a surplus of Rs126.4 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must add that the net assets of both pension funds have been constantly rising over the last three years. Net assets for the CEB Staff Pension Fund have expanded from Rs1775.6 billion as at 30 June 2020 to Rs3.414 billion as at 30 June 2023. Similarly, the net assets for the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund have grown from Rs981.2 m. as at 30 June 2020 to Rs1.598 billion as at 30 June 2023. These figures reflect that the Funds have been accumulating surpluses which are being invested and are earning returns.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the governing body of the Pension Funds and I would like to highlight that the CEB has been implementing the funding plan agreed with the CEB Staff Pension Fund and the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund, respectively. As such a fixed annual contribution of Rs312.9 m. has been committed and paid by the CEB to the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Moreover, a fixed annual contribution of Rs484 m. has been committed and paid to the CEB Staff Pension Fund in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as shown by the above figures, the financial state of both pension funds has been improving over the years. However, given the growing expenditure under the defined benefit pension schemes, the number of pensioners and the regular increases in the salaries of the staff under the Successive Collective Bargaining Agreements, the CEB requested consultancy firm Deloitte to make recommendations regarding a review of the pension funds for better sustainability.

A report was submitted to the CEB in April 2023, and the recommendations made were subsequently examined at the level of a committee comprising board members and members of management. The committee held several consultations with various stakeholders and submitted an action plan for implementation. The actions relate, among others, to a merger of the pension funds for greater sustainability, a shift from defined benefit to defined contribution pension

funds, use of average salary for calculation of pension, cash injection, governance of the pension funds, and reporting on the performance of the investment company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the regular cash injections by the CEB into pension funds, and implementation of the recommendations of the consultant on the review of the pension funds for improved sustainability; it is expected that the position of the pension funds would further improved in the coming years.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Assirvaden: La direction du CEB avait pris l'engagement de verser dans les deux fonds de pensions, 2 fois R 400 millions par an. Peut-on savoir du ministre, si pour les années 2021, 2022, 2023, les R 800 millions, comme engagement pris par la direction du CEB selon la section 21 du *Private Pension Scheme*, ont été respectées ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my main reply, I have already stated that for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, an amount of Rs312.9 m. has already been committed and paid to the CEB Manual Workers Pension Fund and to the CEB Staff Pension Fund, for the year 2021, 2022 and 2023, an amount of Rs484 m. has already been committed and paid. I understand that for the year 2021, 2022 and 2023 they have already paid, except for 2023, 50% have been paid, and for 2024 they have already committed that amount it will be paid before the end of this year. I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, every effort will be made to settle outstanding balances by the end of the year and a letter has already been sent to the CEB Pension Fund to this effect.

Mr Assirvaden: Le ministre vient clairement démontrer que l'engagement pris n'a pas été respecté à la hauteur de R 800 millions par an. Ceci dit, puisque c'est le ministre lui-même qui l'a dit au parlement, plus de R 3 milliards ont été pris dans les caisses du *CEB* pour injecter dans les *Consolidated Fund*. Puis-je demander au ministre s'il compte voir avec son collègue, le ministre des Finances, pour faire retourner les R 3 milliards du *Consolidated Fund* dans les comptes du *CEB* pour que le *CEB* puisse renflouer ses deux fonds de pension comme convenu par la direction du *CEB* selon, encore une fois, la section 21 du *Private Pension Schemes Act* ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied to this question, to a PQ which was asked to me sometimes back. With regard to the amount that I stated, I said that CEB has already committed that they will effect the payment before the end of this year.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**MUNICIPAL COUNCIL VACOAS-PHOENIX – FATAL ACCIDENT – SAFETY
MEASURES**

(No. B/458) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to a fatal accident which occurred on Wednesday 19 June 2024 involving an employee of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix and the scavenging lorry thereof, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to if all safety measures were complied with and, if so, give details thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir with your permission I shall reply to Parliamentary question B/458 and B/469 together since they relate to the same subject matter.

At the very outset I wish to convey my condolences to the bereaved family of Mr M.O.L. who passed away on Wednesday 19 June 2024 while he was on duty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that on Wednesday 19 June 2024, a team comprising of 7 refuse collectors including Mr M.O.L. and one driver, was providing scavenging service at Rajaratnam Road, Grannum Vacoas. At around 8.50 a.m., Mr M.O.L and Mr H.S., who form part of the scavenging team, were in the garbage box of the municipal's scavenging lorry of plate no. 5Z153 to empty refuse bins being handed over to them by their colleagues.

As per information obtained from the driver Mr D.B. while giving back an empty bin to another refuse collector, Mr M.O.L. lost balance and fell on the road. According to employees including the driver who were on the said site of work, the lorry was stationary at that time. The SAMU was contacted immediately and when it called on the said site the doctor declared that Mr M.O.L. had already passed away.

The Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, as well as, the Vacoas Police Station were informed, accordingly. An enquiry is ongoing to determine the cause of the accident.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to similar previous incident on 14 September 2023, late Mr S. S., Refuse Collector, posted at the Council, fell from the refuse box while providing scavenging service at Camp Mapou, Phase 1, Henrietta. The incident occurred whilst the driver, Mr D. B. was reversing the municipal scavenging lorry in a dead end over a distance of around 25 metres to enter an off lane.

Late Mr S. S. who was on the refuse box with another colleague lost his balance when the driver applied the brakes and he fell. He was admitted to the hospital on the same day but unfortunately, passed away on 21 November 2023 at the hospital. The cause of death was attributed to pulmonary haemorrhage. The Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has initiated an investigation into the matter to determine the cause of the accident.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to safety measures, I am informed by the Council that all refuse collectors on roster basis are each provided with personal protective equipment on a yearly basis, namely –

- 2 pairs of rubber boots;
- 4 pairs of rubber gloves, double industrial layer, and
- 1 fluorescent waistcoat.

One rain suit is also provided every two years. All protective equipment are replaced upon request from the employee in case of wear and tear.

Furthermore, the Council has established a safe working procedure for refuse collectors on a roster basis following a visit by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training at the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix on 14 March 2024. Same has been

circulated to all employees working in the scavenging section, including drivers, refuse collectors and supervisors refuse collection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training that following its visit on 14 March 2024 – this was well before the present accident – the following recommendations have been made –

- (i) to establish a safe system of work in connection with all high risk jobs at the place of work and ensure that all employees concerned are provided with appropriate training, instructions, information and supervision for proper implementation of such safe systems of work;
- (ii) to ensure by strict supervision that the safe system of work is being closely followed by the employee concerned, and
- (iii) ensure that the employees are provided with adequate safety and health information, instruction and training.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has further informed that it has already held a consultation with stakeholders concerned for the introduction of a regulation to regulate safety and health conditions of refuse collectors and it is in the process of finalising same.

Moreover, it has scheduled visits with respect to refuse collection activities. On its part, the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix organised a yearly sensitisation exercise through its Senior Safety and Health Officer with all refuse collectors. The last exercise was effected on 20 March 2024. This exercise will be held on a more frequent basis. A risk assessment has also been carried out to identify the risk areas and the Council is monitoring same. I therefore reassure the House that safety measures are being taken by both the Government and Local Authorities in the interest of the employees of the Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Council that on the day of the accident, it has been reported by the Health Officer in charge of the said scavenging section that all the refuse collectors were wearing their personal protective equipment.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Je présente également mes sincères condoléances à la famille L. de Sadally. Comme l'a si bien dit le Vice-Premier ministre, un accident similaire s'est produit il y a neuf mois et aucune compensation n'a été accordée à la famille de monsieur M. S.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: Peut-on savoir du Vice-Premier ministre quel soutien et quelles indemnités ont été apportées à la famille L. de Sadally ? Merci.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have that information with me. I have to check with the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, le 5 décembre 2023, j'ai posé une question au Vice-Premier ministre concernant un accident. Donc, en l'espace de six mois, M. le président trois accidents : deux morts, un paralysé...

Mr Speaker: No! No! Put your question!

Mr Assirvaden: I am coming.

Mr Speaker: You are coming with a supplementary question. So, it should be direct. Do not make comments, observations and analysis and all these.

Mr Assirvaden: Le Vice-Premier ministre est-il au courant – depuis qu'il m'a répondu il y a six mois de cela – que la sécurité et les conditions de travail des travailleurs de la municipalité de Vacoas sont vraiment difficiles ? Pas de *fishnet*, M. le président, dans des voitures. Est-ce que le Vice-Premier ministre...

Mr Speaker: Let him reply!

Mr Assirvaden: Je dois lui demander !

Mr Speaker: Then go first!

Mr Assirvaden: Okay. Est-ce qu'il est au courant de l'état des camions de la municipalité de Vacoas ? Sur 20 camions, 8 camions sont en panne et les éboueurs sont obligés de travailler dans ces camions.

Mr Speaker: No, this is not a question. This is not a supplementary question. It may be a PQ for next time. This is not a supplementary question. So, I do not allow this question.

Mr Speaker: Let us go to the next question. Hon. Woochit!

**MAURITIUS NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM (CLUB M) – MR G. M., COACH –
WORK PERMIT APPLICATION**

(No. B/459) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in regard to the application for a work permit for Mr G. M., a French national acting actually as Coach for the Mauritius National Football Team (Club M), he will state if same has been issued and, if so, give details thereof, indicating if his Ministry is in presence of a request therefor by the Mauritius Football Association.

(Withdrawn)

PAMPLEMOUSSES DISTRICT COUNCIL – HOUSEHOLD BINS – DISTRIBUTION

(No. B/460) **Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the distribution of plastic household bins by the District Council of Pamplemousses from January 2023 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to the number thereof distributed in each village, indicating the respective 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 District Council of Pamplemousses that it has distributed 1,282 pairs of household plastic bins from January 2023 to date.

This distribution has been done in the villages which have not received bins during the first distribution from 03 July 2021 to 31 January 2022. I am tabling a detailed list of bins distributed from January 2023 to date in each village with their respective dates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that a press communiqué was made by the Council on 3, 5, and 7 April 2024 to inform all residents to collect their bins if ever they have not received same. The District Council has also met the Primary School Head Teachers on 15 May 2024 and is providing the school with a set of 15 bins.

Mr Woochit: Thank you. Can the hon. Minister inform the House what criteria have been used by the District Council to determine the allocation of the plastic bins to each village because most villages have not received their bins yet?

Dr. Husnoo: No, actually from the list that I am going to circulate, Mr Speaker, Sir, almost all the villages have received their bins and those which have not received it, that is why the second exercise was done to make sure that they get it.

Mr Woochit: What was the total budget allocated for the distribution of the plastic bins and how much of this budget has been utilised so far?

Dr. Husnoo: I do not have the information for the budget, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: So, we move to the next question, hon. Bodha!

ALCOHOL & SPIRITS BEVERAGES –QUANTITY IMPORTED – IMPORT VALUE & TAXES COLLECTED

(No. B/461) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to alcohol and spirits

beverages, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of bottles thereof imported since January 2024 to date, indicating the –

- (a) cost thereof, and
- (b) amount of taxes collected therefrom.

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that 2.1 million litres of alcohol and spirit beverages have been imported from 1 January 2024 to 19 June this year.

As regards part (a) of the question, the import value amounts to Rs530 million.

Concerning part (b) of the question, the total amount of taxes collected is Rs779 million.

Mr Bodha: I have two questions, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we have a list of the countries of origin from where the imports have been done?

Mr Bholah: I will table it. I do not have it in my possession actually.

Mr Bodha: My second question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is how many bottles were sold duty-free?

Mr Bholah: I do not have this information either.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Bholah: Maybe you can come up with another question.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT – CONSULTANCY FIRMS – FEES

(No. B/462) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro

Express Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Ltd., information as to the quantum of fees paid to the consultants/consultancy firms as at date, indicating their respective scope of work.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express Project is the most innovation and transformative project ever undertaken in Mauritius and it is contributing towards the modernisation of our public transport system by providing a safe, efficient, sustainable and alternative mode of transport. This project has been implemented in several phases as follows –

Phases	Alignment	Date of start of commercial service
Phase 1	Port-Louis to Rose-Hill	10 January 2020
Phase 1- 2A	Port-Louis to Quatre Bornes	20 June 2021
Phase 1, 2A - 2B	Port-Louis to Phoenix	08 May 2022
Phase 1, 2A - 2C	Port-Louis to Curepipe	10 Oct 2022
Phase 1,2 and 3	Port-Louis to Curepipe and Rose-Hill to Reduit	23 Jan 2023

Presently, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express Project comprises of 32 km of railway track, passing through five major towns, 21 Light Rail Stations and 18 Light Rail Vehicles. The alignment is designed to connect six major bus interchanges, namely Port Louis, Victoria, the Immigration Square, Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes, Vacoas, and Curepipe, thus enabling a multimodal urban transit solution.

Further to the implementation of the Metro Express Project, some 45,000 passengers are enjoying a safe, comfortable, quick and affordable transport and which is environmentally sustainable, on a daily basis. In fact, I am informed by the Metro Express Ltd that over 30 million passengers have already travelled by this mode of transport, so far.

In this respect, the Metro Express Project should not be assessed solely on the basis of financial returns and we need to see beyond figures due the numerous benefits, both on the economic and social fronts linked with this project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the complex nature of this project, involving technical risk and due diligence, the services of consulting firms were enlisted to ensure that all the necessary measures and concepts are considered and implemented to enable a safe, secure and a functional Light Rail system in accordance with the international best practices. This is a normal international practice for such a mega multi-faceted and interdisciplinary infrastructure project.

Furthermore, the overall project was considered as a network of systems, which means that the project was built up on various sub systems and each one of them was tackled as an individual system, bearing in mind its hard and soft characteristic integrated into a holistic system approach.

To ensure overall confidence in the project, five levels of assurance were implemented from the design to the implementation phase throughout the lifecycle of this project. A team of multidisciplinary experts, both local and international, with established reputation in their respective domains, were, thus involved to ensure safe planning, execution and implementation of the Light Rail Transit system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the consultancy services of the following firms were retained for the Metro Express Project –

- (i) Larsen & Toubro, which following the procurement exercise for Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the project, was appointed as the main Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contractor on this project, for a fixed lump sum contract.
The latter had an internal assurance process, designed approval verifications and approval processes to ensure the delivery of the project as per the contract requirements.
- (ii) The Project Consultancy Management by RITES Limited, from August 2017 to June 2023.

As part of the funding requirements under the line of credit agreement with the Government of India, a Project Management Consultant was appointed. Since the project was financed by the Government of India, an Indian company, namely RITES, was selected by that Government and, subsequently, appointed by Mauritian authorities.

RITES Limited was responsible to carry out supervision task in relation to the Metro Express works, installation of infrastructure, electrical and mechanical systems, assist the Metro Express Ltd in defining the Safety, Environment Quality and Risk Management, report and monitor for the construction, pre-operation and commissioning, provide assurance support for commissioning and address any issues on the system integration and operation readiness and certified payments.

- (iii) Under the G-to-G agreement between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of Singapore, the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise was enlisted to provide Delivery Support and Advisory Services and to ensure that the concept design of the project was being effectively implemented by the Engineering, Procurement and Construction Contractor.

Under the Delivery Support and Advisory Services, the scope of works comprise of the design and construct delivery services which focus on the Design and Contract Management integration, issues resolution, refinements, provision of technical support and briefings, and support the MEL on other enabling aspects related to the development of the project and ensure that the concept design is implemented effectively.

- (iv) There was a need to capacity build the Operation and Maintenance team of the Metro Express Ltd to ensure that the staff and the executives are well-trained and equipped with the necessary expertise to operate and maintain the Light Rail Network. Therefore, in September 2018, the services of the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise/Singapore Mass Rapid Transit were resorted for the provision of Operation Readiness Services for the Metro Express Ltd in terms of support for effective operations and maintenance, recruitment and staff development and training to enable efficient Metro Express operations and maintenance.

- (v) In accordance with international practice for railways, the services of an Independent Safety Audit Consultancy Firm were also enlisted to ensure that the system is safe for commercial operations.

The scope of the Independent Safety Audit comprise assessing the design, implementation, manufacture, installation, the operation and maintenance organisation processes and techniques that comply to the railway standards. For each phase, before transitioning to operation, an individual Independent Safety Audit was carried out by a team of international multidisciplinary experts in railway assurance, infrastructure design, operations and maintenance assurance.

- (vi) Mr Speaker, Sir, approvals were also obtained from all relevant authorities at each stage of the project implementation.

With respect to the total fees paid for these consultancy services, Mr Speaker, Sir, same amount to Rs1.4 billion, representing 6% of the total construction cost for the project, out of which, 4% has been allotted for the Project Management Consultant, RITES Ltd, and the remaining is for the other consultancy services since the implementation of the project.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I wanted to have a breakdown from the hon. Minister for each consultant, how much was paid. I thought he would have tabled it. So, can I ask the hon. Minister whether, in the light of the problems being faced by Metro, traffic jam, flooding, security and accidents, and profitability, are there any consultancy being done on these fronts?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must inform the hon. Member that, in fact, with regard to the question that he has asked, a team of multidisciplinary local and international experts, as I said, with established reputation in their respective domains, were involved to ensure the safe planning and execution and implementation of the system.

MEL has been working collaboratively with all the relevant local authorities, including the LDA, the NDU, the RDA, Municipal and District Councils, and others with regard to the drainage system all along the metro corridor. And as for any other works, Mr Speaker, Sir, MEL and L&T have been following all the procedures and approval requirements with the relevant authorities, especially the LDA.

With regard to the drainage system, detailed drainage designs have been submitted to the LDA for the recommendations and approvals and only upon receiving the necessary clearances, works have been carried out on site.

Mr Speaker: I think that this question has sufficiently been canvassed. We move to the next question. Hon. Ameer Meea!

NLTA – INTRODUCTION OF ONLINE SERVICES – UPDATE

(No. B/463) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of online services for the public at the National Land Transport Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to where matters stand, giving details thereof.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for giving me another opportunity to enlighten the House with regard to the online services being undertaken at the NLTA currently.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the NLTA that vehicle growth is keeping an ascending trend over the years. Today, our vehicle fleet stands at 686,704 with an annual increase of around 4.4% and these figures did not change. This percentage did not even change during the COVID years, Mr Speaker, Sir. This has of course resulted in an upsurge in the number of transactions at the level of the NLTA counters involving more than 27,000 operations on a monthly basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in accordance with the Road Traffic Act and the NLTA Act, the main transactions effected by the NLTA include among others –

- payment of Motor Vehicle Licence for Private, Company and other Vehicles operating under a Public Service Vehicle Licence;
- Issue of “*Certificat de Gage sans déplacement*”;
- transfer of ownership of vehicle;
- issue of removal permits;

- issue/Re-issue/loss of registration book (horsepower);
- amendments to particulars of vehicle;
- re-registration of vehicles;
- Inscription/removal of lien;
- change of name and address, and
- copy of entry of vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with Government's vision towards promoting digitalisation for ease of doing business, improving customer service and experience while streamlining procedures and processes, the NLTA has already embarked on several online services.

Given that the renewal and payment of Motor Vehicles License (MVL) in the transaction with the highest frequency, an online MVL Platform was introduced in November 2018, enabling owners of private vehicles only to pay their road tax (declaration) online without the need to call at the NLTA Counters physically.

The Online MVL Platform provides for the different payment modes, as per the integrated payment system of the Bank of Mauritius.

This E-Service is a one-stop service available from the comfort of home where users are able to make online payment for MVL by virtually connecting to the NLTA System and the Insurance System. The envisaged E-Service portal would provide the following benefits –

- Improve the work processes and business of the NLTA;
- Provide timely management information for decision making;
- Enhance the level of service delivered to stakeholders;
- Better control on revenue collection and significant minimisation of risks of fraudulent/fake documents, and
- New user-friendly Portal for dissemination of information and service.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, there has not been a proper uptake of this platform as most vehicle owners still call at the NLTA Counters and Post Offices for the renewal and payment of their MVL. As such, my Ministry is proposing for a cut-off date of 31 July 2024 for the renewal of MVL by owners of private vehicles initially which involve some 350,000 vehicles. As many vehicle owners had been effecting transactions regarding renewal of MVL only at the Post Offices, in this case, a transition period up to 1 December 2024 would be given for such transactions to be effected at the Post Offices only and not applicable at the NLTA counters. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the renewal and payment of MVL by owners of private vehicles would have to be carried out solely through the Online MVL Platform as from 2 December 2024.

A help desk is being set up by the NLTA to assist users encountering problems while using the online system. Furthermore, a sensitisation campaign is being organised to inform the public about this e-service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an online platform is also available to the public since June 2020 with regard to the reservation and purchase of Registration Mark comprising a combination of two letters from FN to ZZ followed by numeric figures from 1 to 1000 subject to exceptions.

Additionally, with the introduction of Personalised Registration Mark comprising a combination of 3 to 9 letters followed by numerical between 1 to 9999 depending on the number of alphabets and subject to exceptions, the public may reserve or purchase these Personalised Registration Mark online.

The Online First Registration for Motor Dealers is yet another online platform which has been introduced in September 2023 to enable motor vehicle dealers to conduct the first registration process for new and second hand motor vehicles at the comfort of their offices. The system also provides motor dealers the facility to print horsepower at their end via the platform. The payment module relating to this platform is being fine-tuned and same is expected to be operational by end of June 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, arrangements are also underway for the enlistment of all Motor Vehicle Dealers on this online platform and as at date, four major Motor Vehicle Dealers are using this facility.

The NLTA has been requested to ensure the registration of all Motor Vehicle Dealers including second-hand motor vehicle dealers by end of this year to reduce the number of customers calling at its counters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to facilitate this process and making the transfer of motor vehicles less of a hassle, the Road Traffic Act is being amended to allow the Registrar-General's Department to ascertain through its platform and lawful sharing of information between the NLTA as to whether a motor vehicle or trailer is burdened with a lien prior to the registration and transfer same. The aim of this is to make more convenient and less time consuming both for the former and the new owner. This is with regard to the *certificat de gage sans déplacement*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And being given that the Registrar General department already has its appropriate platform which is providing the taxation and registration of transfer vehicle, this system would be enhanced to cater for the verification of any *lien* on a motor vehicle or trailer prior to the registration of transfer and transfer of ownership of same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this system would initially be introduced for cases of an individual to another individual so that the NLTA would continue to cater for all other cases for the *certificat de gage sans déplacement*. A sensitisation campaign would be organised to inform the public on the new arrangement for the transfer of owner of a motor vehicle or trailer. Necessary amendments are being made today, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Road Traffic Amendment Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are aware that this process for transfer of ownership is time-consuming for customers. There are currently some 51,000 *certificats de gage sans déplacement* which are issued mostly at the Emmanuel Anquetil Building on a yearly basis for the purposes of the sale of vehicle (individual to individual, company to individual, individual to company and company to company) and other instances involving 3 processes namely –

- 1) The issue of the *certificat de gage sans déplacement* which is manually effected by the NLTA;

- 2) The registration of the vehicle and payment thereof which is effected seamlessly online by the Registrar General Department, and
- 3) The transfer of ownership and issue of the horsepower manually at the level of the NLTA.

So, as we can see, there are 3 processes, Mr Speaker, Sir, which will be reduced once the Bill is adopted today by way of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill.

Therefore, in order to lessen the hardship of customers, my Ministry is working in close collaboration with the Registrar General Department, the NLTA and the Attorney General's office to cater for this NLTA process online, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ameer Meea: Despite everything that has been said by the hon. Minister in his reply, can I ask the hon. Minister, why is that we still have long queues at NLTA offices and also is he satisfied with NLTA website portal and the service that is being offered?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since this question was only with regard to the online services to be offered by the NLTA, I did not touch up on other issues like the staffing issues. You know, for the past years the NLTA has been understaffed, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will not go through the details but yesterday five new MSO's have been posted at the NLTA and now the total amount of MSO's which have been transferred to the NLTA in the recent days/weeks amounts to about 61. I speak under the correction of the hon. Minister of Public Service, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Understaffing has been a major problem and so we have solved this problem at least for the moment. And, this is why these days we do not hear of the long queues and of the problems that we have been having during these past weeks. So, the staffing problem has been resolved. All the counters, Mr Speaker, Sir; we have 52 counters, Mr Speaker, Sir, distributed at Cassis, Forest Side, Flacq and the sub-office at Port Louis. So, today we have sufficient staff to man all these counters, this is one important point.

The second point, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are adding additional counters and we are at the moment discussing with the Minister of Local Government and we are going, in the days to come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to also set up new counters at Victoria Urban Terminal; Level 2 of this

building will be rented by the NLTA to provide more counters for owners of motor vehicles, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, in addition as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have already embarked on different online services and we are satisfied with the measures that we are taking right now.

We will bring solution to the problem at the NLTA. We are confident about this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: We move to the next question. Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

**MSAW – CATCH, NEUTER & RELEASE PROGRAMME – WORLDWIDE
VETERINARY SERVICES**

(No. B/464) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Catch Neuter and Release (CNR) Programme, he will state the –

- a) decision taken by the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare (MSAW), if any, for the procurement of the services of the International Animal Welfare and Protection Coalition via Worldwide veterinary services for the conduct of mass sterilisation of dogs and, if so, give details thereof, and
- b) number of stray dogs sterilised and released by MSAW thereunder since 2021 to date on a monthly basis.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with section 12 of the Animal Welfare Act 2013, the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare (MSAW) is established as a body corporate operating under the aegis of my Ministry. Therefore, the Society carries out all its procurement activities in strict compliance with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act 2006 and legal instruments under the Act.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that in June 2021, the Worldwide Veterinary Services (WVS) had on its own submitted a project proposal with cost implications to implement the Humane Dog Management Programme for Mauritius. The project proposal of the WVS was not accepted as it was not in response to a bidding exercise undertaken by the MSAW.

On 09 May 2023, following an amendment made section 2 of the Animal Welfare Act 2013 with a view to providing a 'Catch Neuter and Release', the Society launched an open international bidding exercise for the procurement of veterinary services to implement the Catch Neuter and Release programme under the 'Sustainable Project for the Dog Population Control in Mauritius'. I am informed that only the WVS responded to the bidding exercise. The proposal did not have any cost implication and the bid validity submitted by the WVS was far less than that specified in the bid document. As such, the bid was non-responsive to the requirement of the bid document and was not retained.

On 29 January 2025, the Society conducted a second open international bidding exercise for the project. The only bid received was again from the WVS and it was price offer. I am informed that the bid was non-responsive as the WVS did not submit any evidence of experience of its team in accordance with the specifications of the bidding document and could therefore not be retained again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Society has embarked on a soft launch of the CNR programme on a pilot basis since 2023 with in-house resources. The number of stray dogs sterilised and released by the Society under the CNR programme for the year 2023 and 2024 is 464 and 705 respectively, indicating 1169 interventions so far. It is worth noting, Mr Speaker, Sir, that since July 2022 to date, the MSAW has sterilised 14161 dogs out of which 12992 are owned dogs. I am tabling the details of the CNR interventions.

Ms J. Bérenger: La proposition de la *Worldwide Veterinary Services*, c'est à dire de procéder à la stérilisation de masse gratuitement a été faite à la MSAW, au ministre et au ministère. Le ministre peut-il nous dire, pourquoi est-ce que le ministère n'a pas choisi l'option de signer un accord ou un *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)* avec la *Worldwide Veterinary Services*, pour cette stérilisation de masse comme ça été fait en 2019 avec la *Humane Society International*?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my main reply, I stated that the bid was received and the fact that it is not in compliance with the specification of the bidding document. The bidding committee could not retain that proposal, that's why it had to re-launch the bid, and on the

second occasion, when they submitted their bids, they included a price on it but on the second occasion, the team that was supposed to conduct that exercise, they did not specify the expertise of the team. That is why again, the panel did not retain that offer.

Ms J. Bérenger: Le ministre ne répond pas à ma question. Pourquoi avoir choisi l'option d'un appel d'offres plutôt que de signer un accord avec la *Worldwide Veterinary Services* qui proposait de faire ce travail de stérilisation gratuitement. Pourquoi avoir choisi l'option de l'appel d'offres plutôt qu'un accord?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, again I am saying, in the first option they came up with that zero cost offer but in terms of validity time that they offered was much less than the one that the bidding document specified. And that is why it was not in conformity with the Public Procurement Act and that is the reason why the Bidding committee could not accept the offer. They went for a second launch and the second time they came with an offer, but this time, costs were associated with it. It was no longer free.

Mr Speaker: Next question. MP Juman! I think this time you will need my guidance.

NATIVE TERRESTRIAL BIODIVERSITY & NATIONAL PARKS ADVISORY COUNCILS – COMPOSITION

(No. B/465) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Advisory Council, he will state the –

- (a) current composition thereof, and
- (b) recommendations, if any, made to the Minister with regard to the conservation of wildlife since June 2023 to date.

(Withdrawn)

FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION – LEASED OFFICE SPACES – RENTAL FEE

(No. B/466) **Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the

Financial Services Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of buildings being leased to house same and the offices thereof, giving details thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) name of the lessor/s, and
- (b) monthly rental fee.

Mr Bholah: At the very outset, I wish to inform the House that the head office of the Financial Services Commission (FSC) is located at 54, Cybercity Ebène.

As regards parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that there are currently three buildings on lease from the following lessors –

1. MauBank Ltd and Vivo Energy for two adjacent office spaces at Clyderlex Arcades in Rodrigues at a monthly rental cost of Rs30,266.88, and Rs21,966 respectively;
2. Nex Ltd for office space at Nex Tower Building situated at Ebène at a monthly cost of Rs2,079,951, and
3. PSH Investment Ltd for office space at 7 Exchange Square Building located at Ebène at a monthly cost of Rs4,655,150.

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: No, I have not given you the floor! No ‘thank you’! Why ‘thank you’ for nothing? Let me give you my guidance this time. Now you need my guidance. My guidance to you, hon. Member, is that this Minister is not the substantive Minister of Finance. So, you only have the right to put questions relating to what he answered, what he replied, and relating to your question put on the Order Paper.

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. He is the substantive Minister because this is for FSC. Okay, thank you for your guidance.

Mr Speaker: What are you talking about?

Mr Juman: No ...

Mr Speaker: No question! You always want to have the last word. No question for you!
We move on to the next question!

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have ...

Mr Speaker: Now, the next question would be hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker...

**PRIVATE HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS – APPLICATIONS RECEIVED –
CLEARANCES**

(No. B/467) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the setting up of new private healthcare institutions, he will state the number of applications received therefor to date, indicating the –

- (a) name of the applicants therefor, and
- (b) number thereof –
 - (i) under construction;
 - (ii) having obtained clearances, and
 - (iii) awaiting clearances.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for the period November 2019 to date, my Ministry received a total of –

- 22 applications for Health Care Units, out of which 17 obtained a license, 3 were issued a No objection to proceed further and 2 are still under process;
- 15 applications for Private Clinics, out of which 9 obtained a license, 5 were issued a “No Objection” to proceed further and 1 is still under process, and

- 22 applications for Private Laboratories, out of which, 19 obtained a license, 2 were issued a “No Objection” to proceed further and 1 is still under process.

With your permission, Sir, I am tabling the required information. Thank you.

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of explanation, please. Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the advice you gave regarding the Minister, he is the substantive Minister. FSC falls under his purview. So, I do not understand your guidance.

Mr Speaker: Okay! What did you say? FSC!

Mr Juman: FSC!

Mr Speaker: If FSC falls under his purview, then your question should be related to the answer and also to what you stated as question on the Order Paper. This is my guidance.

Mr Juman: Of course, yes. Thank you. Can I proceed?

Mr Speaker: Wait! Please continue!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Minister in view of the increasing number of private institutions seeking to set up in Mauritius, has his Ministry ensured from all of them that they have the necessary manpower be it in terms of junior doctors and nursing staff to provide a safe and efficient service before permits being issued to them?

Dr. Jagutpal: Thank you, hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is guided by the Private Health Institutions Act. In the Act, it is already mentioned whenever a license is being issued, there are conditions that have to be fulfilled based upon the different conditions for the specific setups.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister be able to share with the House whether the facility of having onboard at the very least, a four-bedded Intensive Care Unit for all new permits, and for those who are now requesting to renew the permits, since we are living in a very high-level care era?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the provision falls under the Private Health Institution Act, so, we are going according to this Act. This Act is under review. The Ministry has already

called for a Consultant so that we can review this Act. Soon, we will be coming with a new Act where such provisions will be made.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, you wanted a clarification with regard to PQ B/466? Go on!

Mr Juman: *Yes, two.* Merci, M. le président! Est-ce que je peux savoir de l'honorable ministre la date depuis que la FSC loue le bâtiment 7 Exchange Square appartenant à Monsieur Gopee ?

Mr Bholah: Janvier de cette année-ci.

Mr Speaker: Second question!

Mr Juman: M. le président, merci encore. M. le ministre de la Bonne gouvernance, vous venez de dire qu'on loue cela depuis janvier. Mais pourquoi, à ce jour, c'est toujours inoccupé, alors qu'on paie R 4.6 millions par mois ?

Mr Bholah: Donc, j'ai été informé qu'ils vont rendre ce bâtiment, c'est-à-dire le Nex Tower Building...

Mr Juman: 7 Exchange!

Mr Bholah: Oui. Je n'ai pas compris la question.

Mr Speaker: No crosstalking. This is a Parliament!

Mr Bholah: Can you repeat the question?

Mr Juman: On loue le bâtiment depuis janvier. On paie R 4.6 millions par mois. On est en juin/juillet et c'est toujours inoccupé. Pourquoi ?

Mr Bholah: They have to furnish it, because it has been rented unfurnished. Now they have to get all the furniture and equipment installed.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**VACOAS-PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – ACCIDENT AT WORK –
SAFETY MEASURES**

(No. B/469) 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 a fatal accident which occurred on Wednesday 19 June 2024 involving an employee of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix and a lorry thereof, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to the –

- (a) circumstances thereof;
- (b) number of such recent accidents, and
- (c) measures being taken to enhance the safety of the workers of the Council

(Vide Reply to PQ B/458)

HYBRID&ELECTRIC CARS – BATTERY REPLACEMENT SCHEME

(No. B/470) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to hybrid and electric cars, he will state if consideration will be given for a scheme to be devised to assist the users thereof for the replacement of the battery thereof.

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, this Government has set the objective to achieve 60% share of energy from renewable sources by 2030. One important element toward this transition is decarbonisation of the transport sector through a greener vacant fleet.

With a view to encouraging the shift, this government has abolished excised duty on hybrid and electric vehicles with effect from 20 June 2022. In addition government is granting a fiscal incentive of Rs200,000 on the purchase of an electric vehicle as from 01 July 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, government is adopting a holistic approach to the issue of replacement of hybrid and electric car batteries whereby any potential assistance for their replacement will be considered together with recycling strategies. In this context, I am also informed that the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities has prepared a 10 Year Electric Vehicle Integration Roadmap 2020 for Mauritius which provides amongst others for the elaboration of electric

vehicles, financial incentives including a National Battery Plan to ensure long-term battery sustainability.

I am also informed that the Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency (MARENA) under the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities has initiated a study on the development of an action plan for the recycling of used solar panels and electric vehicle batteries.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Can I ask the hon. Minister how many hybrid and electric cars are running presently in the country?

Mr Bholah: I do not have this information. Maybe you can come up with...

Mr Bodha: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether a date has been decided by Government as regards only hybrid and electric cars being imported into the country?

Mr Bholah: Not yet.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TRIOLET BYPASS – OVERHEAD IRRIGATION SYSTEMS ON WHEELS – MALFUNCTION

(No. B/472) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the 23 overhead irrigation systems on wheels not functioning properly and affecting sugar cane and vegetable planters in the region of the Triolet bypass, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Irrigation Authority, information as to the urgent measures being envisaged therefor.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Irrigation Authority that there are 26 overhead irrigation systems on wheels also known as centre pivots in the Northern Plains Irrigation Project, which provide irrigation facilities to over 954 hectares of land belonging to small planters and, which are essentially under sugarcane cultivation.

For the region along the Triolet bypass, there are two centre pivots which serve some 200 planters. Unfortunately, these two centre pivots are for the time being not operational due to thefts and vandalism. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, these two centre pivots, which are located in remote regions, have been subject to frequent thefts over the past few years. I am told that the

copper cables found in the pivots are being removed and stolen by thieves, thus, damaging the pivots and haltering irrigation activities in this area. Prompt action is taken by the Irrigation Authority each time to repair and replace the damaged parts. However, the copper cables are stolen again.

This problem has been recurring for a number of times now, the last one being in January 2024. In view thereof, the Irrigation Authority has taken the following actions to curb the problem of theft of centre pivots –

- a) regular patrols around the irrigation areas of at least three times during the night are carried out. A team of workers have been designated specifically for this purpose;
- b) the Police has been requested to increase the frequency of its patrols near the Triolet bypass in the vicinity of centre pivots;
- c) the Irrigation Authority replaced all the copper electric cables with aluminium cables, following which, a decrease in theft was noted, but vandalism continued, and
- d) finally, a security contractor has been hired to secure all the centre pivots in the Northern Plains Irrigation Project by installing electric fencing and alarm system around the control panel areas of centre pivots together with a first response service, which notifies the Irrigation Authority's patrol team in case of any tampering with the equipment. The work is ongoing.

Once the centre pivots found along the Triolet Bypass are secured with the electric fence and alarm system, the stolen parts of the centre pivots which have already been procured, would be replaced. This is expected to be completed by end of June 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the meantime that the pivots are back to operation, the following measures have been taken by the Irrigation Authority to ensure proper water supply for irrigation to the 200 planters along the Triolet bypass –

- a) the procurement of a specific hose reel meant to supply irrigation water to planters;
- b) a new scheme has been launched for the allocation of separate water abstraction points to enable planters to abstract water from the Irrigation Authority's network for crop irrigation. So far, 25 planters have subscribed to the scheme and are able to irrigate their fields;

- c) the Irrigation Authority is also encouraging the use of the drip irrigation method. It is to be noted that a grant of Rs150,000 is being provided as from last financial year to allow planters to purchase drip irrigation equipment. 34 planters have benefitted from this scheme, as at date. Mr Speaker Sir, I am circulating some pictures to show the situation in these fields. You will note that the drip irrigations have been installed and the plantations are well irrigated. In view of the success of this scheme, it will be extended to planters encountering frequent irrigation problems including those affected by the thefts I mentioned earlier, and
- d) furthermore, the Irrigation Authority is contemplating to replace all old existing centre pivots by new and more effective irrigation equipment to ensure a more reliable and consistent irrigation water supply to planters of the northern region. This will cost quite an amount and will have to be undertaken over a number of years, due to intensive capital investment required.

Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Has there been any assessment of the economic impact on the sugarcane and vegetable planters in the region due to the malfunctioning irrigation system as you just mentioned? And what immediate support...

Mr Speaker: No! You know what is a supplementary. This is a PQ, a very good PQ. Next time but not now!

Mr Woochit: It is very short. It is very short!

Mr Speaker: I give you a last chance, put supplementary questions!

Mr Woochit: Okay. Has there been any assessment of the economic impact on the sugarcane and vegetable planters in the region due to the malfunctioning irrigation system?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, you must be aware that this year we have been having regular rainfall all over the island, of course, also in the northern area. So, for this year the rainfall has been sufficiently covered in that part of the island whereby as far as sugarcane plantation is concerned, they have not noticed any kind of impact on the sugarcane fields affected in those areas.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

NSLD LTD – 8000 SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS – COSTS & SELLING PRICE

(No. B/473) 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 8000 social housing units, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the New Social Living Development Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) cost of construction thereof, indicating the amount already incurred and paid in relation thereto;
- (b) cost of offsite infrastructural work in connection therewith, and
- (c) proposed selling price of each housing unit.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the budget for fiscal year 2021-2022, Government announced a historically unprecedented project to build over a period of three years, 12,000 residential units across the island of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that initially the project cost in respect of 12,000 housing units was estimated at approximately Rs21.6 billion. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Mauritius assessed in 2022 the increase in construction costs to be the equivalent of 30% as compared to 2018. According to Statistics Mauritius, there has been a further increase of around 3% in 2023 as compared to 2022.

Now, contrary to what happened in other countries such as New Zealand where construction projects for social housing were abandoned following COVID-19, this Government decided to stand by its commitment and to proceed with this mega project, albeit in a phased manner. Accordingly, Government decided to build a first phase of 8,000 residential units corresponding to 400 units per constituency at an estimated cost, as at February 2023, of Rs2.74 m. per unit inclusive of onsite infrastructural works. Again, unprecedented social amenities onsite and novel provision of ecological measures such as rainwater harvesting, solar energy panels and appropriate waste disposal systems.

As at present, works are in progress on 37 sites across the island and will soon start on the last remaining site at Riambel for Phase 1. It is expected that delivery of the 8,000 housing units will begin as from August next.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, turning to the specifics of the question, with respect to part (a), I am informed by the New Social Living Development Ltd (NSLD) that the cost for the construction of the 8,000 residential units is now estimated to stand at around Rs21.9 billion. As at 24 June 2024, I am informed that the amount incurred and paid in that regard is approximately Rs8.8 billion.

As regards part (b), again, as per information provided by the NSLD, the cost of offsite infrastructural works stands at some Rs5.5 billion.

With regard to part (c), it is important to underline the fact that the announced State subsidy in respect of cost of construction of each residential unit stands at an unprecedented 67%. Despite the significant increase in construction costs, Government will endeavour to ensure that the final purchase price remains in the region of Rs900,000, as previously announced.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will start with the last answer, the selling price of Rs900,000. In answers to previous PQs, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister had indicated that for people at the lower end of the social ladder, Government was going to pay 80% subsidy but, now, I heard him say, 67%. So, may I know why has this figure changed from 80% to 67%?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The general rule remains 67%.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister being given that he has just announced that delivery will start in August, in one and a half month time, whether the NSLD has already worked out the income bracket of the beneficiaries, how many people earning less than Rs20,000 will be eligible for the houses, how many under Rs30,000, have the figures been worked out?

The Deputy Prime Minister: From what I recall, the ceiling household income for eligibility remains fixed at Rs30,000 per month. The NHDC has embarked, in respect of the sites where construction will be completed first, with a verification exercise, if I may so term it, of the applicant's list at the NHDC to confirm who is eligible and who is not.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

**SAINT FRANÇOIS XAVIER STREET – CHILDREN PLAYGROUND –
MAINTENANCE & REHABILITATION**

(No. B/474) 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 public garden situated at Saint François Xavier Street, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to the measures that will be taken for its maintenance and rehabilitation in view of the current state thereof and, if so, when.

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 there is only one children playground at Saint François Xavier Street and it is presumed that the public garden mentioned in the question refers to this children playground.

I am also informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that renovation works at the children playground were undertaken in September 2021 and the following play equipment were fixed thereat, integrated play game: one double seesaw, one double swing, one spring rider and one climber.

I am further informed that in April 2023, the following maintenance works were carried out at the children playground –

- painting of walls, benches, kiosk and platform;
- cutting and trimming of trees, and
- minor repairs.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Vice-Prime Minister for answering honestly by saying that it was renovated in 2021 because I live nearby and...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Ameer Meea: ...I can tell the House that parents no longer send their kids there as all the equipment is very old. So, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, if all the amenities, the equipment for the kids could be changed? Because they can no longer be repaired, renovated or rehabilitated, they should simply be changed.

Mr Speaker: Okay, let the Minister reply!

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in this present budget, 2024-2025, we have got additional finance. So, once we receive it by next week, we will start working on this and we are going to replace the equipment and renovate the garden.

Mr Speaker: Next question, Ms Anquetil!

CAP MALHEUREUX RELAY SHELTER – ABSCONDED MINOR – INQUIRY

(No. B/475) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to alleged escape of a teenager from the Relay Shelter at Cap Malheureux on 05 May 2024, she will state if her Ministry has initiated an inquiry thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Children's Council, which has the responsibility of the RCI in question, that minor A.J.F.A., a male resident, aged 14 years, was admitted at the RCI *L'Oiseau du Paradis* on 25 April this year, following an emergency protection order issued by the Children's Court. The minor absconded from the RCI on Sunday, 05 May around 2.00 p.m. The staff of the Shelter was mobilised to look for the minor in the immediate surroundings but to no avail. The matter was then reported at Grand Bay Police Station on the same day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that as in all cases of absconding, there is an internal inquiry which is immediately initiated to establish the circumstances of the incident. The inquiry revealed that the minor took advantage of the fact that there were construction works ongoing at the shelter and the minor made use of a barrel to climb over the boundary wall which is around 2.3 meters high and jumped on the other side. He then walked to a bus stop where he was given some money by a man. He took the bus to Port Louis, alighted at St Croix and walked home.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the minor was found safe and sound on 07 May by the Police at Cité La Cure Traffic Centre along with his mother. He was immediately taken into custody and thereafter conveyed to Jeetoo Hospital for a medical examination where he was admitted for treatment related to his ailments and there was also a psychiatric follow up.

Since his admission in the RCI, Mr Speaker, Sir, officers of my Ministry inquired into the possibilities of his reintegration with his relatives. Consequently, upon his discharge from the hospital on 13 June, the case was brought before the Children's Court and due to favourable reports, the minor was discharged to the care of his maternal grandmother.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the Police inquiry, I am informed that since there is no element of any criminal offence and based on the fact that the minor was found safe, the matter was classified.

I wish to also inform the House that since the coming into operation of Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, this is the first time that such an unfortunate incident has occurred and with a view of preventing its recurrence, the National Children's Council has been directed to increase vigilance and to control, monitor movement of all minors within the premises of the shelter. In addition, the attention of caregivers and the security guards posted at the shelter has also been drawn regarding more alertness onsite. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. J'apprécie pour une fois l'honnêteté de la ministre. Pour une fois !

Mr Speaker: No comments!

Ms Anquetil: Alors, par contre, Madame la ministre, vous êtes d'accord, et j'apprécie votre franchise...

Mr Speaker: No, don't talk to the Minister! Don't talk!

Ms Anquetil: C'est les travaux...

Mr Speaker: Don't talk to the Minister! Talk to the Chair!

Ms Anquetil: I talk to you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Look at me; talk to me!

Ms Anquetil: I look at you and I talk to you.

Alors, la ministre est-elle d'accord que le mardi 21 mai 2024, suite à ma *PQ* immatriculé B/395, elle nous avait assuré...

Mr Speaker: No, this is not a supplementary question! I stop you there!

Ms Anquetil: Non, je reformule...

Mr Speaker: I don't give you the chance.

Ms Anquetil: I look at you *et je reformule ma phrase...*

Mr Speaker: You are looking for too many chances. The next question would be for MP Osman Mahomed!

**ABERCROMBIE MARKET FAIR BUILDING – MULTISPORT COMPLEX &
MUSIC SCHOOL – RETENDERING EXERCISE**

(No. B/476) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction of a Multisport Complex and Music School on the first-floor level of the Abercrombie Market Fair building, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if a retendering exercise has been conducted for the resumption of the works thereof, indicating the –

- (a) outcome, and
- (b) revised contract value 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 contractor was AWL Trading & Contracting Ltd. Based on the legal advice received from the legal advisor of the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, the contract of the

above mentioned contractor was terminated due to several problem encountered during implementation of the project. A technical team of the MNICD was thereafter set up to supervise the project, prepare the drawings and bidding document for the reinforcement work at the Ground Floor as well and for the completion of the remaining work on that First Floor of the building.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that bids have been invited on the 29 March 2024 through e-procurement. The closing date of the bid was on the 07 May 2024 with opening date on the 09 May 2024. The bids are currently being evaluated at a level of the CPB.

As regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the revise cost estimate of the project is now Rs174.6 m.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the initial tender value was Rs68.7 m. and now the same project is being evaluated at Rs174 m.?

Dr. Husnoo: Yes, the initial costing was Rs68.7 m. but that was mainly on the first floor but now from the advice we have received, we have to consolidate the ground floor as well. I think the price has increased, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister how come the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has embarked on a project on a first floor which cannot sustain that weight because he said that the ground floor has to be reinforced and we all know that the Municipal City Council of Port Louis is the ultimate authority issuing Building and Land Use Permit itself?

Dr. Husnoo: There were people working on that. There were contractors, there were consultants and that was their advice. So, the Municipal City Council followed the advice that they have received.

BEAU-BASSIN – RECURRENT FLOODING & NON-MAINTENANCE OF DRAINS – MEASURES

(No. B/477) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in

regard to recurrent flooding and non-maintenance of drains in the region of Beau-Bassin, namely at Meldrum, Napier Broom, Colonel Draper and adjoining streets, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Beau-Bassin and Rose-Hill, information as to if consideration has been given to the petition dated 18 May 2024 from the inhabitants thereof, indicating the actions taken in relation thereto, if any.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Next question!

NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION – ELECTRIC BUSES

(No. B/478) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of buses thereof currently propelled by electric engine.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is keen on decarbonising the land transport sector and several measures have been taken, through the previous Budgets, to accelerate the shift towards low-carbon emission vehicles.

However, we need to bear in mind that electric bus technology is quite nascent in Mauritius as we have only three such buses out of a fleet of some 2,000 buses. Out of the three electric buses, one is owned by the NTC and two by Rose Hill Transport Bus Services Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the NTC is currently operating one electric bus of the BYD make since February 2022. I need to highlight that the above bus was used as a pilot in order for the NTC to become conversant with the technical parameters of electric buses and gather insights as to the operational requirements thereof prior to proceeding with the acquisition of additional such buses.

However, as I stated in my reply to PQ B/1664, discussions are ongoing with the Indian Authorities for the sourcing of 200 electric buses for allocation to the NTC. The operation of these 200 new electric buses would, in fact, allow the Corporation to achieve significant savings

in terms of maintenance and fuel costs as well as contributing in reducing the carbon footprint in the industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to inform the House that we have made several strides in our discussions with the Indian Side and the electric buses are expected to be delivered in batches during the course of the Financial Year 2024/2025.

On the other hand, we are also expecting to receive 5 electric buses from the People's Republic of China and for which arrangements are being made for the procurement of the necessary charging infrastructure.

Accordingly, we are expecting that the NTC would be operating 206 electric buses possibly in the course of the next financial year.

The fact remains that the sourcing of electric and diesel buses, are very much different from one another, as diesel propelled ones can be deemed as 'off the shelf' items while for electric buses, there is a whole eco-system to be put in place such as the charging infrastructure and training components for the bus crews and mechanics as these buses cannot be operated and maintained in the same way as diesel ones. In fact, we have to acknowledge that the electrification of the bus fleet would have to be carried out in a phased manner. However, necessary actions are underway to assist the NTC for renewing its fleet with electric-propelled buses as mentioned above.

Mr Assirvaden: Donc, le ministre vient confirmer qu'on a qu'un seul bus électrique. Deux ans, dans le budget de 2023-2024, M. le président, le gouvernement a proposé d'acheter 100 bus et aujourd'hui en 2024, le ministre vient nous dire que techniquement c'est difficile. Est-ce que le ministre va expliquer à la Chambre pourquoi en ces deux ans, en 2023 et 2024 - parce que le bus était acheté en 2022 - les 100 bus préconisés dans les budgets n'ont pas été achetés comme par d'autres compagnies qui achètent des bus électriques ?

Mr Ganoo: M. le président, je n'ai jamais dit que le projet est un projet difficile. Ce que j'ai dit, M. le président, l'acquisition de 100 bus se fera dans un package suite à un accord qu'on a eu avec l'Inde.

En effet, M. le président, c'était en 2023 que moi-même, personnellement, j'avais discuté avec le ministre des Affaires étrangères de l'Inde, Monsieur Jaishankar et puis après quelques semaines, le Premier ministre est allé finaliser les discussions *and it was at this time that this package was obtained by our Government.*

We are very thankful to the Government of India, Mr Speaker, Sir, for having been willing to donate 100 electric buses and we can compute the amount that this represent, Mr Speaker, Sir, even if for one second, we all know the prices of electric buses today. One electric bus, at the minimum, costs about Rs10 m. So, that means Rs1 billion of grants from the Government of India and the other 100 buses will have to be acquired on a letter of credit basis.

So, this is the package, Mr Speaker, Sir. It was not a question of trying to buy from other sources. India offered to give us 100 buses as a donation and 100 buses which we were prepared to acquire on an LC basis. So, this is the delay, Mr Speaker, Sir, in procuring the electric buses as already been given in this Assembly in a former PQ which I answered, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said this project of electrification of the NTC fleet would be undertaken and under a G2G agreement which has involved wide and regular consultations between the two parties. All the relevant processes have had to be followed; all the necessary clearances had to be obtained at the level of both our countries. Extensive discussions, Mr Speaker, Sir, had to be held prior to both sides agreeing on the technical specifications of the electric buses so that the requirements therefore are properly framed and meet the local context.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, we had been discussing over 36 different specifications and 32 of them were cleared. Then it took us some more time to clear 3 other specifications –

- the lifetime of the battery;
- the corrosion aspect of the buses, and
- the AC.

Whether the buses would be provided with AC or not? If an electric bus is provided with air conditioning facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir, it means 20% less of electricity, that is, the AC will consume 20% of electricity.

So, I am informing the House, our buses which we will be receiving from India will not be provided with AC because at the end of the discussion, we thought that it would be in the interest of Mauritius to acquire such buses. So, what I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, – I am sure the hon. Member will understand that – it took some time to finalise all the specifications. Even if we are getting a bus for free, we cannot accept a bus with battery of 3 years lifetime. Nobody would accept that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, we also discussed on the lifetime of the battery and so all this took some time, Mr Speaker, Sir. Each party was also required to hold consultation with the local stakeholders, reverting back to the other party, trying to move ahead with each project milestone. Then, a tendering exercise is being undertaken at the level of the Indian Authorities prior to the placement of the purchase order. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the House will understand that all this have had an impact on the time frame of the project and we cannot depart from the established procedure in as much as I said this deal involves a Government to Government Agreement, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I said e-technology is much more complex than the acquisition of diesel propelled buses. The NTC and also the other bus operators because we also have other local bus operators, Mr Speaker, Sir, familiar with the sourcing of diesel buses, realised that procurement of electric buses are not routine ones. In the case of electric buses, Mr Speaker, Sir there are several issues to be considered –

- Charging Infrastructure and connection to the grid;
- Training of drivers to operate the buses;
- Upskilling the mechanics for the maintenance of the electric buses;
- Sourcing of specific spare parts;
- Redesigning the depot layout, and
- Identifying routes which most suitable for the electric buses based on terrain conditions.

So much time was devolved, Mr Speaker, Sir, to carry out this desk search to identify the best technology available on the market, given that e-mobility is also fast evolving and one technology may leapfrog another, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, attention has been paid by the NTC, by Government into assessing the most suitable type of buses adopted for our country as there is no one-size-fits-all the e-bus solution.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, to answer all the hon. Member, there has been neither any excessive delay, nor red tapism in as much as this exercise involves two party states where each of them needs to have internal discussion with their own relevant stakeholders additionally given the novelty, the magnitude of this undertaking, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Question sufficiently canvassed!

Mr Ganoo: I am sure I have answered all your qualms.

Mr Assirvaden: *J'ai demandé pour ...*

Mr Ganoo: And I am speaking the truth, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/465, B/480, B/483, B/484, B/485, B/486, B/490 and B/491.

I now call MP Ms Anquetil!

FLACQ DISTRICT COUNCIL – GARBAGE BINS PROCUREMENT – TENDER EXERCISE

(No. B/480) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the procurement of garbage bins by the District Council of Flacq in 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to if any tender was launched therefor and, if so, indicate the –

- a) number thereof, giving details of the specifications mentioned therein;
- b) list of bidders, giving details thereof, and

- c) name of the successful bidders, further indicating the –
 - i) date of the award of the contract, and
 - ii) cost thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PURE MIND HAVEN SHELTER – MINORS’ ALLEGED ESCAPE – INQUIRY

(No. B/481) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the alleged escape of two minors from the Pure Mind Haven Shelter in Vacoas on 23 May 2024, she will state if her Ministry has initiated an inquiry thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Child Development Unit of my Ministry that minor L. J, 13 years and minor K. M, 15 years were admitted in shelter Pure Mind Haven on 19 July of last year and 26 April this year respectively following emergency protection orders issued by the Children’s Court, absconded from the shelter on the 23 may 2024 around 10.30 p.m. When the care givers noticed their absences, they reported the matter at Vacoas police station immediately.

However, on 05 June, they were found safe at the residence of the place of the mother of minor K.M. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, as in all cases of absconding, an internal inquiry is initiated to establish the circumstances of the incident. The inquiry revealed that they absconded through a window and went to the place of the mother of minor K.M. Both minors also stated that they were eager to go back to their familial environment so they could meet their friends. Based on that, they were provided with psychological support, active listening, counselling regarding the time taken to rehabilitate the family from where they come from and their eventual reintegration.

With regard to the police enquiry, I am informed that statements have been recorded from both minors and that no harm whatsoever was caused against them during their getaway and that enquiry is still in progress. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also wish to inform the House that the process of reintegration for minor K.M was already initiated well before she absconded from the shelter and I am informed that she was handed over back to her biological father on 12 June

2024. As regards minor L. J, reintegration within the familial environment is not to be envisaged at this stage since the parents are unfortunately heavy substance abusers.

The risk of deprivation of basic needs such as food, hygiene, education could come up due to the conditions of the parents and in view of preventing that recurrence, the Shelter Manager has been directed to take remedial actions and increase vigilance at the shelter. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre si c'est normal que la grand-mère de l'adolescente K.M. ait été informée de la fuite de l'adolescente du *shelter* douze jours après l'incident ? Merci

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a matter of fact, the grandmother in question, I do not know exactly when she was informed about but the maternal grandmother did not have parental responsibility of the minor. The parental responsibility when the minor is within the RCI is *c'est la responsabilité de l'État*. When we had removed those children from the place of distress, which is a place where they were being neglected, the responsibility was not that of the grandmother. So, in fact, when we find the children or the police manage to locate the absconded minors, it is the person who has *la responsabilité parentale qui est informée en premier lieu*. So, not the grandmother.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. La ministre peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre si elle est au courant de l'absence de discipline dans cet abri de Pure Mind Haven, permettant même aux résidents de sortir la nuit à leur guise ? Merci.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Member is in possession of such damning information. I would kindly invite you, Mr Speaker, Sir, to invite her to come forward instead of just coming to the House and alleging.

Mr Speaker: You are informed to come forward if you are serious.

So, Time over! Motion!

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.

PUBLIC BILLS

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IV of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. VII OF 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(4.15 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2024) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Road Traffic Act is a complex legislation, encompassing various transport related matters including but not limited to the registration, licensing and examination of vehicles as well as road safety matters.

The Act also caters for the powers and functions of the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA), which is the land transport regulator. The last time the Act was amended, in July 2023, it was done to improve the standard and level of bus services, streamline the licensing process in

connection with Public Service Vehicle Licenses at the level of the NLTA as well to review the Cumulative Road Traffic Offences system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, connectivity and mobility are crucial for the socio-economic development of a country acting as an enabler linking producers to markets, workers to jobs, students to schools, the sick to hospitals and people to leisure. My Ministry, to ensure the freedom of movement of our citizens, responds to the mobility needs of our citizens by ensuring island wide connectivity through public transportation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of registered vehicles on our road network, as at April 2024, stands at 686,704 and there is an average increase of 4% annually. Ownership of a vehicle is no more a luxury but a tool for enhanced mobility and we can expect the number of private vehicles on our roads to maintain an increasing trend.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the increase in the number of registered vehicles on our roads, the number of transactions in connection to the change of ownership of vehicles has also increased over the past years. In turn, this has resulted in sharp increase in the number of persons calling at the NLTA for the registration of their motor vehicles as for the issue of a *Certificat de Gage* resulting in long waiting queues at the level of the NLTA.

We are very well aware of the hassles faced by the public whenever they call at the NLTA and this is why we have come up with several remedial measures to reduce the queuing time and enhance the customer experience. For this reason, we are investing heavily in digitalising NLTA services as we are keen on leveraging on IT solutions to streamline processes and for seamless operations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the renewal of Motor Vehicle Licence (MVL), also commonly referred as *Declaration*, is among one of the transactions for which countless of owners of motor vehicles call at the NLTA on a daily basis. In fact, even if Phase 1 of the Online renewal of MVL is operational since November 2018 in respect of private owned motor vehicles, that is some 350,000 vehicles, members of the public still prefer to call at the NLTA counters. As we are moving towards an increase reliance on e-services, it has been decided to set a cut-off date of 31 July 2024 wherein all renewal of MVL will have to be made only through the online platform instead at NLTA Counters.

However, in order to cater for a smooth transition towards online services, a delay of up to 01 December 2024 will be provided for such transactions to be physically effected at the Post Offices. In order to assist the public during this transition, a Help Desk is being set up at the level of the NLTA to assist users who might have issues while using the online system. On the other hand, Phase 2 of the Online MVL platform involving other types of vehicles is expected to go live before end of this year.

Similarly, as we intend to push for e-services, an Online First Registration of Motor Vehicles was launched in May 2023 wherein four (4) major Motor Vehicle Dealers are now using this digital tool and additional vehicle dealers will be encouraged to make us of this platform for registration of motor vehicles and in turn, this will reduce the need for individuals to physically call at the NLTA. This system will be further enhanced to allow for electronic payment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to acknowledge, amidst the constant increase in the number of transactions recorded on a daily basis, that the NLTA was not adequately manned to cope with the increasing workload and this had an impact on the level of service. However, we did remain aloof and necessary actions were promptly initiated to reinforce the staffing position of the NLTA with the posting of additional officers to service its counters. Accordingly, the number of officers at the counters has been increased from 27 to 69 so that all the 51 counters of the NLTA, including those at its Sub-Offices, could operate seamlessly.

M. le président, c'est dans cette optique que la NTLA avait mis en place des guichets spéciaux dédiés à émettre des Certificats de Gage sans déplacement au Bâtiment Emmanuel Anquetil à Port-Louis, afin de pouvoir traiter plus d'applications mais aussi pour éviter à ce que les personnes se déplacent à deux reprises entre la NLTA de Cassis et le Bureau du *Registrar-General's*. On a connu un bon début mais par la suite au fur et à mesure, avec le nombre grandissant d'applications à traiter quotidiennement, le système est dépassé et nous a poussé à venir avec des solutions plus appropriées afin de mieux répondre aux besoins du public.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is where this Bill comes into play as the various clauses therein aim at improving current procedures pertaining to the transfer of ownership of vehicles. Furthermore, the Road Safety issue being high on our agenda, and in order to further curb down the number of

road casualties, this Bill is coming with various amendments to dissuade road users from committing road traffic violations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as detailed in the Explanatory Memorandum, this Bill intends to –

- (a) cater for situations witnessing the transfer of ownership of a motor vehicle or trailer between 2 individuals and whereby no '*certificat de gage sans déplacement*' will be required from the NLTA for the registration of the transfer of ownership by the Registrar-General. Instead, the transfer in the ownership of that motor vehicle will be registered provided that the Registrar-General is satisfied, following verification on the database of the National Land Transport Authority, that the motor vehicle or trailer bears no lien;
- (b) allow for the use of structures and objects that are, during a procession, carried, pushed, pulled or led on a road to be properly regulated, and
- (c) increase penalties with regard to some offences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Road Traffic Act 1962 is the overarching piece of legislation regulating traffic on our roads. It also permeates to road safety and provides for a number of road traffic offences in order to maintain orderly use of our road infrastructure.

It is apposite to note that, given the dynamic nature of transport operations coupled with evolution in the field of road safety, the Road Traffic Act had, over the past decade, been amended on various occasions to make it more stringent for road users not observing the various provisions therein, with a view to making our roads safer. In the same vein and with a view to curing some gaps in the legislation, in 2019, the Act was amended to make it an offence for a person to drive a vehicle whilst being under the influence of a drug or an intoxicating substance. The law came in force in June 2022 and since then, Mr Speaker, Sir, 165 cases have been registered for period June 2022 to December 2022, 892 cases have been registered for year 2023 and 219 cases have been registered only for January and February 2024.

With the rise in the rate of motorisation and increased mobility in our country and the limited road space to accommodate same, congestion is one of our main concern and we need to ensure that this space is used in a safe manner by all road users.

Added to that, Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been observed that during some festivals, the traffic fluidity on our roads is further reduced mainly due to mass convergence towards specific locations. This situation is aggravated by the conveyance of oversized structures, causing traffic delays which at times pose road safety risks and we could not remain impassible to this situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with deep regret that we witnessed the tragic demise of several young people for the past two years mainly due to processions involving structures on public roads; these two incidents which left an indelible imprint in our memory, and which were very distressing to the whole nation. Unfortunately, as it stands today, there are no specific and binding provisions in place as regards the use of such structures or objects which are carried, pushed, pulled or led during a procession, on a road.

To that end, in order to address this gap in our legislation, we had to make relevant provisions for regulating the conveyance of such structures. This is why we have introduced this Bill as we do not wish such incidents to occur anew.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the average number of fatal road accidents, taken over the last five years, is 126. Since last year, we have observed a rise whereby it reached 130 in 2023 with 138 killed on our road. Unfortunately, the trend during this year is still on the rise and has reached 61 for period starting 01 January this year to 16 June.

We have also observed that the most vulnerable road users are usually auto/motorcyclists representing 45% of all fatalities, followed by pedestrians accounting for 23% of fatalities. This is due to the direct physical exposure to impacts during a road crash. It is also to be noted that most of our accidents are caused due to reckless behaviour by motorists and pedestrians. This is why we are coming with bold measures aiming to make our roads safer and to act as a stronger deterrent against rash and negligent behaviours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was also found that the age group of motorcyclists, who are most at risk, are within the age band of 16 to 30 years old, representing 43% of all motorcycle fatalities, followed by the age group of 31 to 45 years. It has also been observed that 30% of all killed and serious injury crashes involved holders of Provisional Driving License – learner as we call them – and 16% were riding without a driving license. The causes of crashes are many, with the main contributory causes being over speeding as well as drink and drug driving.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to enforcement, my Ministry is also favouring Engineering and Education as its strategy to enhance the level of safety on our roads. A safe system approach has been adopted by the TMRSU while implementing infrastructural projects so as to make our roads more forgiving. Mr Speaker, Sir, this means that the road safety strategy is much broader as it encapsulates several considerations such as improvement of road furniture and detailed reconfigurations are planned and executed to reduce the probability and severity of accidents.

Laws have been strengthened in the past years and let me share some information with the House with regard to the outcome thereof. During the year 2023, some 263,348 road traffic contraventions were established. For the year 2024, as at end of May, 125,955 such contraventions have already been issued. Under the Cumulative Road Traffic Offence system, for the year 2022, the driving licenses of 30 persons were cancelled and they were disqualified for driving. 31 licenses were cancelled in 2023 and for year 2024, as at 17 June, the number of disqualified licenses amounts to 13.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the figures speak for themselves and at the level of my Ministry, we are aiming to change the mindset and attitude of road users through a multi-pronged approach comprising education and awareness, improvement of road infrastructure and use of intelligent systems to track down road traffic violations. Improvement of our road infrastructure and enforcement are ongoing in terms of massive investments in improving our road furniture and in the installation of road safety devices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, belisha beacons are regular features to better warn road users on pedestrians crossings and raised tables are being installed across the island to reduce speeding and enhance safety at junctions. We also invested significantly in equipping our roads with safety features to enhance visibility, reviewed signage and markings as well as the continued treatment of hazardous spots. Same goes for awareness and sensitisation. Several infrastructural upgrades have been made in various regions across the island to improve the road design and the installation of protective equipment to enhance road safety.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, during the last two financial years, some Rs189 million were spent for acquisition of road safety assets and works while an amount of Rs236 million was utilised during the course of this present financial year to implement various road safety projects comprising of –

- (i) acquisition of traffic lights and speed cameras;
- (ii) traffic signage equipment and belisha beacons blinking lights;
- (iii) construction of bus laybys for safe embarkation and alighting of passengers;
- (iv) traffic calming measures;
- (v) construction of delineators, crash barriers and hard shoulders, and
- (vi) construction of footpaths, walkways and drains.

In tandem, several communications campaigns were made on social media and wide dissemination in the press. We even organised a Road Safety Week in November 2023 targeting young persons and where road safety messages ventilated to various segments of the population. The campaigns were framed to reach out to the population and contained messages aiming to raise awareness on road safety issues including the road-rail interaction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact remains that in spite of all the efforts of Government to make our road safer, the statistics regarding fatal accidents have been almost stagnant, fluctuating around 126 killed per year. This, therefore, rings a bell towards a revision of our strategy including reviewing our legal framework as our objective is to reverse the trend of fatal accidents. My Ministry and the Police Force have been working together and the causes of the accidents have been analysed and it has been found that in most cases, accidents occur as a result of reckless and heedless behaviour.

M. le président, malheureusement, l'attitude et le comportement sont deux choses très difficiles à changer auprès des adultes. On n'a d'autre choix que de rendre nos lois plus sévères, d'augmenter les pénalités tout en faisant de la conscientisation soutenue ainsi que d'améliorer nos infrastructures afin d'éviter mort d'homme en cas d'accident. Ceci dit, M. le président, on continuera à enseigner à nos enfants les bonnes pratiques et les bases du code de la route. C'est dans cet élan que mon ministère, en collaboration avec le ministère de L'Education, de l'enseignement supérieure, de la science et la technologie, ont travaillé ensemble pour le développement d'un programme d'études sur la sécurité routière.

I seize this opportunity to announce that the continuum to road safety education programme is now a reality. Road Safety Education is being inculcated to primary school children of grade 1 to 6 for which 853 teachers were trained, of which 509 holistic teachers.

86,000 road safety books have been published and distributed to students of grade 1 to 6. Practical sessions on road safety are also being imparted to those students by the Road Safety Unit of the TMRSU. Additionally, the road safety materials have been digitalised and 28 animated videos for 28 lessons have been produced for grade 1 and 20 animated videos for 20 lessons for grade 2. 31 digital learning resources for 28 lessons for grade 1 and 3 and 23 digital learning resources for 20 lessons for grade 2 have also been developed. We are going a step further, as we will shortly introduce road safety education as from the pre-primary in order to instil among school children the tenets of road safety and the responsibilities devolved upon road users.

Mr Speaker, Sir, inculcating road safety culture to enable a change in behaviour and attitude on our roads is a process that will reap its benefit over time. In the immediate, sensitisation and enforcement have to be further strengthened so as to ensure compliance with the laws in place with a view to limit death toll on our roads. It is exactly in this context that we are reviewing existing penalties and revisiting some provisions of the Act throughout this Bill.

Allow me now to elaborate more into detail the different Clauses of this Bill. Mr Speaker, Sir, during Maha Shivratri 2023, an unfortunate incident took place wherein two people lost their lives when one *Kanwar* caught fire after coming into contact with high voltage electricity cables. Guidelines were thereafter issued prior to *Maha Shivratri 2024* with a view to restricting the conveyance of oversized *Kanwars* along public roads. However, the Guidelines were not fully complied with by everyone, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, resulting in a similar incident in 2024 wherein seven lives were lost. Those two incidents indeed caused immense sadness among the whole nation, and in order for us not to witness such incident in the future, a proper framework has to be established to cater for processions.

This Act is being amended to enable regulations to be made on processions along our roads. Therefore, through Clause 3 of the Bill, provision is being made for a broader definition of the word “traffic”. The words “structures or objects being carried, pushed, pulled or led during a procession” are therefore being added to the definition of the word “Traffic”. Mr Speaker, Sir, subsequently, through Clause 10 of the Bill, it has been provided as follows, ‘A Police officer would be vested with such powers as may be necessary for enforcement purposes including the movement of structures or objects being carried, pushed, pulled or led during a procession. The

permissible size of the structures would be established thereafter by way of new Regulations after the Bill is enacted.

M. le président, je souhaite préciser que tous types de processions seront règlementés et que cette loi ne se limitera pas seulement aux processions religieuses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, presently, there are some 51,000 *Certificats de Gage sans déplacement* issued by the NLTA on a yearly basis for the purpose of sale of vehicles. A *Certificat de Gage sans déplacement* is a document issued to the owner of a vehicle upon sale of a vehicle, certifying whether or not the said vehicle is burdened with a lien in line with Article 2110 of the *Code Civil Mauricien*.

The sale of a vehicle involves three processes, namely –

- (i) the issue of the *Certificat de Gage sans déplacement* manually effected by the NLTA,
- (ii) the registration of the vehicle and payment thereof, effected seamlessly online by the Registrar-General, and
- (iii) finally the transfer of ownership and issue of the Registration Book manually at the level of the NLTA.

Being given that the Registrar-General already operates an enabling platform which caters for the taxation and registration of vehicles, the draft Bill through Clause 4 would allow the registration of vehicles, between two individuals, without the need to produce a *Certificat de Gage sans déplacement* at the level of the Registrar-General.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has also been observed that in many cases, the change in ownership, precisely the registration of the horsepower in the name of the new owner, was not done within the prescribed time of 14 days in line Section 6 (1)(a)(iv) of the Act, leading to situations where the sale was not validly registered or where the horsepower was not amended to reflect change in ownership to the name of the true owner and which is commonly known as '*Papier Blanc*'. Many such cases have been reported wherein the new owners did not register the change in

ownership and where offences were committed with the car resulting in previous owners being served notices or apprehended by the Police. To ensure compliance with the law, provision is, therefore, being made for the introduction of penalties for defaulters.

As such, Mr Speaker, Sir, any person who would be contravening Section (1)(a)(iv), would upon first conviction be liable to a fine not less than Rs25,000 and not exceeding Rs50,000. Upon second conviction, a person would be liable to a fine of not less than Rs50,000 and not exceeding Rs100,000 whereas on a third or subsequent conviction, a person would be liable to a fine not less than Rs100,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to enable the online verification of “lien” at the level of the Registrar-General, Clause 5 of the Bill would cater for the verification of any lien on a motor vehicle or trailer prior to the registration and transfer of ownership of same. As regards the issue of horsepower, same would still be undertaken by the NLTA. In order for the new process to be efficient, the Registrar-General would have access to the NLTA Database and in that effect, sharing of information among the two institutions would be lawfully allowed through Clause 6 of the Bill. Accordingly, Clause 13 of the Bill provides for the waiving of the current fees of Rs50 for the issue of the *Certificat de Gage sans déplacement*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, increase in fatal road accidents is mainly due to careless driving and riding behaviour. Despite having proper laws and penalties to dissuade people to drive under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicating substances, in year 2023, 603 cases of positive cases of drunken driving was recorded. As regards driving under the influence of drugs, as I just mentioned above, 892 cases were recorded in year 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been brought to our attention that people involved in such cases at times refuse to provide a specimen of their breath for a breath test for analysis, or a specimen of blood or urine, or both, for a laboratory test when required to do so pursuant to section 123F, 123G or 123H of the Road Traffic Act. In such cases, no specific timeframe was set for the Police to make an application to a Magistrate to summon a person whenever the person suspected to be driving under the influence of alcohol, drugs or intoxicating substances refuses to provide a specimen of his breath, urine or blood for testing. In view thereof, Mr Speaker, Sir,

Clause 7 of the Bill provides for the Police to make such application within a prescribed timeframe of 30 days now. Concurrently, the penalty for the above would be amended as such that when found guilty by a Magistrate, the disqualification period for driving a motor vehicle would be not less than 4 months but not exceeding 8 months instead of a period not exceeding 2 months from the date of the order.

Mr Speaker, Sir, sadly, illegal road racing has become much of a phenomenon amongst youngsters, especially among motorcyclists, which has led to serious accidents and even fatal ones. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have had several cases recently in the South at Riambel, near Tribeca a few days ago whereby our young people lost their lives as a result of being involved in road racing. The prevailing maximum fine of Rs1,000 upon conviction under Section 125 of the Act, apart from being unreasonably low, is no more seen as a deterrent for those participating in illegal road racing. Clause 8 of the Bill, therefore, provides for an increase in fine, with a minimum of not less than Rs10,000 but not exceeding Rs25,000 on a first conviction, a fine of not less than Rs25,000 but not exceeding Rs50,000 on a second conviction and a fine not less than Rs50,000 but not exceeding Rs100,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years for a third or subsequent conviction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this increase in fine will definitely act as a major deterrent to illegal rally participants. This increase in fine will definitely act as a major deterrent to illegal rally participants. Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, participation in illegal road racing activities or in case a person fails to comply with such conditions imposed by the Commissioner of Police during a road racing event, this would constitute an offence and will be captured under the Road Traffic Cumulative Offence implying that one will be at a higher risk of being disqualified from driving a motor vehicle or holding a licence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Road Traffic Act, the penalties for various offences have been well defined. However, due to the complexity of the Act and the wide coverage it has had on traffic offences, penalties relating to some offences have not been specifically defined. In such cases, Section 163 (1) (b) of the Act provides for any person who commits an offence under this Act shall, on conviction, be liable, where no special penalty is provided, to a fine not exceeding Rs100,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years.

The Third Schedule of the Act presently provides for eleven offences under the Cumulative Road Traffic Offences system and the number of cumulative road traffic offences for which a person is liable to disqualification from driving is 4 within a period of 24 months. With a view to providing stronger sanctions, Clause 11 of the Bill provides for 12 additional road traffic offences under the Third Schedule of the Act which are considered crucial for road safety. That is to say, additional offences, all directly related to road safety, would now be captured under the Cumulative Road Traffic Offences implying that drivers and road users, be it motorists or two-wheelers, would now have to be more cautious and be wary of their actions and conduct on the roads as they run the risk of having their licences cancelled.

M. le président, les lois ne doivent pas rester figées et se doivent d'être revues dans le temps. Nous ne pouvons et ne devrions pas cautionner l'immobilisme concernant la sécurité routière et ce, quel que soit le contexte. Le but, M. le président est de nous assurer que les amendes aient un effet le plus dissuasifs car vous allez convenir que maintenir le même montant sur une période étendue n'aura jamais le même impact sur le comportement des usagers de la route. Il y a des pénalités qui sont restées inchangées pendant plusieurs années, c'est-à-dire, depuis 2018.

Comme illustration, M. le président, le montant fixé pour le délit de '*Overtaking or passing a vehicle which has stopped at a pedestrian crossing*' a été revu de R 1000 à R 5000. M. le président, il est inconcevable qu'un délit de ce genre, c'est-à-dire, dépasser une voiture qui s'est arrêtée devant un passage clouté pour permettre les piétons de traverser sur ce passage clouté et vient cet imprudent qui *overtake* cette voiture qui s'est arrêtée devant le passage clouté pour permettre un enfant ou un piéton de traverser sur le passage clouté, M. le président. Il est inconcevable qu'un délit de ce genre et qui a causé la mort de plusieurs personnes restent à R 1000, reste inchangé, M. le président. C'est pour cette raison que nous nous sommes attelés à réactualiser le montant de certains *Fixed Penalties* dans un souci d'ajuster les pénalités pour mieux refléter la gravité de certains manquements des usagers de la route.

De même, M. le président, le délit de *Failing to allow free and uninterrupted passage to a pedestrian using a crossing*, quel est ce délit, M. le président ? *Failing to allow free and uninterrupted passage to a pedestrian using a crossing*. C'est-à-dire, M. le président, quand un piéton est en train de traverser le passage clouté, le *cross-here* comme on dit, vous venez vous,

imprudent que vous être, *you failed to allow* ce piéton, son *free passage* sur ce passage clouté, M. le président. Je connais un cas trois semaines de cela à Tamarin, une écolière, dont je connais les parents, traversant les passages cloutés, heurtée par un Monsieur imprudent, un conducteur ivre à 8.30-9.00 du matin – *Failing to allow free and uninterrupted passage to a pedestrian*. Ce délit était sujet à une pénalité de R 1500. Cette fille a passé trois semaines à la clinique, heureusement il n’y a pas eu plus de grave que ça, M. de président. Elle a été hospitalisée pendant plusieurs semaines, a dû évidemment ne pas aller à l’école, à ses classes. Qu’est-ce qu’on fait maintenant aujourd’hui avec cet amendement ? Nous augmentons cette amende, cette pénalité de R 1500 à R 3000, M. le président, parce que nous ne pouvions cautionner ce genre de comportement qui consiste à mettre en danger la vie des piétons innocents.

Et là, je répète, plusieurs personnes ont péri sur nos routes par la faute de certaines automobilistes qui ne respectent pas les consignes de sécurité routière. Et nous ne pouvons plus maintenir le statu quo et de ne prendre aucune action envers ceux agissant de façons irresponsable et démontrant un manque total de considération envers les personnes les plus vulnérables sur nos routes que sont les deux roues et les piétons. D’ailleurs, c’est avec peine quand je viens de vous dire, M. le président, nous constatons de temps en temps un accident impliquant des piétons sur des passages cloutés ce qui est vraiment outrageant, M. le président.

Alors même la cour a donné raison aux autorités, nous enjoignons d’être plus sévères envers les personnes faisant fi des règles élémentaires de bonne conduite. Et là, M. le président, comment passer sous silence un jugement qui a été rendu par la Cour suprême deux semaines de cela, je ne vais pas citer le nom de l’accusé, M. le président, parce que le prévenu avait fait appel contre ce jugement à la cour suprême. Condamné par la cour intermédiaire à trois mois de prison en sus d’être disqualifier par la cour d’intermédiaire en premier lieu et il a été disqualifié pendant une durée de six mois. Cet accident, M. le président, avait causé la mort d’une personne par la faute d’un chauffeur sous l’influence de l’alcool, il avait fait appel contre ce jugement auprès de la Cour suprême. C’est-à-dire son avocat lui a conseillé de faire appel parce que le jugement de la Cour intermédiaire le condamnant d’abord à trois mois de prison et le disqualifiant pour six mois d’après son avocat, était excessive ou probablement *wrong in law, in principle*.

Donc, il fait appel à la cour suprême, M. le président et voyons ce que ressort du jugement éclairé de la Cour suprême, et la Cour n’est pas allée avec le dos de la cuillère à l’encontre de cet

accusé, de ce prévenu. Malgré que son avocat ait plaidé pour une révision de la sentence, qui d'après lui, était *manifestly harsh and excessive in principle*, la Cour suprême dans toute sa sagesse, n'a pas accédé à sa requête. Pire, M. le président, au contraire, vu que la personne avait un taux d'alcoolémie quatre fois au lieu de la limite autorisée, la Cour n'a pas été tendre, n'est pas allée du même ordre et a eu ceci à dire, *I quote*, M. le président –

“We cannot obliterate the likely devastating impact of the appellant’s reckless action and lack of responsibility on the victim’s wife and family.”

De plus, M. le président, la cour a statué que la période de disqualification initiale, ordonnée par la cour intermédiaire de l'ordre de six mois n'était nullement appropriée et a révisé cette sentence à la hausse en augmentant la période de 6 mois, tenez-vous bien, M le président, à 3 ans. Oui, M. le président, 3 ans de disqualification alors que le prévenu et son avocat contestaient que la sentence rendue par la cour intermédiaire était *manifestly harsh*.

Et laissez-moi citer ce que la Cour avait eu à dire –

“It is high time that people understand that drunk driving will be severely dealt with. This Court will focus on holding individuals accountable for reckless behaviour of drunk driving, which leads to loss of life (...). The sentence meted out should reflect the severity of the offence and serve as a deterrent to others in the future.”

C'est pourquoi, il est inconcevable que certaines pénalités demeurent inchangées et ce malgré l'effluxion de temps. Mais je tiens fermement à démentir certaines mauvaises langues qui affirment que la révision des pénalités a d'autres motifs. Non, M. le président, le but de ces amendements est de protéger nos enfants, notre population, nos écoliers, nous étudiants, nos vieux, nos piétons contre les personnes irresponsables au volant et surtout ceux qui sont les plus à risques. Nous ne voulons pas faire de la politique sur les victimes d'accidents de la route et j'invite les membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre à faire preuve de retenue car la sécurité routière est l'affaire de nous tous car nous sommes tous des usagers de la route et à certain moment, nous sommes même des piétons, cyclistes et motocyclistes.

M. le président, il faut le souligner que sur 204 offenses figurants sur la liste des *Fixed Penalties*, seulement une trentaine sont en train d'être revues et il est totalement faux de faire croire que nous voulons pénaliser qui que ce soit.

Au contraire, si nous pouvions résumer ce projet de loi, on pourrait le faire en un seul mot : continuer à protéger. Oui, M. le président, protéger la population contre les personnes irresponsables, une minorité probablement, ceux qui ne respectent pas le code de la route et démontrent une absence de courtoisie, contre ceux qui conduisent sous l'emprise de l'alcool ou de la drogue et que grâce aux amendements récents, nous pouvons mieux sévir contre eux.

Je n'ai aucun doute, M. le président, que la population dans son ensemble s'alignera sur la position du Gouvernement en ce qu'il s'agit du durcissement de la loi envers ceux qui mettent en péril la vie des gens sur nos routes. Nous rejetons toute forme de conduite dangereuse telle que le non-respect du code de la route, des panneaux de signalisation et la conduite irresponsable et irréfléchie. Par rapport aux *Fixed Penalties*, M. le président, en toute humilité nous avons revu notre copie. En ce faisant nous avons été à l'écoute de la population et nous avons fait des ajustements là où il fallait. C'est justement pour cela que le montant de certains délits, la pénalité concernant certains délits a été réalignée et le montant des pénalités revu.

Nous avons aussi, autant que possible, aligné les offenses du même type sur le même barème et ce dans un souci de proportionnalité tout en tenant compte, comme je l'avais mentionné plus haut que certains montants n'avaient pas été révisés depuis belle lurette et il fallait réajuster les pénalités. Par exemple, pour une offense aussi sérieuse que le non-port de la ceinture de sécurité, l'amende a dû être révisée car il a été constaté, en moyenne, au cours de ces dernières années, qu'environ 8 passagers se trouvant les sièges arrières périssent dans des accidents, M. le président.

D'ailleurs, dans un souci de mieux s'armer contre l'insécurité routière, nous n'avons pas lésiné sur les moyens pour construire un *State of the Art Forensic Laboratory* au coût d'environ R 800 millions ce qui démontre, de manière sans équivoque l'engagement de notre Premier ministre par ce *State of the Art Forensic Laboratory* commandité par le bureau du Premier ministre qui démontre notre engagement envers la sécurité de nos concitoyens sur nos routes.

Qu'est-ce je peux dire, M. le président, quand je parle d'un *State of the Art Forensic Laboratory* et pourquoi je saisis cette occasion pour en parler ? Parce que cela nous a permis de procéder à des tests plus poussés pour détecter la présence de substances illicites dans le sang des automobilistes, M. le président. Et là dans un cas, le *FSL* a pu déceler plus de 8 types de drogues dans le sang d'un usager de la route et cela démontre d'abord toute cette imprudence, M. le président, et toute cette volonté à faire, de notre part, nos routes un espace plus sûr. 219 cas ont été des tests positifs et dans 60% des cas, M. le président, écoutez-moi bien, dans 60% des cas, plusieurs types de drogues ont été décelés et plusieurs personnes ont été testées positives à plusieurs types de drogues à la fois. Et certainement, M. le président, comment pouvons-nous montrer plus de laxisme sur ce sujet et les chiffres nous réconfortent dans notre tâche qui est de faire nos routes plus sûres.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, out of 424 samples analysed up to June 2023, 339, *écoutez-moi, M. le président*, 339 analysis demonstrated that these drug users were poly drug users having a minimum of 2 drugs and a maximum of 6 drugs in their blood at the time of the commission of a road traffic offence.

M. le président, can you imagine, a driver on our roads, Labourdonnais street, I don't know, Rose Hill somewhere driving on one of our roads with 6 types of drug in his blood at the time that he is at the wheel of his car, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, how can some people come and contend the increase in penalties metered out to such offenders. What should we do, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the face of these appalling figures?

Des centaines de millions ont été dépensés pour de nombreux ajouts et mécanismes visant à assurer la sécurité de nos concitoyens sur nos routes et nous ne pouvons pas nous arrêter en si bon chemin. Notre devoir envers la population est de promouvoir et d'assurer un système de transport sûr et efficace et cela requiert une approche favorisant un déplacement en toute sécurité. Beaucoup d'efforts ont été consentis et vont se poursuivre car mon ministère, à travers la *TMRSU*, s'est vu confier plusieurs responsabilités récemment quant à la maintenance de panneaux de signalisation et de marquage de route, le but étant de faire de nos routes encore plus sûres.

Ces amendements ne se sont pas faits sur un coup de tête. Il y a tout un travail qui a été faite par les techniciens de mon ministère et le *TMR* pour que les amendements aient l'effet souhaités car nous voulons que les gens soient plus responsables sur nos routes et adoptent des bonnes habitudes. Les *law abiding citizens* n'ont rien à craindre de ces nouveaux amendements car notre seul objectif est de faire de sorte que les routes soient plus sûres. C'est très réducteur d'entendre certain parler de répression. Non, M. le président, sauver des vies ne peut être assimilé à la répression car la route est un espace commun, un espace de partage et appartient à nous tous.

M. le président, je vais parler des ajustements que nous avons faits et que nous allons proposer à la Chambre et c'est dans un souci de proportionnalité tout en tenant compte, comme je l'avais mentionné plus haut, que certains montants n'avaient pas été révisés depuis belle lurette et il fallait réajuster les pénalités.

Following consultations held and taking into account views and representations made, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will move for amendments at Committee Stage to review some of the penalties and harmonise same. I also proposed to review downwards the list of offences being captured under the Cumulative Road Traffic Offences.

M. le président, the amendments are being circulated. I wish to show my appreciation for the emphasis laid by the Prime Minister on Road Safety and his direct involvement in the matter. This demonstrates the commitment of this government to promote a road safety culture and even the Prime Minister's Office provided assistance in the different sensitisation campaigns carried out on the matter.

Je le maintiens. M. le président, le but de ces amendements est d'abord et surtout de mieux protéger la population et c'est surtout ceux qui font fi de nos lois.

J'ai terminé. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

With these words, I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: Before I give you the floor, let me remind hon. Members that the Bill today before this House is an Amendment Bill. I, therefore, appeal to hon. Members to confine their observations to the amendments contained therein. Thank you.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(5.06 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Of course, I will try to confine to specific amendments being brought to the legislation but you would concur with me that the Minister has opened the debate and has referred to deterrence, prevention and issues which are not directly relevant to the amendments being brought before us.

Let me make it quite clear that deterrence is not correlated directly to increase in fines. There are other issues that have to be flagged and flogged, and emphasis is one of the issues that have to be taken on board. I, like the Minister, have made it a point to talk to several persons, and people are worried; not that they will fall foul of the law, not that they are not law-abiding citizens, but everybody you meet will tell you that the fines are disproportionate, excessive. Mr Speaker, Sir, you cannot stop people saying that the Government has an agenda. The agenda is to collect money and to turn road traffic offences into a money-spinner.

The biggest omission in this Bill, as I have stated, is emphasis on deterrence, training and road safety *per se*. I will make a comment of general nature in relation to the Road Traffic Amendment Bill. You know the saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, 'click clunk and drive safe'. Safe trip home or to any destination is our prayer and ardent wish. Road kills. I think we all want to be safe rather than sorry.

The Minister has spoken lengthily on drink and drive which is indeed a serious offence and it is worst as he has stated if there is level of drugs in the bloodstream. And we expect the Forensic Scientific Lab to deliver in relation to tests that have to be conducted. There are provisions in the legislation, the Minister mentioned Clause 7 which should take care of this offence. But, again, there is a call to convey the right signal. The issue is not only of drink and drive or consumption of drugs, but the issue is deeper. The problem is deeper. And the drug issue

has to be addressed; unfortunately government is yet to address this issue. I am going to say that it has failed abysmally but this is an issue that has to be addressed forcefully.

Of course, no one wants drugs to be in the blood level, there is no threshold for toleration of drugs. There is always a note of warning also when one is on medicated drugs. But the risks are sometimes self-made and self-inflicted. You can see people who are standing on the side of the road waiting to cross with their heads in the phones. For example, on the corner of an unlit road to the SBM Park in Forest Side, a big trailer of a juggernaut is parked on and off, and it is a recurrent feature. We expect the Road Traffic Management to act and to act forcefully and diligently.

An accident-prone area has been created sometimes and largely due to indifference and insensitivity to safety and security. Whoever does it cannot get away I concur but at the same time, the fines cannot be disproportionate. Now, Traffic Management officers have to be diligent and they have to be present, and they have to act forcefully. And they have to make sure that the right signals are sent to those who often break the law.

How many of these at-risk areas are there? The sites where there is no safety camera are obviously the preferred choices. We are all for prescribed regulations, they should provide the avenue of redress, but again I will come back that these fines cannot be excessive. Let me advise the Minister to err on the side of caution on the cumulative road traffic offences. And I will elaborate on it later on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, polluters and offenders of road traffic must pay, but they cannot as stated be fleeced. A fine has to be reasonable. There cannot be quantum leap of fines. Offences relating to safety, silencers, insurance vignette have increased 150%, and those who break speed limits will be severely fined. The Minister has given figures in relation to the number of motorised road users, and as he said, the number will continue to increase and incidentally, there will be an increased number of persons who will break the law. But, I will come back again to say that this is not the reason why government has to rip off taxpayers directly or indirectly.

I know people who have stated that – *“With that substantial increase in fine, you might as well take my vehicle because the fines are so excessive, I won’t be able to pay.”*

And this is the harsh reality and the naked truth. It is not because government gives that government has to take. I guarantee you that there is no free lunch, but government cannot always be government and the government cannot always decide, because government has been made to retreat and surrender – the will of the people is a great force to be reckoned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has seen it and I concur the fleets of motorised or non-motorised vehicles are growing but the correlation of accident between increasing road network and vehicles is obvious. Since 2015, the regime has failed to face the problem fair and square, head on as we say.

Has a reliable study based on empirical evidence been conducted to assess the causes of 140 fatal accidents in year 2023? The danger always lurks with repairs of total loss of vehicles; total loss should be total loss! There should be no compromise. But I grant you drivers are keen on repair because of the constant increase in price of insurance and repair largely due to depreciation of the rupee.

The Metro has unfortunately compounded the problem of road safety and security in some areas. Saint-Jean Road has been narrowed for the light-rail track of Metro, and if there is an emergency call to be attended by ambulance or fire services, it spells a disaster. It is the outcome of poor infrastructural planning by the regime, which was fiercely condemned by Minister Ganoo and his colleague, the Minister of Environment when they were on the Opposition bench.

Causes of accidents are multifactorial. I'm not going to go into many of the causes, but let me say that Road Traffic Signs – the keep left signal, especially at roundabouts are misleading. At the roundabout of Phoenix if drivers cross over and are caught, the offence will be compounded as cumulative road traffic offences, and if enforced, many drivers will lose their licences. The offence should stand on its own.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2018 Amendments to the Road Traffic Bill also made provision to increase cumulative road traffic offences from 11 to 24. The Prime Minister realised the blunder and impressed upon the then Minister responsible for road safety to go back to the drawing board and keep the cumulative road traffic offences to 11, as it was. Now the Minister is daring and keen to increase the cumulative offenses to 32. This is provocative and unnecessary.

Let me come to Fitness Centres. How reliable are Fitness Centres? I grant you there is no compromise on road safety but the values and merits of road safety have to be constantly disseminated with reach out to all. Some experts have argued for training on defensive driving for drivers, an unlike training that delivers a certificate of the completion with checks for scrutiny.

Mr Daniel Raymond set up a Training School for motorbike drivers and after six months of hand-on training, it was agreed that they would take exams to be eligible to have a licence. Unfortunately, the gentleman has gone and the school has fallen back.

Mr Speaker: Make sure you are not going outside the debate.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a point of order. Just a few minutes ago, before the hon. Leader of Opposition took the floor, you indicated that we need to concentrate on the amendments being proposed in the Bill. I am fairly certain that the Leader of the Opposition, I speak under your correction, Mr Speaker, Sir, has completely left the ambit of the amendments being proposed.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have another point of order. How is the Leader of the Opposition supposed to make his speech when the Minister has not yet submitted the amendments to the amendments that we are supposed to be talking about? How is that possible?

Mr Speaker: I will come to your point! First of all, let me address this point. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, your debate should concentrate on the first series of amendments.

Okay, let us break. First, I asked you whether you were willing to talk. You took your responsibility and you said 'yes'. Let us break until the Minister circulates the amendments, because you misled the Chamber when you said 'yes' you are ready to talk.

At 5.19 p.m. the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.55 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated. Leader of the Opposition, you have all your amendments, please continue!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, I do not expect you to tender apologies but I feel...

Mr Speaker: What is it?

Dr. Boolell: I said I do not expect you to tender apologies but I feel comfortable that the...

Mr Speaker: What is it? Asking the Chair to tender apologies for what?

Dr. Boolell: I am not. I am saying that alright I accept but the...

Mr Speaker: No, no, let us talk about the first part of your conversation. You are a Leader of the Opposition, I give you the floor. I am telling you that you have all your amendments, carry on. You do not expect me to tender apologies for what? Leader of the Opposition, I can take recordings and show you. I asked you whether you are willing to start your speech. You said yes! It is on that condition that I gave you the floor. Please continue!

Dr. Boolell: But it was under condition...

Mr Speaker: Continue! You are talking for nothing! Talk on the Bill!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, now that the amendments have been circulated, of course, I feel comfortable.

Now, when I look at the amendments in relation to the cumulative road traffic offenses, I stated earlier that there were 32, now I find out that there are 23. If we cumulative the first 12 plus the last 11, there are good reasons to say that the amendments as circulated now in relation to fines, I can now say that the fines have gone down. It is more acceptable.

Now secondly, in relation to the *immatriculation* plate, it is so easy to fiddle when you have a specific plate number. Let me give an example, if the plate number on my car is AD 11, I can easily put an 'L' and turn it into 'AD IL'. Or else, AG 11, if I put a 'T' above, it can bear the name of 'AG IT'. What I am saying is that since it is so easy to fiddle, there is provision in the legislation for remedial action to be taken. But I will go further than that because if the intention is to wage war on those who are acting illegally, – and they can be involved in drug trafficking or any other issue – I would impress upon the Minister to see to it that a tracking device be put to locate a vehicle. Now, if we have to extend it to those who use motorbikes because very often you have drug traffickers or drug peddlers who use motorbikes and bicycles to peddle the stuff.

So, the Minister has to inform the House, later when he makes his conclusion, as to the necessity to have this tracking device and I am sure that he will take this onboard.

The other issue which is relevant, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the fine. Now, the fine in relation to the Fourth Schedule, I am going to speak on the Regulation Fourth Schedule. The hefty Rs20,000 fine on failing to fix registration plate in provided space. That was totally rejected and the Minister has to agree that he had to bow to the pressure being borne upon him and upon Government by members of the public. Otherwise, this would not have been reduced to the Rs5,000. So, to me this looks like a big retreat, a big surrender, the U-turn and he had to bow to the public opinion.

In relation to what I have said earlier, there are offenses that stand on their own and are not related to cumulative road traffic offenses. For example, I have stated earlier in relation to fiddling with the plate number. That offense, as I can see, it is now Rs3,000. It is an offense that stands on its own. So, that is fair enough, I have no problem with this but let me come to one issue which has been one of the cumulative road traffic offenses. I have in mind the traffic instructors who sat for an exam and they were awarded their certificate but the Traffic Branch was yet to acknowledge that they have gone through the exams, that the exams were conducted by the Traffic Branch, supervised by the MES. There are 45 persons who have been successful. Up to yesterday, they have not received their licenses to operate, permit to run what we call the 'Driving Instructor's Licence'. Now that they have their Driving Instructor's Licence, they can operate.

Now, these delays were unnecessary. That is why I appeal to the Minister to see to it that things are expedited. There is now relatively broad consensus that Government had no choice but to bow to pressure being borne by the public. The fines are more reasonable if I can say so. So, I take it for granted that the implementation will be done as expected. But one thing that I would remind the Minister, in 2019 – almost on the threshold of general elections – two legislations were introduced: one which relates to the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act though this amendment was brought in 2018 and then the Funding of Political Parties.

I do not know whether this has become a habit and these two legislations come after the budget has been voted. So, that is why you cannot stop people saying loud and clear that the

purpose of this Bill is to collect. Time to collect, time to reap off taxpayers, but as I said, you have to bow to pressure being borne upon you by members of the public. And I say when it comes to the dicta of the public, Government has no choice irrespective of Government is Government, Government so decides. But when it comes to the dicta of public, Government has to bow to pressure and this is what we have seen. You have to be grateful to those who voice out and speak their mind without fear or prejudice.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: The next one on the list would be hon. Teeluck!

(6.04 p.m.)

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will focus my intervention on Clause 3 of the Bill which proposes to amend section 2 of the Road Traffic Act by amending the definition of “traffic”, thus enabling the Minister to make regulations to regulate the use of structures and objects that are, during a procession, carried, pushed, pulled or led on a road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I still have vivid memories of that evening of 03 March 2024. At around 18 00 hours on that day, I was, along with the Prime Minister and several other Ministers and Members of Parliament, participating in a cultural programme at Ganga Talao (Grand Bassin). A programme organised by the Hindu Maha Sabha and if my memory does not fail me, it was the first cultural programme marking the official launching of the celebration of Maha Shivratri at Ganga Talao.

Ganga Talao at that time, as every year, was teeming with devotees, several thousands of devotees and pilgrims converging to the sacred lake. And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, the news came in that a *kanwar* had caught fire at Arsenal when it came into contact with a high voltage electric cable and the first indication was that there were casualties. Soon after, videos started pouring in

and the images, Mr Speaker, Sir, sent shivers down the spine. Very soon, it was confirmed that, unfortunately, six young *kawartees*, pilgrims passed away and around 22 others were injured.

All of us, the country actually, was in a state of shock. The country mourned the loss of these six young pilgrims. Mr Speaker, Sir, that night, I can still remember, the Prime Minister went straight from Gango Talao to SSRN Hospital to meet those who were injured but also, to meet their parents and to see that proper and prompt treatment is being given to all of them. The next day, again, we went to the funerals of all the victims to pay a last homage to them and we met their parents, their families, they were devastated and shattered. Mr Speaker, Sir, losing someone close to you is always painful, to say the least, but, losing a young son, losing someone in these circumstances must be even more difficult, and after a month, a seventh pilgrim passed away. Recalling this incident still makes one's skin crawl, the wound is still raw and red, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Despite the guidelines for the conduct of religious processions, we are sad that this very unfortunate incident occurred. We all recollect that in 2023, during *Maha Shivratri* pilgrimage, a similar unfortunate incident occurred at Mare Longue which brought about the untimely demise of two young pilgrims and causing injuries to several other pilgrims.

Following the incident in 2023, the Cabinet took the decision to set up an inter-ministerial committee to come up with an appropriate regulatory framework for the conduct of processions, for religious purposes and pilgrimage to ensure the safety of pilgrims, participants and the public at large. I, myself, chair the Committee along with other colleague Ministers. The Committee also has seen the participation of other Departments and Ministries. A first meeting was held where certain issues were highlighted and identified.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following that first inter-ministerial meeting, two technical sub-committees were set up, one to look at all issues and hazards related to processions and the second one, to look into the legal aspect of the matter and come up with a regulatory framework. Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is good to highlight that we also had consultative meetings with various social organisations to discuss their proposals after the receipt of preliminary recommendations of the technical committees. Several meetings were held and at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was noted that there was a general consensus amongst Ministries, Departments

but also, socio-cultural organisations to bring some orderliness in the organisation as regards the procession to Ganga Talao and other processions.

Following workings of several technical committees, it was noted that the most appropriate framework was to set up guidelines that will regulate the sizes of *kanwars* and the conduct of other processions. Thus, comes into play a guideline that was brought to Cabinet and approved on 19 January and same was of course given away to all socio-cultural organisations, where they held press conferences to disseminate the content of the guidelines brought to ground level to those participating in pilgrimages, to all pilgrims converging to Ganga Talao. But, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, the incident happened in March 2024. Following that incident of this year, it was important - and I think it is important – that we step up in terms of ensuring the safety and well-being of pilgrims. We need to expunge all regulatory risks to ensure that such incidents do not occur again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by regulating the use of structures and objects that are used during processions, we are ensuring that pilgrims and participants are protected from potential hazards, thus enhancing their overall experience and spiritual journey. Over the years, we have seen that during various pilgrimages, increasingly elaborate and larger structures are being constructed. There are various reasons for this such as increased devotional faith and devotion amongst participants which reflect their sincerity and intensity of their spiritual commitment, increased creativity of participants, resulting in larger and more impressive structures, thus pushing the boundaries of traditional designs. While this growth reflects the vibrant religious fervour of our people, it also presents new challenges, particularly in terms of road safety.

In fact, the primary concern of the Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, in driving this amendment is, first and foremost, public safety. It is true that we have come up with the guidelines but the guidelines lack the binding authority necessary to ensure compliance. Without enforceability, there is a risk that not all participants will adhere to the guidelines, thus compromising their own safety and that of others. Through this amendment, to empower the Minister to make appropriate regulations regarding the carriage of structures on the road, we will provide a clear legal framework that will hold everyone. The regulations will provide the legal obligations which were currently missing, making it clear what is required of the pilgrims and

participants. This clarity, Mr Speaker, Sir, will help prevent misunderstandings and will ensure that everyone is on the same wavelength.

Mr Speaker, Sir, of course, these amendments to the Road Traffic Act will warrant the need for regulation to be introduced. The regulation will naturally draw its content from the existing guidelines; guidelines, as I mentioned earlier, which result from extensive consultations from various stakeholders. These amendments to the Road Traffic Act is a testament, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the commitment of the Government to fostering a harmonious society where religious freedom is respected alongside the imperative of public safety. We are taking a proactive step towards ensuring that our cherished traditions can be celebrated safely and respectfully. It should be highlighted that the ambit of the amendment extends to all processions, not just processions of a religious nature.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the country cannot afford to lose another son or daughter in these circumstances. We have a responsibility and we are assuming our responsibility. No mother, no father should be allowed to live through such a trauma again. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I congratulate hon. Alan Ganoo for coming forward with this Bill and for proposing these essential amendments to the Road Traffic Act.

Before I end, allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to pay homage to all those nine *kawartees* who lost their lives last and this year. May their soul attain *moksha*, that is, be free from the shackles of the endless cycle of life and death.

I fully support these amendments, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am done. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Uteem!

(6.15 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président, M. le ministre veut nous faire croire que l'unique but de ces amendements est de nous protéger et de protéger les usagers de la route.

Mais ces amendements, M. le président, concernent principalement les *fixed penalties*, il n'y a rien dans ce projet de loi pour rendre nos routes plus sûres. Il n'y a aucun amendement

prévu concernant les automobilistes qui conduisent *without care and attention* ou *recklessly*. Rien concernant la peine pour ceux qui par leur imprudence ou pour avoir consommé de l'alcool et de la drogue causent un accident entraînant la mort des usagers de la route et n'importe quel avocat d'expérience, M. le président, sait que quand une personne double une voiture qui est en stationnement sur un passage clouté et qu'il heurte une personne mais cet automobiliste ne va jamais être poursuivi pour un *fixed penalty*, il va être poursuivi pour *dangerous driving, driving without care and attention*, il aura une peine d'emprisonnement et si par malheur la victime arrivait à mourir, il peut avoir cinq ans de prison, voire huit ans de prison ou même plus s'il y a des charges sous *involuntary manslaughter*.

Donc, expliquez-nous comment l'augmentation des *fixed penalties* dans la plupart des cas qui ne concernent que des délits techniques rendra nos routes plus sûres ? Est-ce qu'une voiture qui a une plaque d'immatriculation avec des lettres en caractères gras, a-t-il plus de chance de provoquer un accident ? Est-ce que le fait d'opérer d'une base d'opération autre que prévu dans votre licence entraînera-t-il plus d'accidents ? Est-ce que les taxis *maron* qui voient leur amende passer de R 3000 à R 5000 sont impliqués dans plus d'accident que les autres automobilistes ? Non, M. le président, la raison des augmentations dans tous ces cas ne peuvent pas avoir été motivée par le désir de réduire le nombre d'accidents sur nos routes. La raison, selon moi, est belle et bien d'augmenter les revenus du gouvernement. 27 infractions sont mentionnées dans les amendements. Certaines amendes vont augmenter par 4, voire 5 fois et dans le cas des plaques d'immatriculation non conformes, initialement l'amende aurait été augmentée par 25 fois mais là je vois que le ministre par voie d'amendement va réduire de 25 fois à 5 fois.

En sus, le *Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations 2010* sera amendée pour augmenter l'amende maximum qui passe de R 20 000 à R 100 000, soit plus de cinq fois. Cette réglementation, M. le président, concerne l'aspect esthétique et technique des véhicules. Donc, si vous modifiez l'apparence de votre voiture, vous décidez de mettre un *bull bar*, vous décidez d'avoir des rétroviseurs qui ne sont pas conformes, des gèntes qui ne sont pas conformes à la réglementation, vous risquez maintenant une amende allant jusqu'à R 100 000. Pourquoi une telle hausse dans les amendes ? Certains diront pour mieux vous plumer et je ne parle pas à légère, M. le président.

Voyons les chiffres, on vient de voter le budget cet après-midi, selon les *Estimates*, l'an dernier pour 2023-2024, le gouvernement a récolté, tenez-vous bien, R 419 millions uniquement sous l'item *finer, penalties and forfeits*. Au fait, le gouvernement prévoyait de recevoir R 480 million, un demi-milliard de roupies comme contravention, comme amende mais il n'a reçu que R 419 millions, donc il faut augmenter le taux des amendes parce que il n'y a pas assez de revenus au gouvernement et ils estiment qu'avec les amendements ils vont récolter au moins R 422 millions, toujours selon les *Estimates* qui viennent d'être votées par cette Chambre.

Selon les dernières statistiques publiées par *Statistics Mauritius* au 30 juin 2023, le nombre de contraventions pour les *Road Traffic Offences* en 2022 était à 113 977 et la plupart de ces infractions concernaient les excès de vitesse, soit 58 773 environ la moitié des infractions. Donc la moitié des contraventions à Maurice concerne les excès de vitesse. Avec l'augmentation de l'amende pour excès de vitesse qui passe de R 10 000 à R 12 500, soit une augmentation de 25% gageons que les policiers vont se frotter les mains. Je les vois déjà se cacher avec leurs *speedometer* à la main, prête à jaillir sur tous les automobilistes inattentifs car dites-vous bien ces pauvres policiers subissent des pressions pour remplir leur carnet de contraventions. Et je me réfère là, M. le président, au *Police Force Policing Plan* de 2024, c'est un document officiel que vous pouvez consulter sur le net. À la page 9 de ce *Police Force Policing Plan* de 2024, vous savez c'est quoi l'objectif de la police concernant les *Road Traffic Offences* ? Augmenter les contraventions de 5%, objectives –

- increase the number of contraventions relating to speeding driving by 5%,
- increase number of contraventions for failing to wear seatbelts by 5%.

Et là je dis en passant, *failing to wear seatbelt* pour les passagers, est-ce que ça s'applique aux membres du Parlement ? Est-ce que ça s'applique aux ministres ? Est-ce que ça s'applique à tout le monde ? Est-ce que l'on a déjà vu un membre de cette Assemblée ou un ministre avoir une contravention pour n'avoir pas mis la ceinture de sécurité quand il s'assoie à l'arrière comme passager ?

M. le président, autre amendements proposés concernent les cumulative road traffic offences, une disposition au fait pour remplacer le permis à points. *If a person is convicted on a fourth occasion of one or more offences specified in the Third Schedule of the Road Traffic Act within a period of 24 months, donc within two years, he will be disqualified from holding a*

driving licence for a period not less than 6 months and not more than 12 months. Parce que c'était une mesure draconienne, si vous commettez une infraction 4 fois dans l'espace de deux ans, vous perdez, il n'y a pas de discrétion, la loi prévoit que vous être disqualifié.

Donc, à cause de cela, il y avait un nombre restreint d'infractions qui étaient énumérées au *Third Schedule*, il y en avait seulement 11. Maintenant c'est passé de 11 à 32 avec l'addition de 21 nouvelles infractions. Je crois comprendre qu'avec les amendements, ça va être réduit maintenant à 23. Initialement c'était 32, maintenant ça passe à 23 mais toujours est-il, M. le président, qu'aujourd'hui pour avoir enfreint ces dispositions du *Third Schedule*, au moins quatre fois dans l'espace de 24 mois, il y aura un nombre grandissant de mauriciens, d'automobilistes qui vont voir leur *driving licence* suspendue. Est-ce qu'une telle mesure va réduire le nombre d'accidents, par exemple: auparavant, il y avait, ils l'ont retiré, heureusement, parce qu'un des infractions qui pouvait mener à votre disqualification comme conducteur, c'était si vous aviez *size display or spacing of characters on the registration plate not as per prescribed regulations*. Donc, si votre plaque d'immatriculation est un peu *fancy*, vous avez des lettres en caractères gras ou vous mettez d'autres symboles à côté de votre plaque d'immatriculation, quatre fois, vous perdez votre licence.

M. le président, l'autre aspect que je voudrais parler c'est le transfert des véhicules. The law is being amended to enable the Registrar General to register a transfer of vehicle between 2 individuals where there is no *lien* on the vehicle. This is a good measure.

According to Article 1 (10) of the Civil Code, the seller of the motor vehicle must remit to the buyer of the motor vehicle, a certificate issued by the National Land Transport Authority certifying whether there is any *lien* known as "*Gage sans déplacement*" on the motor vehicle or not and a copy of that certificate must be annexed to the deed of sales.

As a result of this, as the hon. Minister explained himself; there is a long queue in front of the NLTA office in Cassis. Now, with this proposed amendment, the Registrar General only has to be informed by the individual that they are transferring the motor vehicle and then the Registrar General will have access to the database of the NLTA and will ascertain whether there is a *Gage sans déplacement* or not and if there is no *Gage sans déplacement*, he will effect the

transfer. But my question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is why limit it only to transfers between two individuals?

I know the law says that you can increase it to other transfers as may be prescribed but why not generalise it for everyone? Then, the second thing is why limit it to circumstances where there is no *Gage sans déplacement*? Why can't the Registrar General effect a transfer if there is a *Gage sans déplacement*? May I remind hon. Members that article 2109 of the Civil Code provides –

“Le gage sans déplacement suit le véhicule ou l’engin grevé dans quelques mains qu’il passe.”

So, it really does not matter if you have a *lien* which is registered or not. When you transfer the ownership of a vehicle the *lien* moves with the vehicle. Now, what the hon. Minister should have done and I hope he will do it eventually is to digitalize everything, digitalize the register, so that anyone who wants to purchase a vehicle, can go online and see for himself whether the car that he is going to purchase is subject to a *lien* or not. If it is subject to a *lien* then he knows he can negotiate on the price and pay a lesser amount. But the fact that the *lien* is registered or not registered should not impact on the ability of the Registrar General to register a transfer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been given a very limited amount of time, I am very conscious that I do not have much time.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Uteem: *Okay. Yes, I am concluding.* M. le président, ce projet de loi ne prévoit pas grand-chose pour rendre nos routes plus sûres si ce n'est qu'à travers la répression avait une augmentation des amendes des *fixed penalties*. Je m'associe à l'honorable ministre Teeluck qui a parlé un moment pour rendre hommage aux victimes d'accidents de route et aux pèlerins qui ont perdu leur vie. J'espère qu'avec les réglementations qui vont être établies par le ministre, les vies seront sauvées. Malheureusement je doute fort que les amendements proposés vont réduire le nombre de victimes d'accidents de la route. J'espère sincèrement, M. le président, que j'ai tort. Merci.

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

(6.29 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to commend the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK, for bringing to the House such an important piece of legislation, Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2024.

The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2024, which is being debated today, embodies a weighty commitment to the safety, progress and wellbeing of every Mauritian. I cannot prevent myself from smiling at the lame statement made by the Opposition. Yes, we do have an agenda and our agenda is to help our people.

M. le président, forts de leurs expériences avec les coffres-forts, ils pensent sûrement que nous faisons pareil. Détrompez-vous, l'argent du peuple est servi pour soutenir le peuple. Mr Speaker, Sir, each life lost on our roads is not just a mere statistic, it's a family shattered, a community in mourning and a reminder of our collective moral responsibility to act. This Bill is our response to the cries of parents who have lost their loved ones, to the pleas of emergency responders who brave the aftermaths of accidents daily and to the silent prayers of every citizen who ventures on to our roads. Let me be clear, this is not a partisan issue. Road safety transcends political boundaries; it is about protecting the very fabric of our society.

It is about ensuring that our children can walk to school safely, that our workers can commute without fear and that our elderly can cross the street with confidence.

M. le président, la pierre angulaire de ce projet de loi est son approche de la cession de propriété des véhicules. En simplifiant ce processus, nous ne faisons pas que réduire la bureaucratie, nous donnons du pouvoir à nos citoyens. En même temps nous tirons parti de la technologie pour nous assurer que tous les contrôles nécessaires soient en place, c'est une gouvernance intelligente en action.

M. le président, permettez-moi de m'adresser aux sceptiques qui pourraient dire que ce projet de loi est trop sévère, que les sanctions accrues sont excessives. A cela je dis, quel prix pouvons-nous mettre sur une vie humaine? Les sanctions plus strictes introduites dans ce projet de loi ne sont pas une punition mais elles visent à prévenir. Elles envoient un message clair, les

comportements irresponsables sur nos routes ne seront pas tolérés. Cette loi n'est pas simplement un texte juridique, c'est une promesse. Une promesse que nous faisons à chaque famille mauricienne. Nous nous engageons à faire de nos routes des espaces plus sûrs où chacun peut se déplacer sans crainte.

Les nouvelles mesures concernant les vêtements à haute visibilité pour les motocyclistes ne sont pas une contrainte mais une protection. Chers motocyclistes, chaque fois que vous enfilerez ces vêtements, rappelez-vous que c'est un geste d'amour envers vos proches qui vous attendent à la maison. Nous renforçons également les réglementations concernant les processions sur nos routes. Ce n'est pas pour limiter nos traditions mais pour les protéger, pour garantir que nos célébrations culturelles et religieuses puissent continuer à enrichir notre vie nationale en toute sécurité.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to address a critical aspect of this Bill, its provision for regulating structures and objects carried during processions. Mauritius is a land of vibrant cultures and tradition and our roads often become the stage for our most colorful celebrations but, with this vibrancy, comes responsibility. This Bill empowers us to ensure that these celebrations can continue safely protecting both participants and bystanders. Our culture is not static, it evolves and part of that evolution must be towards greater safety and responsibility. We are not curtailing traditions. We are ensuring that they can continue for generations to come. This Bill also recognises the changing phase of our urban landscape by clarifying regulations on the use of pavements and public passages. We are preparing for a Mauritius where walking and cycling are not just alternatives but preferred modes of movement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me be clear about the urgency of this Bill. Every day we delay is another day we put our citizens at risk.

M. le président, les sanctions plus strictes, les définitions plus claires et les pouvoirs accrus à nos forces de l'ordre ne sont pas des simples exercices bureaucratiques. Ce sont des outils pratiques destinés à sauver des vies et leurs impacts se feront sentir dès l'entrée en vigueur de nouveaux règlements. En renforçant les sanctions, nous dissuadons les comportements dangereux et irresponsables sur nos routes. Les définitions plus claires éliminent les ambiguïtés

qui pourraient être exploitées pour échapper à la justice assurant ainsi que les infractions soient traitées avec la rigueur qu'elles méritent.

Ces mesures ne sont pas seulement pour que les citoyens assument leurs responsabilités mais avant tout pour prévenir – prévenir les accidents, prévenir les tragédies et prévenir les pertes de vies humaines. Ce projet de loi est un appel à la responsabilité collective et individuelle. Il nous rappelle que la sécurité routière est l'affaire de tous et qu'à travers des actions décisives et des lois claires, nous pouvons créer un environnement où chaque trajet sur nos routes est plus sûr.

Adopter ce projet de loi c'est choisir la vie et la protection de chaque Mauricien. Je fais un appel à tout un chacun, quel que soit votre affiliation politique, pensez aux jeunes étudiants qui se rendent à l'école ou à l'université, aux conducteurs des bus qui circulent dans les trafics aux heures de pointe, au couple âgé qui se promène le soir, ce projet de loi est pour eux. Il est pour nous tous.

Donc je lance un appel à la Chambre, voyons ensemble au-delà de ce projet de loi. Ce texte de loi n'est pas une fin en soi, mais un moyen pour atteindre un objectif plus grand. C'est un pacte social, un engagement vers un avenir où nos routes ne seront plus synonymes de danger mais de progrès, de connexion et de vie.

Mr Speaker, Sir, The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2024, is unequivocal declaration that we value the life and safety of every Mauritian above all else. Let us all support this Bill. Let us send in resounding message to every Mauritian that their safety is our highest priority. Let this pass of this Bill not just with our votes, but with a unified commitment to its implementation and to the vision of a safer Mauritius it represents. Let us think of the people of Mauritius whose trust we hold, and whose lives we seek to protect with this landmark legislation.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval!

(6.40 p.m.)

Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened obviously carefully to what the Minister had to say, he has expressed some self-satisfaction I think on the reforms and improvements to the procedures at the NLTA. Unfortunately, I am in a process of buying a car, it took me two weeks and I just got the number today. It took me two weeks to register the sale and the purchase and to affix a new number to the car. It was very frustrating and I feel very sorry for my fellow citizens having to go through the same issue. So no doubt, it is still work in progress and hon. Minister I am sure you will have a lot of works still left to get this sorted out.

As far as road accidents are concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, the 67 deaths in the first 6 months of this year are tragic road accidents involving mainly motorcyclist, cyclists and pedestrians and these people are often tragic victims of these accidents. It is a fact that driving, walking, riding on our roads, in Mauritius, are extremely hazardous. If you try and drive overseas, I am sure you would find it is much easier to drive overseas than it is to drive and use our roads in Mauritius.

The government response as perfect as it may be is to increase the fines, but as rightly said by hon. Uteem just now, many of these changes don't relate to safety. They related to administration of the Act which has nothing to do with safety. So, that is something therefore that is surprising. But the real question that remains is: what is the point of imposing a fine?

The point of imposing a fine is to create a deterrence, to deter people from doing it again. Now take a little example as far as deterrence is concerned: my neighbour who is a gardener, he was riding his motorcycle without the vest and he was fined Rs5000. That is a disaster for him. He was destroyed by that fine. And he had to find the money which is nearly a quarter of his salary to pay for this fine. But the same Rs5000 that is charged to someone much richer will have no effect; he will just pay it and forget it. This issue of deterrence has been dealt with in other countries successfully, and it is the first point of my speech this evening. It is to see how we can make our fines more of a deterrence to people who misuse our roads, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, how have other countries dealt with this? They have dealt with it in a very ingenious way and many countries have done this. I am talking about Finland, the UK, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Greece, Australia is considering this. What

have they done? They have actually linked the fine to the income of the individual. There is a minimum fine and apart from the minimum fine, the judge, the magistrate will fine the driver or the rider up to an amount which relates to his monthly income.

For instance, in Norway you can be fined up to 10% of your annual income; that is a lot. If you make a traffic offence, for certain offences you can be fined up to 10% of your annual income. And, believe me; if you pay a fine which is 10% of your annual income, you are not going to do that silly thing again. You are going to stop. That is a deterrent. Mr Speaker, Sir, in Greece for poor persons pay a fine and rich persons can pay up to 3 times that fine. In the UK, the maximum limit is 175% of your weekly income. The traffic offence can be sanctioned by a fine of nearly twice your weekly income. Now that is a deterrent!

My issue, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that whatever level of fine that we have seen in these issues, it is very unfair, and it is hugely burdensome on poor people. I take the gardener for example, Rs5000 for not wearing a vest! It is still at Rs5000 as we speak today. It is a disaster for him. He may not be able to feed his family properly. He may not be able to pay his rent. But the same offence perpetrated by someone who is much richer, – say a member of this Assembly if ever they get fined, – they don't even care because it is only Rs5000.

So, my point, Mr Speaker, Sir, my plea in fact, is that fines must be a deterrent and for them to be a deterrent, they must hurt otherwise there is no point of having the fine. And therefore, they cannot just hurt the poor, they must hurt the rich as well and they must be therefore related to the income of the person/the perpetrator, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the first point that I wanted to make.

Also, Mr Speaker, Sir, some of these fines are not right. I think item 42 of the Schedule, failing to display an insurance vignette, not failing to have an insurance vignette, just failing not to display the insurance vignette, Rs5,000. Is that fair? How fair can it be that just for not having the little vignette – you have the insurance, you do not have the vignette – the Police Officer will fine you Rs5,000? So, what I am saying is the whole Schedule has to be looked at again. There are things that still remain in that Schedule which I consider to be extremely unfair.

Also, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are some fines which relate purely to economic activity. Touting, I suppose finding a client for your taxi, that is what touting is all about, was going to

change from Rs500 to Rs2,000. Now it is back to Rs1,000. That is an economic offense, nothing to do with safety. *Taxi marron*, Mr Speaker, Sir, we all feel for *taxi marron* because believe it or not, the issue of taxi licences has never been based on meritocracy. It has never been based on meritocracy. It has always been based on who you know and if you are a *taxi marron*, it is not your own fault. You would like to have a taxi licence. You cannot get a taxi licence. You feed your family by being a *taxi marron* and the fine now goes from Rs3,000 to Rs5,000. Imagine Mr Speaker, Sir, a *taxi marron* getting three of these fines in a month. How destructive it is to his family? I am against, Mr Speaker, Sir, increasing of these fines where it relates merely to economic offenses.

I do not actually mind a fine going from Rs500 to Rs1,000 because a fine of Rs500 is no fine at all. It is pointless, who is going to give a ticket to someone for Rs500? I do not mind if it goes to Rs1,000 but Mr Speaker, Sir, it is an economic fine for these economic offenses and I am very much against increasing them as some of them are being increased this time because it is unfair to the poorest sections of our society who often, through no fault of their own, have to act just outside the boundaries of the law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to mention this issue of having to pay the fine in person. Now, imagine this gardener again. He has a Rs5,000 fine and he has to lose one day's work just to go to Court to pay because he cannot pay by Juice, he cannot pay by Blink and he cannot even send his wife to pay. He has to go to pay in person. That is, Mr Speaker, Sir, something that ought to be changed but accidents are not just a question of drivers and riders etc.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have raised in this House before the sad lack of pavements on our roads and I was actually astonished. Budget after budget, we talk about roads, we talk about bridges, we talk about all this and nobody gives a hoot about pedestrians, people walking. Have you actually seen pedestrians walking? They have to dodge the cars that come by, they have to dodge the buses that come by. Some have to jump in the canal just to avoid the bus and this is the case in many roads in my Constituency. It is the case also in many roads around Mauritius.

It is a highly dangerous issue, highly dangerous activity to be a pedestrian in Mauritius. And the figures show but I think the Minister said that 26% –if I get the right figure – of the accidents were actually pedestrians. Why? Because this is a country without pavements, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why! This is why, nobody seems to realise that or say that. It is a country

without pavements and in a country without pavements, you get pedestrians that will get killed because they are sharing the road with motorcyclists. They are sharing the same road with the drivers, with the cars, with the buses. We will never ever, whichever fine you put, be able to stop pedestrians being killed on our roads without pavements. Never and this must be the priority of the Government to construct pavements wherever it is still possible. In many places, I am sure; it is no longer possible because there have been constructions on both sides of the road. But in many other places, it is possible and I plead, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not in the budget but I plead that pavements be included as a priority for road safety.

And the second thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, are these motorcycles. Up in the north where I live, you will always see these motorcycles going by. Many of them do not have number plates. The Police cannot do anything, they do not do anything. Many of them do not even have or have modified their silencers. The fine for not having a silencer is Rs5,000. Does it work? Have you noticed the number of motorcycles going around in Quatre Bornes, in my constituency, anywhere else without silencers? Why does it not work? Because the Police are not enforcing it, they are not enforcing it because they cannot catch these motorcycles. They sit on the side of the road, they will stop anyone who is willing to stop.

If a motorcycle does not want to stop, especially if it does not have a number, the Police just let it go by. They have no way to stop it. The Safe City Cameras cannot catch, there is no number. The speeding cameras cannot catch, there is no number and these motorcycles are multiplying like mushrooms, like rabbits in Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. Multiplying! And it is becoming a real danger and no doubt being used by drug traffickers, no doubt being used by youth without licences and I would like to hear from the Minister of Transport. What is he going to do about these motorcycles? Is the Police just going to sit by and let this happen? They are the real danger. 16%, according to the Minister, of motorcycle riders who have been involved in accidents did not have a licence. 16% of these users of motorcycles if we extrapolate do not have a licence and yet what are we going to do about it?

That is, Mr Speaker, Sir, the few points that I wanted to raise. I think the whole issue of traffic is not just a question of fines. Otherwise, we would not have motorcycles with modified silencers. It is also and especially with regard to enforcement. If we do not enforce it properly then whatever we are voting here is not going to make any difference.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Koonjoo-Shah!

(6.52 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, and like my colleagues who spoke before me, I commend the Bill brought by hon. Ganoo which has as objective to adopt a more proportionate approach in a bit to improve road safety and to streamline administrative processes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened very attentively to the hon. Member, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval who just spoke before me and to be honest, I am actually very happy that the said gardener that he made reference to is still here, and he will be able to cater for the needs of his family in the future. I know, I totally agree with the hon. Member who said that a fine should be a deterrent and that was the deterrent because the Rs5,000 did hurt. It hurt the gardener's pocket. He has had to fork out Rs5,000 with no doubt, difficulty but this is what is going to henceforth ensure; it is drilled in his system now that he has to be sporting a higher visibility jacket henceforth. So yes, he must be rueing the Rs5,000 that he has paid as a fine but like I said, I am sure as much as he is bitterly regretting paying that fine, I am sure that henceforth he will not forget to put on his visibility jacket which is going to ensure that he does not lose his life and later on not be able to cater for the needs of his family for the simple reason that he is dead.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, again I concur with the hon. Member who spoke before me who said that any fine should be a deterrent. I also agree that no Bill is perfect but all Bills are perfectible. So, this is why I commend the timing of this Bill. The timing especially and I will come to that in one moment, Mr Speaker, Sir. As Minister in charge, responsible for child and family welfare, I am going to put some perspectives into this debate. I am going to obviously concentrate on Clause 3 of the amendments of the Bill.

In 2022, Mr Speaker, Sir, the School Certificate Examination, in particular the English Paper examination was scheduled to take place on 05 October of that year. The next day, on 06 October, I attended two funerals in my constituency, of two young ladies. One of them was meant to precisely be sitting for her English exams but, instead, she was there lifeless, dead, never to again sit in her class with her school friends. And just a few streets away from that

House, there was another young lady who had lost her life, and same scenario, different house, same cries of distress of a now childless mother. What is behind these two tragedies? The reason I am bringing this to this debate. What is behind those two tragedies, Mr Speaker, Sir? We have a car crash, where the car, driven by a young man, who later was tested positive to a blood alcohol level test. We have a car with eight passengers on board – eight, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is against this kind of backdrop that I wish to put on record in this Assembly, that there is simply no acceptable level of death on our road. And I am certain that all the well-meaning citizens in our Republic do not want to see this kind of carnage on our roads to perpetuate, Mr Speaker, Sir. This Bill is an urgent and an essential part of Government's response to the concerning trend of rising road fatalities and life altering injuries.

And here, I hope that the hon. Leader of the Opposition as well as hon. Uteem will feel a modicum of embarrassment for alluding in this House that this Bill is a cash cow for this Government. *La population vous écoute honorable leader de l'opposition ; avec les mauvaises habitudes des membres de l'opposition*, like hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry said earlier on, probably they are so used to the dollar bills of their Leader's *coffre-fort* that they allow themselves to cast aspersion on measures that are potentially going to be saving human lives. Hon. Uteem is downright offending the hundreds of Police Officers who are out there carrying their duty. How did you put it? How did you term it? 'The Police hiding in the bushes with their speed detectors.' *La police aussi prend bonne note, M. le président.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments to this Road Traffic Act is the topic at the moment, especially among the Opposition *extra-parlementaire*, among the chattering classes and it is unfortunate that Members of the Opposition are displaying such qualms. *La question qui se pose:* is it because had they been in power, they would not have brought these amendments because a general election is looming? Is that why it is like this? This is where, Mr Speaker, Sir, lies the difference in leadership. The population is going to be drawing their own conclusion because it is without any question that we are all or – well, when I speak about the Members of the Opposition – we all should be equal participating stakeholders when it comes to road safety. And I urge that Opposition to appreciate the value of what this Bill comes to add, from safer driving behaviours of our citizens to reformed penalties with an aim to make a bigger difference to road safety.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall not go into the details about the statistics of traffic fatalities, whether it is worldwide, whether it is locally, it is frankly shocking. Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, we had 138 fatalities, 42 were pedestrians, 57 were motorcyclists. Mr Speaker, Sir, through this Bill, we are also inching closer to the Sustainable Development Goal Target 3.6 relating to road traffic injuries, which is to halve the number of global death and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleagues before me spoke about the devastating effect of road traffic injuries, and rightly so, we go back and we recall, the one that comes to mind when I am intervening is the incident that happened in April this year, in Bel Étang, where two teenagers lost their lives. Mr Speaker, Sir, two teenagers in such tragic way. As Minister who caters for the well-being of families, I wonder which facet of those tragedies I should be elaborating upon. Is it the dreaded task of the person who places that phone call to inform the families that their sixteen-year old son – incidentally whose birthday they had celebrated on that very day – has passed away? Is it the plight of those fire fighters who very often have to extract those bodies from a metal wreck? Is it the medical staff who has to go through all those processes before they can handover the bodies to the families for the final rituals? Those shattered parents, the friends, the family members, the work colleagues. Mr Speaker, Sir, these accidents have lifelong impacts on far wider circles than immediate family and that is why as members of the Government, as ministers, as policymakers, it is our overriding duty, it is our responsibility to take decision in the best interest of the fellow citizens, even when the measures are deemed to be unpopular.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will quickly shift my intervention to clause 3, as I stated earlier on, to the need to regulate the use of structures and objects that are, during a procession, carried, pushed, pulled or led on the road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, *Maha Shivratri*, as we all know, is a very important religious and cultural event in our country. Just to go back a little bit in history, it has been happening since 1898. The first group of pilgrims that went to Ganga Talao hailed from the village of Triolet and was led by Giri Gossayne from Terre Rouge in 1898, and ever since this is the tradition that has perpetuated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, back in those days, the *kanwar* was a very simple bamboo structure and over the years, we have seen how it has evolved, it has changed, getting bigger and bigger. But,

lately, we are witnessing super structures that are a danger to the pilgrims, to the road users. We are not going to talk about all the inconvenience, all the traffic jams that are caused by these structures. But, allow me to put it candidly, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have come to a point where we need to strike the right balance between respecting and upholding our vibrant tradition and exaggeration.

The responsibility of one's safety is everybody's responsibility. Life is non-refundable and we know that. My colleague before me has mentioned about the fatalities we encountered on two occasions, again referring to those *kanwars*, one in February 2023, where two lives were lost when one of their *kanwars* hit a high-voltage power cable near Mare Longue. And the second one is more recent, it is in March of this year, in Arsenal, when the *kanwar* caught fire, once again, hit a high-voltage power line, 22,000 volts shooting down that structure, striking the people carrying it. Seven people died and most of them were so young. And I recall one of the PQs by hon. Ms Anquetil to that effect. My officers had gone to provide psychological counselling to those bereaved families.

Allow me to share with you, Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleague who paid a visit to those families, even the Prime Minister who paid a visit to the bereaved families is going to concur with me that there is no heavier burden on this earth than that of a father carrying the coffin of his young dead child. This is what this Bill is coming to do. Let us not make a mistake about the objectives of this Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have the Task Force which is chaired by the Prime Minister. The Government takes on board all the proposals, the good proposals, raised by the socio-cultural representatives. We have clear instructions, guidance being given but sometimes all these need to be accompanied by a legal framework, especially in the wake of the holy month of Shravani which is upcoming, which is the holiest month in the Hindu calendar, where, again, you will see, we are going to have pilgrims in all devotion carrying *kanwars* and heading to Grand Bassin. So, this Bill comes at an opportune time, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Road Traffic Amendment Bill is undoubtedly going to improve road safety. It is streamlining ownership transfers, it is regulating procession and on a safety level, adequate regulation also guarantees better adherence to those safety standards, it is

going to enhance road safety in general. And with respect to those structures during procession, it is going to ensure better management, it is going to help in averting accidents, road congestion during the processions, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the proposed amendments are not here and this, they should be very clear. The amendments are not here only for sanctioning to punish people, it's very far from it. It demonstrates our respect one for the religious customs but it is also striking this balance, I spoke about, between tradition and community well-being, careful supervision that is going to create this harmonious equilibrium which as a whole, reflects the Government's commitment to enhancing and protecting our citizens.

The Bill is the one step in a larger multi-facilitated journey towards achieving zero road fatalities and that, Mr Speaker, Sir, requires collective action, it requires unwavering resolve, it requires sustained investment in infrastructure, be it pavement as well, why not? Education, enforcement but most importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to see improvement in human behavior. We have to create a proper environment within the national psyche and this Bill comes to reinforce our commitment to this cause.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank everybody for their attention and I thank you as well. Long live the Republic of Mauritius. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Hurreeram!

(7.07 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Every first of January while we are celebrating with our families, wishing each other a great year of success and happiness, at the same time we know that by the end of the same year, we will have at least a hundred of our citizens dead on our roads.

Despite all our efforts, every year accidents happen and more often than not drivers were not careful enough. More importantly, they were in breach of our laws, regulating road traffic. Mr Speaker, Sir, not later than this weekend, the traffic lights were red to allow a pedestrian to cross, a car did not stop and collided with her and projected her against a bus on the other side of the road and it turns out from what we have learnt, the driver was drunk.

M. le président, on ne peut plus tolérer ce bain de sang sur nos routes, et comme un gouvernement responsable, il est temps pour nous d'agir.

I think we can all agree here for once and for all, that there is no Bill that this Government will ever introduce that will not spark controversy. We all remember the amendment to the IBA Act. They thought we were bringing it in to close all the private radios. They even managed to criticise the Children Bill, the Children Court, the Financial Crime Commission which consolidates our legal framework with regard to corruption. The Environment Act which was qualified as *cosmétique* by hon. Member and now this time; it's the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2024. Yes, a few changes have been announced by the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, but what is the big deal? Is this not why a Bill is circulated at First Reading and made public on the website of the National Assembly weeks before the debate starts so that the press can report on what the Bill is about and then people have the opportunity to voice out through their representative in this very august Assembly? Isn't it how democracy works? And now we are being told we have backpedaled. Absolutely not!

Nous sommes un gouvernement à l'écoute and this has been the case since day one. We have always been sensitive to the voice of the people and I can say that a vast majority of road users are agreeable with these changes because they realise today we are facing a crisis situation and Government has gone the extra miles in term of improving road infrastructure with new roads, diamond grade traffic signs and road markings. We have the SAJ Bridge which has already impacted massively on the lives of road users. The Quai D, the Palmerstone, Phoenix bring a huge relief on road traffic, even smaller projects such as freshly inaugurated Bruniquel Bridge. The new Holyrood Bridge has been acclaimed by the inhabitants of Vacoas. When completed, La Vigie –Flic-en-Flac Link Road passing through La Brasserie, Pierrefonds and Beaux Songes will add 21 km of modern road infrastructure to our existing road map.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is to tell you how far this Government has gone to better the lives of our road users.

On a durci la loi à de nombreuses reprises, M. de président, avec la politique de zéro tolérance de l'alcool au volant. La possibilité d'identifier un automobiliste sous l'influence de la

drogue et on a également réduit à quatre le nombre d'offenses autorisé sur un total de 11 offenses pour une période de deux ans à défaut de perdre son permis de conduire.

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, even then, some people are being reckless on the roads, costing the lives of our sons and daughters. Literally every day, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have one accident somewhere; sometime benign, but sometime with occupants of the vehicles seriously injured. Every day! This is not normal. This is not what we want for our country while we head into its modern era. Every driver, while on the road, should think of the mother or father who lost their son or daughter in a car accident that could have been avoided; the pain of those parents who will have to live the rest of their lives having lost their child because a driver was drunk or driving too fast. In order to avoid such a situation for those aggrieved parents and for those who are lucky enough to still have their children next to them, I say yes, increase all those fines.

I heard the hon. Member speaking and talking about increasing these fines, *c'est pour remplir la caisse de l'État*. I think this would suggest, Mr Speaker, Sir, we want our drivers to infringe the law which is totally false. These fines need to act as a strong deterrent to discipline our drivers. If sensitisation campaigns have not worked, if seeing the poor families crying live on the news, does not make you realise that you need to be more careful when driving then they need to feel the heat. Sometimes as a Government, as a Prime Minister, as a Leader, you are like a father and a father has the duty to be hard sometimes in order to raise fine young men and women who are disciplined and more importantly law abiding citizens.

There are also some Members on the other side of the House who want to draw similarities between these amendments and the *permis à points*, introduced by the Labour Regime. *Le permis à points était un épée de Damoclès au-dessus de la tête des automobilistes* whereas this new system actually gives a choice to the driver. I am sure that we will hear this from the other side of the House that raising the fine will encourage policemen to abuse situation in order to fill their own pockets by taking bribe or ti dithe as we call it. Nothing could be more offensive towards our policemen who are doing a fantastic job in such difficult conditions.

I am sure on the other side of this House, you are well acquainted with the practice of giving bribes. In fact, one among you was caught red handed and condemned for it. I salute the police officer who did not fall in this trap and punished that person as it should have been.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other side of this House, they are quite familiar to breaking road traffic laws. We have *depite lamok* and also *depite siro*, two valuable members of the alliance led by Paul Bérenger and we should not forget the prominent member of the MMM who forced his way in to a police station in order to free his brother-in-law who had been arrested earlier for drunk driving. These people are going to give us lesson today about road traffic laws? Hon. Ganoo has been subject to some harsh criticism since his appointment as a Minister especially from the MMM benches but so has been Ivan Collendavelloo, Kavy Ramano and Steven Obeegadoo.

It hurts them to see where they have reached and what they have achieved. But, let me tell you something, we are very glad on this side of the House to have them and I am sure for many years to come; seasoned politicians and very capable Members of this House who have and are still continuing immensely to build modern Mauritius and they will continue to do so. They chose to be on the right side of history. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard some people qualify these amendments as suicidal in view of the context of coming elections. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell you, the lives of our citizens of this country matters more than election results.

This massacre on our road cannot be allowed to continue, it has to be dealt with, and now. It is possible to reduce the number of casualties on our road, Mr Speaker, Sir. How about aiming at a week with zero accidents on our roads, why not make it a month? How about three full months with no deaths on our road? And what if one year we manage to have no dead Mauritian citizen on our roads, it is possible. First, we have to improve our existing law and make those fines a deterrent. You like it or not, this will make drivers think twice, thrice before being reckless on our roads and this is exactly what we want.

How many families have had fate take a deadly turn overnight, saying goodbye to your spouse in the morning and the next time you see them, is in a coffin. People lamed or bed ridden for life, children traumatised by the impact of a collision, families destroyed and all that because of an irresponsible driver who felt wearing a seat belt was too complicated, not talking on the phone while driving was too much to ask, driving at a reasonable speed as indicated on the traffic sign is such a burden, slowing down at a pedestrian crossing or stopping at the red light requires too much effort from your left foot. They can try to criticise this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, but there

is a time when a responsible Government which has at heart the very best for this country and its citizens need to act and we are acting now. I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Mr Ramchurrun!

(7.19 p.m.)

Mr P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, this august Assembly will today be debating an extremely important piece of legislation. Indeed it is with an immense pleasure, immense sense of humility and duty that I am contributing to the debates tonight. Road safety and the prevention of fatal and non-fatal accidents have never before been such a national urgency and it cannot be denied that our Government has been relentless in tackling the causes of road accidents on all fronts.

Hence, I would humbly urge my fellow hon. Members from both sides of the House to put party politics behind, Mr Speaker, Sir, so that we can constructively debate this Bill being presented today. Mr Speaker, Sir, the bolder proposals in the Bill are indeed very much welcomed. In fact, we have reached a situation which each news of an additional fatal or non-fatal accident being reported is sadly scaring the families of the victims for life as well as traumatising the population. However, it cannot be denied that our Government has been responsive and foresighted in implementing a raft of legislative and operational measures to improve the road safety level of our country.

Hence, our common endeavour should not stop here as we should aim to reduce the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents to the minimum possible. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have no choice as the situation requires major and immediate remedies. However bitter they might be, indeed losing a dear one is already a devastating situation. Losing a family, a friend, acquaintance or simply hearing about accidents of youngsters or parents and elderly in a deadly road accident is even more distressing. In contrast, we cannot shy away from the increasing numbers of non-fatal accidents.

These cases are not reported in news headlines but victims of such accidents are often left with permanent disabilities of different degrees requiring protracted, painful and costly treatments. Families are affected to the core by such life upsetting accidents especially where the

primary income earners have to face the loss of income or unemployment for long periods. The victims and their families are also unfortunately left in deep mental trauma throughout their lives. They are heart-wrenching tragedies that could have been avoided, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Enforcement, education and road safety infrastructure must certainly continue to be improved but we also need stronger deterrence against irresponsible driving; undeniably the irresponsible driving can have deadly consequences. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill makes essential provisions to address another issue which has profoundly marked country in the last few years hence we very much welcome that this legislation will empower the Minister to devise regulations to control the use of structures and objects which are carried, pushed, pulled or led on road during a procession.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is crucial to emphasise that this Bill is not an attempt to undermine or alter the cultural and religious significance of Maha Shivaratri celebration or any procession of any sort on the public roads of this country or any other festival where such structures are displayed and used, instead they are intended to enhance the safety and wellbeing of all participants. In fact, extensive consultations and open discussions were engaged with religious leaders and representatives from each community in the decision making process. The feedback from compiled and analysed and fed into the drafting for this proposed legislation, we salute and thank all the religious and cultural associations who were very receptive to our consultations and contributed immensely in the proposal of the Bill.

Hence, our consultative approach will thoroughly and humbly ensure that the Bill was respectful and considerate to all the religious and cultural traditions of our multi-floral social fabric so that the broad acceptance and support of all stakeholders were achieved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, smaller kanwars, it is called 'structure' in the Bill but I'll go straightforward, the smaller kanwars I can say, are not only safer but also more environmentally friendly. The construction of large kanwars often involves significant use of materials which can lead to environmental degradation and waste. By regulating the size, we encourage more sustainable practices and reduce the environmental impact of the celebrations. Additionally, smaller structures are easier to manage, transport and making the logistic of the festival more efficient and less burdensome for organisers and participants alike.

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Mr Speaker, Sir, we can look at other regions and countries where similar regulations have been successfully implemented. For examples, in some parts of India, local authorities have excised limits on religious processions to ensure public safety without diminishing the cultural and religious experience. These measures have been met with positive feedbacks, and have led to safer and more organised events. By adopting similar regulation in Mauritius, we can achieve the same positive outcomes ensuring that traditions continue in a safe and respectful manner. Respect and abidance is the key Mr Speaker, Sir. It is equally vital to quote that the primary responsibility of any government is to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens.

During the Mahashivratri festival, the construction and carrying of excessively large *kanwars* pose significant risk. The numerous incidents where Devotees, including children and the elderly have suffered injuries due to the widely nature of the structures indeed impact people. This Bill, by regulating the size of *kanwars*, will prevent such accidents and ensure the safety of our people without diminishing the spiritual significance of the ritual and will ensure that it is conducted in a manner that prioritises human life and safety.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the purpose of this Bill is not only the safety and security of participants of the Mahashivratri festival, but to the general public at large. Let us not forget Mr Speaker, Sir, that in the recent past – in the very recent past I can say, our government proposed guidelines for the construction of *kanwars* and conducted extensive communication campaigns alongside the sociocultural organisations so that safety and security of those taking part in any processions be enhanced. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, those guidelines were not legally enforceable and after wise consultations and validations, our government has been wise to propose the Bill to ensure its legal enforceability.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, any responsible citizen of our motherland where there exists an array of cultural and religious celebrations, held throughout the year, making our a small island a peaceful country to live in, would agree unanimously to vote for this long awaited Bill.

Unfortunately, it is with immense sadness and regret that I will have to revive the unfortunate tragic events that put our island *en deuil* during the last two consecutive years of Mahashivratri, 2023/2024. The bereaved families undoubtedly are still facing the trauma of having lost the dear ones during the incident at Mare Longue Road, caused by a *kanwar* of a certain height which was transported by a group of pilgrims returning from Ganga Talao.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier, in spite of the existence of the guidelines and the communication campaigns, the whole country was again shocked by the tragic life-taking incident which occurred at Arsenal.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Ramchurrun: Six participants of the *Trikaal Sena Group of Triolet*, the *kanwarteers*, died after their *kanwar* struck a high voltage power line on 03 March 2024, and very sadly, a 7th victim passed away a month later. Unfortunately, this sad incident occurred despite the fact that safety instructions and guidelines had been amply communicated by the National Task Force and the various presidents of the different sociocultural associations such as the Sanatan Dharma Temple Federation, urging the pilgrims to control the sizes of their *kanwars*.

This tragedy Mr Speaker, Sir, revived the trauma faced by the whole nation; deep sadness reigned all over the island during the pious festival which is celebrated with great devotion *par toutes les communautés confondues*. *Cette célébration est aussi décrétée comme une fête nationale et c'est là qu'on voit le patriotisme de nos citoyens qui contribuent dans leur façons en faisant des dons, des rafraichissements et des soins médicaux entre autres.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we are talking about *kanwars*, it should be highlighted that *kanwars* are not just the structure, but have their sacred meaning and religious implications. Before the *kanwar* is constructed, during the phase of assembling and after its completion while setting out to the sacred lake according to the *Shiv Mahapuran*, several rituals have to be performed.

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Ramchurrun: While concluding Mr Speaker, Sir, I will say from my own experience as a pilgrim, as participating in the pilgrimage of Mahashivratri every year since my childhood, I know how *kanwars* were before. As well said by hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah, a bamboo – a small *kanwar* which we called *kande pe kanwar*...

Mr Speaker: You have only 1 minute.

Mr Ramchurrun: and today if we love our country, we love this motherland, be it from the Opposition side or from any part of the country, regardless to any religion, if they want this country to be safe on this pious day, they have to abide unanimously to this law where we have to have a proper structure, proper size of *kanwars* in this country Mr Speaker, Sir.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: MP Lobine!

(7.34 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, once again the national priority is road safety. This Bill, yet another Amendment Bill to the Road Amendment Act; is about road safety again. And after a year, we had another Amendment Bill. Last year in 2023 and now in 2024, another Bill and yet another way of trying to deter people from committing road traffic offences and yet again Mr Speaker, Sir, the backdrop of this Bill is yet another increase in road traffic accident, yet another increase in road traffic fatalities.

This is the sad state of how things are moving. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would recall way back in 2015, if my memory serves me right, hon. Bodha was Minister. There was what we called the National Road Safety Strategy 2015-2025, and I quote, it says –

“(...) Road safety: A national urgency, has been released in a forceful bid to improve road safety amid general concern over the high death and injury rates among road users since the beginning of the year.”

So, way back in 2015, Mr Speaker, Sir, this was a national issue and it continues to be this national issue affecting our users of the roads and our fellow citizens in this country. Amidst an increase in the fleets of vehicles on our roads but again, users, many Members of this House have pointed with regardsto road infrastructures. Hon. Bobby Hurreeram, Minister, spoke on the infrastructures. Yes, it is nice; it is good to have good road infrastructure but what about adaptability? Hon. X. L. Duval mentioned that we need pavements everywhere. So, do we need only piecemeal amendments, legislations to try to counter this national tragedy which is happening with regard to road safety? Do we need only piecemeal legislations? Do we not need a holistic approach whereby we are providing, the Government is providing, national infrastructure?

But the people using it need to adapt to that infrastructure and this turns me to what I said last year in the debates with regard to this Amendment Bill. And in this Amendment Bill, I will reiterate what I said last year, Mr Speaker, Sir. I took reference to what has been said on the international scene and it was in 2022, Mr Speaker, Sir, where there was a High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on Global Road Safety. It was canvassed at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we need four key shifts to save countless lives. Yet again, Mr Speaker, Sir, what they are trying to convey to the people of Mauritius is that we need to adopt those four measures. So, only increasing fines will not suffice. The key priority is that we need safety first. Safety of our people first, the infrastructure should be adopted to provide safety to our users of the roads first. This is the priority.

The second one is we need a holistic approach. That is, we need to have a global view of what is happening. In many countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Singapore for example, there have been many studies that have been carried out. They are also bringing amendments to be laws over there and they have been doing studies and surveys prior to COVID-19 and after COVID-19. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised to note that they have come to the conclusion that there is so much mental stress on the users after COVID-19. COVID-19 has been like a trauma for road users and these very detailed studies have come up with measures, with systems to try to adapt to the people using the roads instead of people adapting to how to use the roads and the infrastructures. It is a different way of looking at it.

So, the third one is there should be shared responsibility. The people also need to be responsible and here educational campaigns should be more aggressive in schools, in colleges, amongst users of the roads because the first responsibility is the users'. And I do agree that at some point in time, we Mauritians, we are losing that courtesy on our roads. We use roads every day, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we know with the stress of life many people want to go to work early, they are stuck in the traffic and they want to have a go and get the priority to get out of a lane or to enter the main road. But suffice to say that we need to respect the law. So, the law as it is, it is very comprehensive but the only issue of bringing amendments just to increase fines is not the solution.

For example, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take the example of Finland and Singapore in that comprehensive report that they have. Unfortunately, we do not have such reports. The TMRSU or any independent body, as at date, has not conducted a comprehensive report with regard to how and why we are not able to decrease the number of road fatalities on our roads. We do not have such a report. And in Finland, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have adopted what hon. X. L. Duval said earlier on. It is with regard to fines: how to calibrate those fines as to your pockets as rightly said by hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah. And over there, they have found that when you fine somebody who has got the means, it is as per his salary. Over there, speeding fines are calculated based on an offender's daily disposable income. Generally, their daily salary divided by two and in that report they give an example of a Finnish business man.

In 2015, Mr Speaker, Sir, he was handed over a fine of 54,000 euros for having speeding more than 22 km/h over a speed of 50 km/h. And another of his colleague, he was a former Nokia Director, he was fined for a similar offense for 116,000 euros. We are seeing on our roads so many big cars; Porsche, Range Rover, Mercedes, BMWs. Speeding has become the norm for those cars. I see it every night, almost everywhere, they are speeding and these people they have got the means to go and pay those Rs12,500. They have got the means because they are spending a day to put petrol in those cars for Rs10,000-Rs15,000. So, you will not touch their pockets. You are taking it from those people, local, normal consumers of our roads. So, we also need to touch those people. To touch those people we need to adopt the Finland approach, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, it should not be a cut-across fine for all people. It should be selective. There should be a grading of fines with regard to road users and I would humbly again request the hon. Minister to consider the model that Sweden has adopted. We call it the Vision Zero Approach. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vision Zero Approach is about adapting the infrastructure to the people, not the people adapting to the infrastructure. And this, Mr Speaker, Sir, has brought a decrease in fatal road accidents by 75% over 20 years in Sweden, Mr Speaker, Sir, and more than 25% in other countries that have adopted that principle.

So, I will not be long because the hon. Minister has made amend to the disproportionate figures that were announced earlier on and that were read in the press. Now with the amendments that have been circulated, it is only fair to say that the Minister has listened to the voice of the people but he has to go an extra mile. We should stop with those piecemeal approaches to bringing amendments. We should come with a holistic approach. For example, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about introducing bicycle lanes. We have got the Metro now. People should know how to use all these infrastructures and also the traffic centres, Mr Speaker, Sir. It needs to be professionalised. So, there is a global approach instead of a piecemeal approach.

So, I urge the hon. Minister to consider going that extra mile to bring a comprehensive piece of legislation with regard to road safety in this Parliament. I thank you for your kind attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(7.44 p.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):
Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

A l'adresse de l'opposition, je dirai tout simplement : il n'y a pire aveugle que celui qui ne veut pas voir.

As I address the Assembly today, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a feeling of gratitude and satisfaction. I am grateful to be part of a team that has the best intentions towards the population and is coming with such amendments on a crucial Bill in view of making lives better and safer.

Every year, Mr Speaker, Sir, lives are impacted by road accidents, and indeed, as a caring Government, there is an urgent need for comprehensive strategies to enhance road safety. Most of us must have gone through the statistics where it can be observed that there is an increase in road accidents in 2023 compared to year 2022, and human factor contributes to 90% of accidents.

Proactive measures like sensitive campaigns and awareness campaigns are there to foster culture of road safety. When this fails, Mr Speaker, Sir, automatically, there is an obligation to enhance traffic rules and regulations. Strident enforcement sends a clear message that violations will not be tolerated. It is a must that penalties like reckless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, failure to wear seatbelts, amongst others be enforced. These enforcements, Mr Speaker, Sir, will automatically discourage dangerous driving behaviours.

I must say that the amendment proposed through the Bill by the hon. Minister, Alan Ganoo, marks a decisive step forward in enhancing the efficiency, fairness and safety of our roads as well as instilling a sense of accountability among road users, leading to safer road practices. As we appreciate the amendments proposed, I can even say that a majority of our people appreciate the amendments.

Allow me to give my insight into the key aspects that highlight its importance. My appreciation, I must say, is merely an echo of near to the whole country's population, except to, of course, and as usual, Members of the Opposition and their followers.

The amendment to the Road Traffic Act is a key moment in our ongoing commitment to improve road safety, streamlining administrative processes and reinforcing accountability within our transportation structure. Firstly, the amendment concerning the transfer of ownership of motor vehicles or trailers is particularly important. By eliminating the requirement for a *certificat de gage sans déplacement* from the National Land Transport Authority for certain transfers, we streamline bureaucratic processes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, this requirement is replaced with a

verification process through the NLTA database, ensuring the absence of *lien* on the vehicle. This smooth approach, Mr Speaker, Sir, facilitates quicker and more efficient transactions, benefitting more buyers and sellers. Mr Speaker, Sir, while this particular amendment, focuses on simplifying things, ease of doing things, some might overlook and even criticise, giving once again their own analysis and solution. The usual '*pa sa ki ti bizin fer me koumsa.*'

The Government, on the other hand, is making life easier and unburdening individuals in every way possible. From my point of view, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are once again contributing to the feel good factor. Not to forget, this change also reduces administrative burdens.

Moving on, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the provision made in the Bill to the empowerment of the Minister to regulate structures and objects during procession is a positive measure to ensure road safety. We are proud of our cultural society and processions. Mr Speaker, Sir, these are integral to our cultural and social fabric for years. However, we also have to adapt to all the changes that took place over the years. That is why and where the regulation leading the use of structures and objects during procession on roads became important. By setting clear guidelines, we will promote responsible conduct and harmony during such gathering, which once again reflects our commitment to community safety.

Coming on the amendment to increase in penalties, the topic that is keeping some busy for two weeks now. *Bann ki pena travay*, those who are always seeing *le verre vide, même pas à moitié plein*. After all, they have to remain true to themselves and force themselves to see problems everywhere. I wonder how they can convince themselves to believe that increasing penalties for traffic rules violation is a negative scene. They do not stop here. They want to influence the population into believing that the Government has hidden agendas. We are lucky that the population is no fool. *Dimounn pa pou rant dan zot zue!*

The amendments to stricter penalties for specific offences demonstrate our commitment to deterrence and accountability on our roads. By imposing stricter penalties, we send a clear message, Mr Speaker, Sir. Reckless behaviour will not be tolerated. Members of the House, even from the other side of the House, we all have to agree that enough is enough! We cannot afford losing more youngsters, more elders, more family members, neighbours, friends on the road. Furthermore, no one can deny that fines can and will discourage people from violating traffic

rules. Let us not forget that individuals who violate traffic rules are putting not only themselves at risk but also, almost all the persons using our roads. We want things to change.

While educating our drivers and citizens is of prime importance for the Government, we also have to be clear and take bold measures to make sure that our people feel safe on the roads. With this approach, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not aiming at *grossir la caisse* contrary to what some on the other side are saying. We are aiming at discouraging reckless driving behaviours and promoting adherence to traffic laws. I am convinced that the increase of penalties in certain traffic violations will lead to improved compliance with traffic rules and safer road behaviour. And in the long run, we will without any doubt achieve the change of behaviour among drivers we are all hoping for, and I suppose Members of the other side are also hoping for the same, that is, safer roads.

While some are doing a lot of blah, blah, blah, on the fines concerning non-compliance to licence plate, they are overlooking the intention behind same. Those who do not comply with the norms set, are obviously individuals who intend to go against the law and do not want their licence plates to be read.

As a caring Government, we have listened to the polemic created by the excessive penalties but, we must ponder on the registration plate issue, how these plates are defaced, registration number not visible. It is crystal clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, that if the fine is exorbitant, *ces personnes sans scrupules penseront deux fois avant de s'engager dans des rallyes ou dans des businesses louches*. By putting a fine on the higher end, we are intending to put an end on this type of behaviour. Coupled with fine, imprisonment for repeating offenders underscore our firm determination to keep back careless driving, fostering a safer environment for all road users.

Moreover, the clarity brought to existing provision through these amendments underline our commitment to a strong and logical legal framework. The amendments to various sections of the Road Traffic Act clarify existing provisions, ensure consistency and transparency in enforcement.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, Sir, by modernising regulatory framework and making provision for electronic registration and information sharing, we improve operational efficiency and adaptability to technological advancement.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill of 2024 represents the effort of this Government to modernise our traffic laws, enhance safety measures and improve the overall efficiency of administrative processes. It is another one of the many testaments to our Government's commitment to the safety and well-being of the population. No matter how much some may twist the fact, how they can try, *je dis bien* try, to present the amendments in a negative light, the fact remains that we are aiming at promoting a safe and orderly road environment for all citizen through laws, through fines. At the end of the day it is about discouraging reckless driving and violation of traffic rules. As we move forward, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we implement these amendments, let's continue to support initiatives that prioritise safety, justice and efficiency. Together, Mr Speaker, Sir, we can build a future where our roads are safer, our processes are more streamline and our communities thrive. Preventing road accidents is crucial for the safety of all road users, driving sensibly is the responsibility of everyone; legal, social and moral omission of this duty can bring huge pain and suffering.

Je vous remercie, M. le président. Je remercie la Chambre.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Bodha!

(7.58 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Je suis en train de lire par-dessus l'épaule de mon ami le Dr. Aumeer, et sur le titre il y a un jeune homme qui décède après un accident de moto, deux mois après son accident, c'est un sujet...

Mr Speaker: He is reading a newspaper there!

Mr Bodha: Yes!

Mr Speaker: Oh, you disclosed the secret!

Mr Bodha: Yes, I did!

Mr Speaker: You have no right to read newspaper in Parliament.

Mr Bodha: C'est un sujet extrêmement sensible, M. le président et d'après les Nations unies, les accidents seront la première cause de mortalité dans le monde dans les années qui

viennent et ce sera aussi à Maurice et c'est pour cela que je dis que c'est un sujet extrêmement sensible. Il concerne la mobilité de centaines de milliers de personnes au quotidien, leur sécurité, leur mobilité et aussi rentrer sagement à la maison tous les soirs, que vous alliez à l'école, qu'on aille au bureau, qu'on aille sur son lieu de travail. Nous avons 350 000 ménages. Nous avons un véhicule pour deux personnes à Maurice. C'est un des taux les plus élevés au monde, M. le président, et le nombre de personnes avec un permis devrait atteindre, d'après moi, près d'un million à Maurice.

Ainsi, cette législation nous concerne tous, c'est pour cela que dans de nombreux pays la sécurité routière tombe sous l'égide du Premier ministre ou encore du président de la république comme c'est le cas en France. Elle exige une priorité politique nationale, c'est ce que j'ai essayé de faire pendant mon mandat parce qu'un accident est une tragédie ; on se souvient toujours du moment où une victime proche a trouvé la mort. Ce n'est pas une fatalité l'accident. Aujourd'hui c'est une science, on parle de l'accidentologie basée sur les risques sur les routes, sur la dangerosité des infrastructures, les *dark zones*, on parle sur les études et les recherches avec un observatoire pour comprendre où il y a les accidents ? Qui sont les accidentés ? Le coût des accidents ? Tout cela pour permettre à changer un *driving culture* qui représente des dangers. 130 morts à peu près par an pour 1 million d'habitants à Maurice, c'est trop.

Vous savez, M. le président, qu'en Norvège l'objectif c'est zéro mort par an et vous savez qu'il y a eu le *Cumulative Road Traffic Offences* qui avait été introduit. Le système avant avait fait l'objet d'un tel levé de bouclier qu'on avait dû l'abolir, on avait une amnistie et on a proposé un autre système. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il est il y avait un chaos, tout le monde avait peur. Vous êtes sur la route et après beaucoup de réflexions nous sommes venus avec un système qui est toujours répressif mais qui s'appuyait sur la prévention, la formation et l'éducation, un modèle plus humain et plus complet.

Le *CRTO* s'applique sur à peu près, de manière plus proportionnelle parce qu'on avait proposé à l'époque des délits graves, 11 d'une part, et des délits moins graves. Mais le *CRTO* devrait s'appliquer comme un moyen répressif, oui, mais accompagné d'une grande sensibilisation permanente de campagne de formation, de prévention et d'éducation de tous les usagers de la route parce que la priorité c'était de sauver des vies. Je me souviens qu'il y avait eu une campagne permanente et il y avait eu un mois où il y avait eu une cinquantaine d'activités.

On avait réussi à l'époque de stabiliser le nombre de victimes à un moment et on avait mis en place la Commission nationale ministérielle présidée par le Premier ministre. On avait un conseil technique avec des experts parce qu'il fallait absolument responsabiliser les gens et avoir une autre *driving culture*. Est-ce que la Commission nationale fonctionne toujours ? Je demande au ministre. Est-ce que le Premier ministre est impliqué ? Il l'a dit tout à l'heure comme il le faudrait. Je crois qu'il a organisé une réunion après des années. Est-ce que la commission technique a visé ce projet de loi ? Est-ce que les amendes, les chiffres qui ont été proposés, qui semblent assez irrationnelles ont été analysés par des techniciens ? Je me pose les questions. Alors ce que je pense, moi, c'est qu'il faut absolument la prévention, la formation, l'éducation et alors il faut absolument qu'on voit les problèmes tels que les problèmes sont en réalité. Je salue la facilitation au niveau administratif, c'est bon, parce que c'est vrai que les gens font la queue, cette question du Certificat de gage, on passe des heures et des heures.

Prenons les vrais problèmes, les jeunes qui meurent sur leurs motos ou comme les *pillion riders*, 50 par an, quelle est la solution ? Il n'y a pas de solution miracle, M. le président. Il faut une formation pour monter sur une motocyclette. Il faut des moto-écoles. Ce n'est pas un business, c'est une obligation et moi je crois qu'il faut subventionner les moto-écoles, il faut les rendre gratuits. Deuxième chose, il y a 150 000 conducteurs à motos seulement avec un *learner*, ben il faut des cours d'encadrement. Il faut quelques heures pour qu'ils comprennent que la motocyclette ce n'est pas une bicyclette avec un moteur, on ne peut pas tout faire avec une motocyclette et on avait à l'époque mise en place, comme j'ai dit une politique nationale. J'ai demandé au Premier ministre aujourd'hui où est-ce que cela en est ? Maintenant les piétons qui sont victimes et les personnes âgées, une cinquantaine encore, quelle est la solution ? C'est l'éducation, c'est la prévention, c'est les trottoirs.

L'autre jour pendant un des discours que j'avais fait ici, j'ai proposé qu'on rénove tous les trottoirs et qu'on donne des incitations fiscales à tous les magasins pour qu'ils puissent renouveler leurs trottoirs avec un plan d'urbanisme, décidé par la ville où ils se trouvent. Je pense ça aussi c'est une incitation fiscal, il faut le faire.

Maintenant l'augmentation des pénalités, je ne sais pas, M. le président, si c'est vraiment la solution et on a aussi l'impression que les augmentations ont été faites de manière irrationnelle, sans étude, sans une proportionnalité et on a dû reculer, revenir sur certains

amendes sous la pression populaire. Je prends l'exemple de la plaque d'immatriculation mais la première question, est-ce qu'il y a une plaque standard pour que les gens puissent savoir, que les vendeurs autorisés puissent respecter cette plaque standard ? Alors, M. le président, pour moi, il y a un certain nombre de priorités.

Il ne faut pas dorer la pilule, d'augmenter les amendes. Il faut dans un premier temps que la sécurité routière soit un sujet à l'école primaire, secondaire et universitaire. Il faut l'observatoire pour qu'on sache pourquoi il y a des accidents à Maurice et où il y a des accidents à Maurice. Deuxième chose, il faut un *Traffic Modelling Unit* pour qu'on puisse comprendre comment fonctionne le trafic et quand on fait un projet, quel est le *modelling* ? Si demain le nombre de véhicules augmente par 10 % ou 20 % ou 30 %, comment faire de sorte qu'il n'y ait pas des ...

Donc, il faut *Traffic Modelling Unit*. J'avais mis en place, il faut le continuer. Il faut une politique nationale pour qu'il y ait une fluidité nationale. Troisième chose, M. le président, il faut le *National Traffic Centre* qui coûte à peu près R 300 millions. C'est quoi le *National Traffic Centre*? C'est un système qui synchronise tous les robots, tous les feux de l'île Maurice en temps réel. À tous les moments, un conducteur sera au courant si une route a statut rouge, orange ou vert. Ça existe dans toutes les grandes villes, j'ai vu ça à Beijing. Au faite, à l'époque j'avais même pensé de demander au gouvernement chinois de nous faire un *grant* pour ça.

Et il faut un *National Traffic Centre* et aux Casernes Centrales, sera un grand écran, on aura toute l'île Maurice et toute la circulation en temps réel. M. le président, la répression n'est pas la solution. La solution c'est la prévention, l'éducation et une nouvelle culture. Il ne faut pas parler de la sécurité routière après chaque accident grave, c'est une priorité permanente.

Permettez-moi maintenant, M. le président, de dire quelques mots sur le *Explanatory Memorandum* concernant *to empower the Minister to make regulations to regulate the use of structures and objects that are during a procession, carried, pushed, pulled or led on a road*.

Et au faite beaucoup de mes amis de l'autre côté de la Chambre ou de ce côté-ci, ont parlé des *Kanwar* et de *Maha Shivratri*, mais *Maha Shivratri* c'est 400 000 personnes avec parfois entre La Marie et *Ganga Talao* 10 000 à 20 000 véhicules en permanence avec des dizaines de milliers de *Kanwar* de toutes dimensions. C'est ça la réalité. Alors, je suis content

qu'il y ait eu une consultation entre les autorités et les organisations socioculturelles, les fédérations. *It's a very, very tall order*, de mettre de l'ordre, de faire respecter. Est-ce que la police pourra faire respecter ces règlements qu'on va mettre que le ministre va promouvoir?

Je voulais savoir quels sont ces règlements et je voulais savoir aussi comment ces règlements seront appliqués, par qui – par la police? Est-ce qu'on ne devrait pas demander aussi, il faut ne pas créer au niveau des organisations socioculturelles et les fédérations, une armée de jeunes pour régler cette procession ?

Deuxième chose, je voulais savoir quelles sont les peines. Si par exemple, j'ai construit *Kanwar* qui a dépassé les dimensions, qu'est-ce qui se passe? Quelles seront les mesures? Quelles seront les décisions qui seront prises et qui va prendre la décision? Je pense que là, si on veut vraiment que ces règlements soient respectés, *it's a very, very tall order* et il faudra la compréhension, il faudra l'aide, la collaboration de tout un chacun – des *pilgrim*, des *kanwari* mais aussi des fédérations et aussi du public qu'il soit piéton ou qu'il soit dans les voitures ou aussi tous les gens qui font le *sewa* sur la route.

Moi quand j'étais enfant, je suis allé à Grand Bassin, Ganga Talao à l'époque....

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Bodha: You are always very strict on that, thank you. J'ai dit que quand j'étais enfant, je suis allé à Ganga Talao où on a construit les *kanwar* de là-bas, les petits *kanwar*. Aujourd'hui, les choses ont changé mais ce que moi je voulais dire, c'est très bien d'avoir une réglementation mais cette réglementation ne pourrait se mettre en place qu'avec la collaboration de tout un chacun. Alors, je vais terminer en disant qu'il ne faut pas parler de sécurité routière après chaque accident. C'est une priorité permanente, une responsabilité permanente et c'est le rôle de l'État, le chef de l'État d'être à la tête de cette mission. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. One observation, I am chairing and so I sit here for hours. I have been given a list of orators and the time. I have nothing to do with that, just to apply it. So, you had the chance of going out 10 times during the session. So, thank you very much.

I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 8.12 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.14 p.m. with Mr Speaker in Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

Mr F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Mr Speaker, Sir, for my intervention on this Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2024), I will focus on Rodrigues’s situation, concerns and needs, in view of improving the safety of road users thereat.

Tougher penalties are part of the traffic law enforcement chain, which will deter road users from committing road traffic violations, reduction of injuries and fatalities. The political will and context of these legislative amendments have a bearing to shifting road user’s behaviours.

Mr Speaker sir, section 6 of principal Act amended, for the change of ownership of a motor vehicle or trailer, where, at sub-section (iv) –

“(vi) the new owner shall within 14 days of the change of ownership deliver the registration book and other relative documents to the [Chief] Commissioner (...)”

Here, I have to say it is the Chief Commissioner under NLTA Act 2019, not that of Regional Assembly.

“(...) who shall, subject to subsection (5) register him as the owner of the motor vehicle or trailer.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that when a vehicle is sold in Mauritius and to be shipped for registration in Rodrigues, it takes about nearly a month for the vehicle to reach Rodrigues depending on availability of space and shipment voyage scheduled. In that particular case, the law does not provide for a practical registration timing in Rodrigues for change of ownership. Thus, how do we avoid that the new owner is not contravened under this legislation despite the online registration? I raise this point because of the high fines of Rs25,000, on a first conviction, applicable for an offence committed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, more severe penalties may not necessarily reduce offending behaviours in certain circumstances, including, when penalties, such as fine payments, are avoidable, where

higher fines, rather than for the benefit of road safety, is being perceived by the community at large, as revenue raising for the State. There must be a mindset shift in that regards by the community for the promotion of road safety and saving lives above all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 125 of principal Act, is amended to provide for tougher penalties for no illegal road or street racing and reckless driving around our Republic. We all know how practicing motorsport racing is dangerous and challenging, especially when carried out on the street. We all know, the passion, love and adrenaline charge of practicing or watching a pilot pushing his limits on the field. We all know how many young riders have lost their lives in illegal street racing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new offence at item 32 of the Third Schedule states that –

“Taking part in a race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on a road without the consent of the Commissioner of Police” is an offence.

Since 2002, in Rodrigues, the private Rod-Riders Club and others have promoted motorbike racing, though it was not a fully regulated sport to ensure safety, which became a top popular sport after football and regatta.

As per the President of Rod-Riders club, Mr Jean Claude Ah Kang, alias Waro, the club, on their own initiative, built an amateur motorcycle earthed race track circuit of about 700 metres long, at Pointe Palmiste, Rodrigues.

In 2021, the Regional Assembly vested the state lands to them, which now has been cancelled by the new Regional Government since 2022, with the disappointment of the motorsport teams and supporters in Rodrigues. One reason behind the creation of race track was that legal road racing should not be encouraged on bituminous or tarred roads in Rodrigues; it's a question of inappropriate design and safety landscape to protect riders and prevent other illegal road racing. In that regard, I beg in favour of our local motor-bikers and supporters that the Regional Assembly, reinstate and hand back to them, their race track.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per clause 11 of the Bill, the Third Schedule to principal Act is amended. The new item 13 and 14, provide for new penalties for riding an autocycle or motorcycle at night without wearing high visibility clothing as rider, which is extremely

dangerous. This is a very important clause for Rodrigues, being given that actually, as I have observed, more than 50% of our roads, are completely in darkness with defective street lighting – *tou bann' larout dan mare nwar.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to humbly request, the concerned authorities to speed up matter for the disbursement of the Rs8 m. for the purchase of solar street lightings, granted out of the Rs19 m. earmarked for Rodrigues under the Indian Grant for small projects, upon my proposals as PPS for Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, new offence at item 26 of the Schedule: carrying more than one person as pillion rider on an auto cycle is most welcome. There are too many irresponsible riders out there, especially those who at times carrying a child or a baby in between the rider and the pillion rider without a helmet. You can imagine the high degree of risk.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 12 – Fourth Schedule to Section 191 – Fixed Penalty Notice of principal Act is amended. I note a general increase by Rs500 on the various proposed items or an increase to Rs5000 of some penalty fees, to deter careless drivers and reduce road accidents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, I have to say, as the voice of the people of Rodrigues and road users thereat, people from Rodrigues do not fully endorse all the increase in figures for the penalties, and I am duty bound to stand by my people of Rodrigues. There is, I won't say a responsive reaction but a kind of mixed and natural reaction, as regards the impact of the increase in fines, this is because of the reality of Rodrigues, which differs from, what is substantial here in Mauritius. I do take note of the circulated amendments to be moved during Committee Stage. On behalf of road users in Rodrigues, I also implore for the fairness of enforcement officers, to observe a sort of reasonable flexibility when dealing with offenders thereat, especially by police officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is also concerned with new offence at item 51 in relation to Rodrigues, whereby exceeding speed limit by more than 25 km per hour, to increase the fines from Rs10,000 to Rs12,500.

In my previous speeches on RTA Amendments in 2018 and 2020, I raised this issue, that there is a problem with regard to actual road speed limits in Rodrigues. The existing maximum

set speed limits is 50 km/h on our roads. Drivers are persistently complaining about the limited speed limit that should be reviewed. For example, the limited speed limit for the coastal road from Port Mathurin to Baie Du Nord is 40 km/h. On La Route de L'Autonomie from Mt Lubin to Port Mathurin and La route Grande Montagne to Gravieres, the maximum speed limit is 50km/h. It is too easy, without great effort, to reach an excess speed of more than 25 km/h in these zones, which could make life difficult for drivers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I again reiterate my appeal for the Road Development Authority (RDA), Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) at national level and the RRA to conduct the necessary surveys for a review of the speed limit by varying from 50-70 km/h and also to provide recommendations on reasonable safe speed thresholds.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware that in October last, the Ministry for National Infrastructure under the leadership of hon. Hurreeram, the RDA and TMRSU, in collaboration with the Commission for Public Infrastructure in Rodrigues, have already proposed a preliminary report with the view to propose road classifications in Rodrigues.

There is necessity for the classification of the 150 km of bituminous concrete roads in Rodrigues, which is most critical, and even our roads sign post stating that there is a speed limit in a region are neither classified nor gazetted. This surely have a bearing on court cases under RTA. In line with the proposed amendments of this Bill, there is necessity for the Regional Assembly, to urgently come up with specific regulations for classifications of public roads.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the new offence at item 21 –

“Carrying person(s) in the open pickup area of a double cab pickup/dual purpose vehicle (...)”

In Rodrigues, there is a cultural custom to use a 4x4 double cab pick-up to carry coffin during a funeral procession, which is very practicable on our untarred roads or track roads. This implies that at least two persons always sit in the open pick-up area to accompany and to keep an eye on the coffin.

In that regard, may I make a request to the hon. Minister Ganoo, to consider in the coming regulations, to add a special derogation clause that only applies to Rodrigues during a

funeral procession, where only two or not more than four persons, can sit in the open pick-up, provided that the vehicle should not be driving at a speed of more than 20 km/hr.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from statistics and data gathered from the Rodrigues Police, for 2023, the number of road traffic accidents is 188 and the number of fatal accidents is 3, with an average of around 175 accidents and 3 fatal per year for the last 5 years. One fatal accident is too many, especially for our youths in Rodrigues. The total contraventions for year 2022 were 2,547, and for year 2023: 3,824. Statistics also show that the number of traffic offences for exceeding speed limit contraventions in 2019 were 139 and 2023 were 80.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 179 amended, implies that more Police Officers in Rodrigues are required to fulfil the prescribed duties. Despite the great efforts to increase the police strength, and the exponential increase of vehicles volume on our road, there is still a lack of police resources to manage traffic around Rodrigues.

Rodrigues Statistics communicated to me, shows that, as at date, 21,820 vehicles are registered with the NLTA.

- Out of which, the number of motorcycles is 13,599;
- The number of vehicles/cars dual purposes – 5,868;
- Government vehicle – 1,247;
- Number of buses – 234, and
- Others including tractor, dumper, etc. – 182

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister, on Thursday last at Gymkhana, reaffirmed Government's commitment to increase the police strength in our Republic during the passing out of 599 new recruits, among which, a few proud officers from Rodrigues, whom I congratulate them. The actual police strength in Rodrigues is 481 regular police, around 40 SMF and 66 Coast Guards. There are actually eight officers on interdiction.

I again seize this opportunity, to humbly request the Commissioner of Police through the hon. Prime Minister and Minister for Rodrigues, to continually increase the police strength in Rodrigues, by those trained Rodriguan born Police Officers posted here, in Mauritius, who wished for their transfer to Rodrigues Police Division.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before concluding, I will make a few proposals. There is need to introduce a new courteous road driving culture in our Republic. Road drivers must be fully conscious at all times that when they are on the road, there are always other people out there using the same road as them, not as if the road belongs to oneself. There must be a new road mindset culture and road discipline in our Republic and education and sensitisation are the key factors.

I have to put on record, the effective collaboration in Rodrigues between the police and NGOs such as the Rodrigues Council of Social Services, the Rod Riders Club, to organise regular events and campaigns to promote road safety through a collective consciousness for a new road driving culture, as mentioned by Mr Jean Claude Ah Kang of Rod Riders Club and Mr Mhadov, the Police Divisional Commander during a public mass two weeks ago at St Gabriel Cathedral.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will also propose for the introduction of what is called a Gradual Driving Licence System, as is the case in Queensland, Australia, with the intention of lowering the high road trauma rate among newly licensed young drivers by allowing them to gain experience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is strongly committed to doing all we can to keep our roads safe and saving people's lives. As rightly stated by hon. Ganoo, Government remains committed to improve road safety above all with necessary investments, as recently announced in the budget measures 2024-2025.

I conclude, by re-emphasising that we cannot succeed alone. Road safety is necessarily a shared societal responsibility for our Republic, and I join the hon. Minister Ganoo to urge all road users to play their part fully and consciously as true patriot.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am done and with these words, I thank you for your kind attention. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

(9.30 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know everybody wants to go home but then...

Mr Speaker: I know you will be short.

Mr Ramful: I will try to be short, especially having hon. Minister Ganoo doing the summing up after me.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is an important Bill. It has three main objectives.

Firstly, to do away with the *Certificat de gage sans déplacement* where the Registrar-General is satisfied that there is no *lien* on the vehicle. I do not think that we have much to say about these amendments and we hope that these amendments will make the transfer of ownership less burdensome in the future.

The second objective of this Bill is to regulate the use of structures and objects during a procession and we take note that Government has decided to react after those two unfortunate events that happened in 2023 and 2024 during the Maha Shivratri festivals where eight youth have lost their lives. We unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, do not have the regulation before us to debate on the provisions of the regulation but we sincerely hope that those provisions will be effective and proportionate so that in future the security of our pilgrims will be safeguarded.

My main intervention, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be on the third objective of this Bill. It is with regard to the penalties that have been increased in order to try and act as deterrent measures against road traffic offenses. Now, these three sets of road traffic offenses where penalties have been increased, there are three sets of road traffic offenses where penalties are being increased.

The first one relates to the extension of what they call the cumulative road traffic offenses which cover 23 offenses. In the past, we only had 11 offenses, now it has been extended to 23 offenses.

The second set of offenses relate to what we call minor road traffic offenses where we are dealing with about 29 offenses where penalties have been toughened.

And the third category of offenses relates to the road traffic offenses under the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations where the penalties have increased from Rs20,000 to a maximum of Rs100,000.

The question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: are these deterrent measures going to make our roads safer for all road users? This is the main question. Now, when we look at our previous records, unfortunately our records which show that every one or two years we have been increasing the

penalties for road traffic offenses, but yet, the number of deaths on our roads and the number of road traffic contraventions have kept on increasing. This is the fact. We brought amendments in 2016, we brought amendments in 2018, we brought amendments in 2020 to increase the penalties for road traffic offenses. Yet, the data gathered by Statistics Mauritius for the year 2022 show that these measures did not work and if you look at the last amendments, since the last amendments in the year 2020.

When we look at the data that has been gathered by Statistics Mauritius what do we see? It is that the number of road traffic contraventions increased by 1.4% from 112,454 in 2021 to 113,977 in 2022. We see that the contraventions relating to exceeding speed limit increased by 42% from 41,000 to approximately 58,000.

We see that contraventions for failing to comply with traffic signs have increased by 25.7% and we see that contraventions relating to dangerous driving have increased by 81.4%, despite the increase in penalties in the previous years. 42.6% of fines paid for the year 2022 were due to exceeding speed limit. The accident rate per hundred thousand population in Mauritius is 2,341, as per the National Road Safety Observatory made in collaboration with the University of Mauritius in September 2021. These are the true facts. I am speaking from data gathered by Statistics Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, although we are increasing the penalties for the road traffic offences, our roads, unfortunately, are becoming more and more dangerous for road users. The statistics are there to speak for themselves. Increasing penalties has not been a deterrent factor for road traffic offenders.

I can only conclude that Government has, therefore, failed to render our roads safer and the reason is simple, because their road safety strategy, Mr Speaker, Sir, did not work. I am not the one saying this, the Director of Audit, himself, criticised the Government's National Road Safety Strategy, what they call the NRSS 2016-2025, adopted in the year 2016, where the objective, Mr Speaker, Sir, was to achieve a 50% reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on our road network by year 2025. We are in 2024! Ten fields of actions were identified under this strategy, namely setting up of a Research & Development Programme; improvement of Safety Standards of the road infrastructure; reorganisation of the roadworthiness control of vehicles; strengthening of the Road Traffic Law and Enforcement; – that we are doing now with the Bill – development of new perspectives for delivering Road Safety Education; re-engineering

of the Driving Licensing Scheme; provision of post-crash trauma care and medical fitness to drive; reduction of accident costs and funding of the Strategy; setting up of a Road Safety Academy. I do not know how many of these strategies have been implemented. And further, a Road Safety Programme which consists of engineering measures was also undertaken to improve the safety of road users.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, the total cost for the implementation of that National Road Safety Strategy that was decided in 2016 and the Road Safety Programme for the last five financial years, from 2018 to 2022, have cost public funds the total amount of Rs827.6 m. This was the cost of the project that Government has spent. And remember, the measures were meant to reduce the number of people killed in road accidents by 50%. Let us look at the results.

In the year 2015, before the introduction of that strategy and the programme, 139 people were killed in road traffic accidents. Five years after, after the implementation of that National Road Safety Strategy, in 2023, after that we have spent Rs827.6 m. of public money, 138 people were killed. Therefore, Government spent Rs827.6 m. over five years and managed to reduce the number of death on our roads by one. So, something has gone completely wrong. The Minister may have good intentions but I do not think that these measures that are being proposed in the Bill will be enough to reverse the situation on our roads. When you look at the statistics, 50% of the deaths – I think hon. Bodha said it – are riders and pillion riders of auto cycles and motorcycles, and nothing concrete has yet been done by the Government to address this issue. As hon. Bodha said, where are the *moto-écoles* to train the young riders?

Mr Speaker, Sir, sometimes, we try to do politics with issues that concern the society, real problems. And these were the same people who criticised us when we had introduced le *permis à points* which covered only 19 offences. Today, this Bill goes even further: it extends the cumulative road traffic offences, where the driver runs the risk of his driving licence being disqualified to 23 offences; it increases the penalties for no less than 29 minor offences; and also increases the penalties for a series of contraventions pertaining to construction and use of vehicles from Rs20,000 to Rs100,000.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will conclude by saying that it is clear that the Government has lamentably failed on its strategy to make our roads safer for road users and the measures, unfortunately, that are being proposed are not the adequate solution for our problems.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lesjongard!

(9.42 p.m.)

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Merci, M. le président, de me donner l'occasion d'intervenir sur ce projet de loi, c'est-à-dire, le *Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2024*.

Permettez-moi, au tout début de mon intervention, M. le président, de remercier mon collègue, l'honorable Alan Ganoo, pour avoir introduit ces amendements à cette importante législation qui concerne toute notre population, soit directement ou indirectement.

M. le président, le trafic routier est un sujet comportant plusieurs complexités où les autorités doivent légiférer pour avoir un contrôle sur le comportement des automobilistes et surtout ceux qui sont indisciplinés et qui mettent en danger la vie d'autrui.

M. le président, je pense qu'au sein de cette auguste Assemblée nous sommes tous conscients, ça, c'est un fait, que la route est de plus en plus dangereuse et le gouvernement a pris ses responsabilités. Premièrement, j'ai écouté l'intervention de mon collègue, le ministre Alan Ganoo, en seconde lecture où il a fait état de plusieurs campagnes de sensibilisation et il a longuement élaboré sur ce sujet, et nous investissons beaucoup sur cet aspect, M. le président.

M. le président, les amendements, à l'ordre du jour, proposés sont de mieux protéger premièrement la population, ça, c'est sûr, et de décourager éventuellement les potentielles entraves aux règlements. Et nous devons aussi comprendre qu'un chauffard ayant commis plusieurs fautes graves doit être sévèrement sanctionné.

M. le président, je vais être bref, je vais intervenir sur deux sections du projet de loi. Et je propose de commencer avec la Section 2 de ce projet de loi qui vient dire principalement *that we*

are amending Section 2 of the principal Act in the definition of “traffic” by inserting, after the words “pedestrians,”, the words “structures or objects being carried, pushed, pulled or led during a procession,”.

Mais avant, permettez-moi, tout d’abord, de faire quelques commentaires sur les nouvelles amendes qui seront imposées aux cas de non-respect de cette législation. C’est un fait, M. le président, que les lois doivent être régulièrement amendées selon le développement économique mais aussi selon l’évolution d’une société et nous avons ici, à l’île Maurice connu un développement économique conséquent depuis des dizaines d’années et le secteur du transport est un des secteurs qui a connu un grand changement et nous avons ces derniers temps construit des nouvelles voies routières comme jamais auparavant, par exemple, l’investissement dans les voies routières.

M. le président, ces dernières cinq années sont de l’ordre de R 15 milliards et parallèlement, des chiffres du nombre de véhicules aussi sur nos routes ont plus que doublé en 23 ans, c’est-à-dire passant de 244 000 véhicules en 2000 à presque 676 000 véhicules en fin 2023. Mais malheureusement l’augmentation des véhicules, l’augmentation de nombre d’accidents sur nos routes aussi, quels soient mineures ou majeures ont aussi augmenté, passant de 21 243 en 2010 à 36 400 fin 2023. Et fait notable, M. le président, le nombre de deux-roues, est sorti de 24 000 en 2000 à 112 000 en 2023. Et nous savons tous que les motocyclistes sont souvent les plus vulnérables.

M. le président, nos lois, comme je l’ai dit un peu plus tôt, doivent évoluer afin de mieux protéger la population face aux accidents de la route et c’est pour cela que nous donnons aussi des moyens légaux, plus solides aux autorités concernées, par exemple la force policière, la National Land Transport Authority afin comme je l’ai dit de décourager et réduire le nombre d’accidents et je pense qu’il y a certains cas spécifiques et les amendements proposés dans ce projet de loi vont dans ce sens. M. le président, permettez-moi de me référer à la section 125 *of the main act which deals with road racing where it is stated that –*

“Any person who, except with the consent of, and in accordance with any conditions imposed by the Commissioner of Police –

(a) promotes; or

(b) takes part in,

any race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on a road shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding a 1,000 rupees.”

M. le président, je pense qu'en évoquant cet aspect des choses, je prends comme exemple, malheureusement les rallyes organisés très souvent et c'est organisé en fin de semaine sur nos autoroutes et effectivement, sur certaines sections de nos autoroutes et là, je connais un tronçon où régulièrement, en fin de semaine, il y a des rallyes, c'est-à-dire, sur l'autoroute plutôt de Terre Rouge-Verdun et je pense que plusieurs de mes collègues au sein de cet auguste Assemblée, très souvent si on emprunte cette route en week-end, on voit les traces, leur freinage qui sont très souvent liés à des accidents non-rapportés. Ce qui est proposé, M. le président, dans ce projet de loi est en relation à l'organisation, c'est des amendes à l'organisation de ces rallyes, c'est des amendes beaucoup plus sévères comme mentionné à la section 6 ou –

“(a) on a first conviction, the fine is not less than Rs25,000 and not exceeding Rs50,000;

(b) on a second conviction, it goes up to less than Rs50,000 and not exceeding Rs100,000, and

(c) on a third or subsequent conviction, to a fine of not less than Rs 100,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.”

Et comme je l'ai dit cela devrait décourager surtout nos jeunes à participer à des telles courses illégales.

M. le président, nous savons tous que certaines de ces courses comme je l'ai dit ont été fatales pour nos jeunes et ces courses doivent cesser. Et très souvent, M. le président, la force policière est appelée à faire des patrouilles tout le long de la nuit pour empêcher ces rallyes sur nos autoroutes et je pense que les autorités doivent réussir à viser non seulement les participants mais aussi les organisateurs de ces rallyes et on apprend que très souvent c'est des forte sommes d'argents qui sont mis en jeu sur des telles courses.

M. le président, je vais maintenant commenter l'amendement proposé à l'article 2 du *Road Traffic Act* que j'avais mentionné un peu plus tôt. C'est un amendement qui concerne

principalement les infrastructures du CEB, c'est-à-dire les lignes de haute tension. M. le président, notre pays a malheureusement connu deux tristes événements pendant le pèlerinage vers le Ganga Talao en février 2023 et mars 2024. Deux tristes événements ou des jeunes concitoyens sont décédés. Après le premier accident, c'est-à-dire l'accident de février 2023, le gouvernement avait mis sur pied un comité interministériel avec des termes de référence bien précises et le ministère des Arts et du patrimoine national avait préconisé des lignes directrices, c'est-à-dire des *guidelines* afin que toute structure religieuse ne soit pas plus de 3 mètres de hauteur.

Malheureusement on avait fait une campagne pendant cette période, mêmes les organisations sociaux-religieuses avaient fait des campagnes pour sensibiliser la population mais malheureusement, dans certains cas on n'avait pas respecté ces lignes directrices.

M. le président, je dois préciser que selon les règlements du CEB, presque tous les câbles du CEB sont aériens et cette hauteur est définie par le *Electricity Safety Quality and Continuity Regulations 2022* pour les réseaux de 22 000 volts et de 66 000 volts. La hauteur des câbles est définie par ces règlements et sont comme suit –

- pour un câble de 22 000 volts, la hauteur est de 6,4 mètres, et
- pour les lignes de 66 000 volts, la hauteur est de 7,5 mètres.

Et les conséquences sont fatales au cas où une personne est en contact avec les lignes de hautes tensions de 22,000 ou de 66 000 volts.

M. le président, je faisais une petite recherche juste avant mon intervention et je suis tombé sur quelque chose d'assez intéressant à ce qui concerne les cas d'électrocutions sur les lignes de haute tension et je cite dans les cas pareils –

“The most significant risk of injury from a transmission line is the danger of electrical contact. Electrical contact between an object and an energized conductor (wire) can occur even when the two do not touch. High-voltage transmission lines can create an electrical arc across an air gap.”

C'est-à-dire qu'il n'y a pas besoin d'avoir contact physique pour que quelqu'un soit électrocuté avec une ligne de haute tension soit de 22 000 volts ou de 66 000 volts, M. le président.

M. le président, sur ces lignes de haute tension ce qu'il faut dire à la Chambre, c'est que régulièrement l'organisme qu'est le CEB fait des vérifications que ce soit sur les lignes de basse tension ou de haute tension installées à travers l'île et très souvent, il y a des rapports qui sont soumises à la direction afin de rectifier là où il faut rectifier c'est-à-dire, s'il n'y a pas assez de clearance entre le sol et ces lignes de hautes tensions.

M. le président, cette amendement proposée par mon collègue vient mieux protéger nos citoyens qui transport des structures lors des pèlerinages. Aujourd'hui nous légiférons sur la hauteur de ces structures qui doivent être moins de 3 mètres lors des processions religieuses ou autre type d'événement, M. le président. Notre pays ne doit plus vivre les triste événements des années passées et je lance, moi, M. le président, un appel afin que toutes les organisations concernées s'adaptent aux nouvelles lois.

M. le président, on ne peut contrôler la conduite de chaque automobiliste mais nous avons en tant que gouvernement la responsabilité de protéger la population et c'est ce que nous faisons ce soir à travers les amendements proposés dans ce projet de loi. Protéger, M. le président, est le maître mot mais aussi ne plus permettre à certains chauffards de fauter et de mettre la vie de nos citoyens en danger. M. le président, je vous remercie.

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Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Ganoo, your summing-up.

(9.57 p.m.)

Mr Ganoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wish to thank all Members who intervened on this Bill today, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Members on the Government side and also for the comments

made constructively and also I wish to thank the Members who intervened on the Opposition side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come first to hon. Ramful before I forget him. So, because there are so much to rebut after having listened to all the Members of the Opposition talking especially, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But let me take the last Member on the Opposition side who has intervened. So, what he is telling us in fact is that our road strategy has failed when he has taken certain figures from the Director of Audit or some other report to try to demonstrate that our strategy has gone wrong, berserk, has failed, we have spent so many millions of good rupees which we have thrown in the drain. But, he has forgotten to tell the whole truth, Mr Speaker, Sir. Over the last 5 years –

- In 2019, the number of accident was 144;
- In 2020, 131;
- In 2021, 108;
- In 2022, 108 again, and
- Last year, 138.

And there were about on average, Mr Speaker, Sir, this means 126 road traffic fatalities reported.

But, coming back on the figures, does he know that during the Labour days and from 2000 to this year, 2024, the highest number of accidents that took place in this country was under the Labour Government. 168 when Dr. Ramgoolam was Prime Minister. *168, M. le président.* What are you talking about? Now, when we look at the average which I have just given from 2019 to 2023, this corresponds to a fatality rate of about 10.3 fatalities per 100,000 population. This baseline figure which was the average fatality rate per 100,000 population was also taken during the 5 year period *de 2010 à 2014 quand le parti Travailliste était au pouvoir.*

M. le président, vous savez combien c'était? Je viens de vous dire, en 2019 à 2023 c'était 10.3, entre 2010 et 2014 c'était 12.6, M. le président. De quoi parle l'honorable Ramful, M. le président? 168 morts sur nos routes, je crois que c'était Anil Bachoo le ministre des

Infrastructures publiques et du transport à l'époque et le Dr. Ramgoolam était le Premier Ministre. Ne venez pas faire de la démagogie s'il vous plaît.

Et ceci dit, M. le président, l'autre reproche qui nous a été faite au sujet de ce projet de loi, c'est que ce projet de loi rien à faire avec les accidents de la route, rien ne va changer. Je crois l'honorable Uteem, je ne suis pas trop sûr si l'honorable leader de l'Opposition a dit ça. Je pense qu'il l'a dit lui aussi, que ce projet de loi n'a rien à faire avec les accidents de la route.

Let us look at the cumulative road traffic offences, Mr Speaker, Sir, what are these new offences which we have added in the already existing list of 11 offences, Mr Speaker, Sir. Firstly, *le douzième est le suivant. Il y avait 11 déjà dans notre loi, dans le Schedule du Road Traffic Act. Aujourd'hui nous avons ajouté 12 jusqu'au 23 –*

“12. Failing to give way when coming out of a less important road onto a more important one”

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, M. le président? Vous brûlez la ligne blanche qui est devant vous. *You are exiting from a subsidiary road and you are entering a principle road, a major road, a main road* sans vous arrêter derrière la ligne blanche. *Failing to give way when coming out of a less important road onto a more important one*, ça n'a rien à faire avec les accidents ça?

M. le président, combien d'accidents aujourd'hui sont causées par la négligence de beaucoup de nos chauffards comme on dit, pour se servir du terme de l'honorable ministre Lesjongard, quand il ne s'arrête pas sur cette ligne blanche et dans toutes les villes, tous les villages cela arrive très souvent, M. le président.

Le 13ème –

“Failing to wear high visibility clothing whilst riding an auto cycle as rider.”

L'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval a parlé de ça. Il faut que nous devenions tous conscients de cette nécessité *to wear high visibility clothing whilst riding an auto cycle or even a motorcycle*. Parce que le 14ème fait mention du motorcycle : le 13ème *auto cycle as rider*, le 14ème *motorcycle as rider you have to wear the high visibility clothing*. Nous sommes tous chauffeurs, M. le président, sur nos routes ne voit-on pas cela tous les jours, quelqu'un habillé en

noir traversant devant nous sans ce *high visibility clothing* ? Les risques d'un accident sont énormes, M. le président, quand le motocycliste ou l'auto cycliste ne porte pas son *high visibility clothing*. Ça n'a rien à faire avec les accidents?

“Failing to overtake traffic on the right”

Doubler à gauche, cela n'a-t-il rien à faire avec les accidents, M. le président? Combien de motocyclistes, quelquefois les cyclistes, auto cyclistes, nous les voyons doubler sur la gauche, M. le président, et la voiture tourne sur sa gauche qui cause un accident grave ou moins grave.

“Obstructing traffic coming from the opposite direction whilst overtaking.”

Vous êtes en train de dépasser, *you are overtaking* et vous restez au milieu de la route et vous obstruez le trafic qui vient de la direction opposée. Cela n'a-t-il rien à voir avec les accidents, M. le président?

“Auto cycle and motorcycle not fitted with a rear view mirror in the manner prescribed.”

Sans rétroviseur sur une motocyclette ou auto cyclette, M. le président, vous ne voyez rien derrière. Vous voulez tourner à droite ou à gauche sans savoir qu'est-ce qui se passe derrière vous. Ça n'a-t-il rien à voir avec un accident? N'est-ce pas la cause potentielle de mort d'homme ou d'accident grave? Et je peux continuer, M. le président.

Ecoutez-ceci, *this is the 21* –

“Breach of lane discipline on a dual carriage way.”

On ne voit pas ça sur nos routes, les chauffards qui font, *le code poisson*, de ce *lane* pour aller de l'autre parce qu'ils sont trop pressés. Ça ne cause pas d'accident et ça n'a rien à faire avec les accidents, M. le président ?

22-23 – *“Breach of conditions imposed by the Commissioner of Police when taking part in a race or trial of speed between motorcycle.”*

On revient sur les rallyes.

La dernière c'est – "*Taking part in a race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on a road without the consent of the Commissioner of Police.*"

Les rallyes, M. le président, vous parlez des rallyes aujourd'hui, à Chamarel, à Tribeca, dans le nord, dans toutes ces nouvelles routes qu'on a construites, vous voyez ces jeunes – même à Roche-Bois moi j'ai vu ça personnellement de mes yeux. A un certain moment, à la tombée de la nuit, 10heures -11 heures du soir vous les voyez sur ces autoroutes en train de faire des rallyes, M. le président. Donc la police leur impose des conditions, ils ne respectent pas ou bien ils ne demandent même pas la permission du Commissaire de police.

Alors ne sont-elles pas des situations mettant en danger la vie des autres, causant des accidents, M. le président ? Voilà les nouveaux délits ajoutés à la liste des 11 délits qui existaient déjà dans cette liste de *Cumulative Road Traffic Offences*.

Et je rappelle aux membres de l'opposition qu'en élargissant cette liste de CRTO *offences aujourd'hui*, il n'y a rien de *cash-cow* dedans. Le gouvernement ne remplit pas ses coffres forts, si vous me donnez la permission d'utiliser ce mot, M. le président. Nous ne gagnons rien. L'État ne gagne rien en augmentant le Cumulative Offences passant de 11 passant à 23. C'est ne pas une question d'argent, de *money*.

Je reviendrai sur l'autre question – est-ce que nous avons *increase the penalty* pour remplir les coffres de l'État ? Mais laissez-moi terminer pour dire aux membres de l'opposition, cette nouvelle liste de Cumulative Road Traffic Offences, à toute affaire, est liée directement et indirectement avec les causes des accidents sur les routes et c'est la raison pour laquelle, le ministère du Transport, nous avons décidé d'ajouter à cette liste de 11 qui est passé à 23.

Maintenant les autres, qu'avons-nous fait dans ce projet de loi, M. le président ? Dans un premier projet de loi qui a été circulé initialement, c'est vrai, je suis d'accord, il y avait peut-être des délits qui n'auraient pas dû être augmentés. Nous prenons le cas flagrant de R 1000 a R 25000, et nous avons écouté la voix de la raison – quelqu'un disait, M.le président, seuls les imbéciles ne changent pas ou bien n'écoutent pas. C'est vrai, donc nous sommes assis moi avec le Premier ministre et mes officiers, et nous avons donc changé et ajusté. Et vous savez ce que nous avons fait aujourd'hui, dans cette majorité de nouvelles peines qui concerne, une trentaine de délits, la majorité est passée de R 500 à R 1000 et de R 1000 à R 200 – la grande majorité

vous allez voir, sauf quelques exceptions sur lesquelles je reviendrai dans quelques secondes, M. le président.

R 500 à R 1000, R 1000 à R 2000, mais seulement nous avons ciblé les *plates*, les plaques d'immatriculation, M. le président. L'honorable a lui-même fait mention de ça, M. le président – ces jeunes malheureusement qu'on ne peut pas détecter, qu'on ne peut pas poursuivre, et ils n'ont pas des plaques, ils habillent en noir, ne portent pas ces gilets fluorescents, ils sont peut-être des *drug dealers*. C'est lui qui l'a dit. Alors c'est pourquoi nous avons harmonisé tous les délits qui sont liés à la plaque d'immatriculation. La première initiative de R 1000 à R25000 est passée de R 1000 à R 5000 et tous les autres délits concernant les plaques d'immatriculation sont passés à R 5000, sauf un. Lorsque *your plate is not properly illuminated* – ça nous avons laissé à R 3000. C'est ne peut-être pas de votre faute, ça peut arriver à tout le monde et donc, sinon c'est R 5000.

Maintenant, il y a un cas récemment, M. le président. C'était dans les journaux, ou un jeune motocycliste encore une fois sur sa motocyclette sans plaque d'immatriculation, a traversé devant des policiers qui patrouillaient. Les policiers l'ont pourchassé, ont pu l'arrêter et vous savez qu'est-ce qu'il a fait, il a retiré sa casque et il a frappé un policier. C'était dans les journaux, M. le président. Dieu sait où il allait pilotant une motocyclette sans plaque d'immatriculation, habillée en noir et quand il a été arrêté par la police, il a même agressé un policier, M. le président.

Donc, voilà ce que nous avons fait dans ce projet de loi. Je le constate que l'opposition est d'accord avec *all the Clauses except Clause 11 and 12 concerning the CRTO and the* l'augmentation des pénalités. Voilà pour commencer comment je réponds à l'opposition, M. le président. *Disproportionate fine, we listened, as I said, to the people, we adjusted the fines. 37 fines are being amended.*

Now, M. le président, pour répondre à cet argument que nous avons pris la population pour un *cash-cow*, c'est ne pas sérieux. J'allais dire quel argument bête et imbécile, M. président. *If we had considered the population as a cash-cow, we would have reviewed more than 37 items*, mettre R 500 en plus R 1000 en plus. 204 délits, nous avons ciblé seulement 37 items. Mais si nous avions vraiment voulu déplumer la population, M. le président, on aurait augmenté les 37

items. si nous aurions voulu faire l'économie ou bien de l'argent sur la tête de notre population, M. le président, nous n'aurions pas investi des millions dans le ministère du Transport, surtout les *road infrastructures*, surtout les *lay-bys*, les *race platforms*, les *bus shelter*, les trottoirs et tout ce qu'on fait dans ce ministère au niveau de *road safety* et *road infrastructure*, M. le président.

J'ai le budget avec moi. Cette année-ci M. le président, nous avons voté presque R 300 millions to *provide safety on our roads*, un peu moins de R 300 millions. Bien on aurait dit : donner nous R 100 millions, R 150 millions et garder le reste pour l'État si on avait voulu vraiment prendre de l'argent et mettre dans la poche de l'État, M. le président.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House must also know that, comme je viens de dire tout à l'heure et j'insiste sur cela, the purpose of reviewing the fees of fines for registration of plates is fundamentally to ease the identification of vehicles involved in road traffic violation. It is to apprehend drivers exceeding speed limit through easy capture of their plates by speed cameras.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to stress on the fact that at times it is extremely difficult for the Police to identify vehicles involved in serious accidents – such as hit and run – arising from the use of non-compliant registration plates.

Comme je l'avais dit tout à l'heure, M. le président, l'honorable X. L. Duval avait raison de souligner l'importance pour les usagers d'avoir une plaque d'immatriculation aux normes.

M. le président, *we have invested massively in upgrading our road furniture and road safety* et cela c'est un autre point que je voulais faire. L'honorable Lobine et quelques autres membres de l'opposition ont dit : 'ben, comment régler le problème de *road safety* seulement avec les *fines*' ? Qui a dit cela ? *We have a three pronged approach*, M. le président. J'ai dit cela dans mon discours, au début. Sensibilisation, éducation en premier, investir dans les *road infrastructures*, dans les *dark spots*, *traffic lights*, *speed cameras*, des millions et des millions de roupies. Et le troisième volet, c'est l'*enforcement*. Malheureusement, la répression, l'augmentation des pénalités, je ne suis pas moi-même partisan de la répression, M. le président. Mais malheureusement, dans le secteur de la sécurité routière c'est un élément important de temps en temps de revoir les pénalités et les *fines* etc.

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, comme je viens de vous le dire, R 188 millions ont été dépensés en 2022-2023. Cette année-ci, R 236 millions *have been allotted by the Minister of*

Finance for road infrastructure and so on and if we were not sensitive to road safety, we would not have invested so much in improving our infrastructures by making our roads more forgiving, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Alors, l'éducation, sensibilisation, des millions, nous sommes le premier pays africain qui a peut-être aussi un des rares cas dans le monde, nous introduisons avec la ministre de l'Education – j'ai dit cela tout à l'heure dans mon discours, M. le président et même dans le pré-primaire – éducation sur la sécurité routière à nos enfants depuis leur plus tendre âge pour qu'ils deviennent nos ambassadeurs. On a parlé de l'autre côté de la Chambre et de ce côté de la Chambre d'une nouvelle culture, inculquant une nouvelle culture de courtoisie à nos chauffeurs, M. le président. Comment faire cela si ce n'est pas à commencer pendant la petite enfance et pendant le primaire et le secondaire, M. le président.

Donc, les *billboards Respe*, vous avez sûrement vu, M. le président, nous avons fait des compétitions de slam l'année dernière, les jeunes qui sont venus participer pour conscientiser les autres jeunes. L'éducation, sensibilisation, M. le président, et c'est cela l'approche holistique dont parle l'honorable Lobine. L'honorable Bodha a parlé de l'éducation, de la formation. Un projet inédit, honorable Bodha, je ne suis pas là pour le critiquer, pour faire son bilan quand il était ministre des Transports avec ses écoles de formation, mais moi ce que je peux vous dire, M. le président, ce gouvernement a eu 23 arpents de terre avec le ministre de l'Agro-industrie à Forest Side.

Nous sommes en train de construire en ce moment un *driving and training centre* sur 23 arpents de terre. Nous avons même engagé un consultant PwC de l'Inde qui est venu nous conseiller. J'ai tout cela sur mes papiers, mais je suis en train de parler de ma mémoire, M. le président. Donc, tout est terminé maintenant, mais on va construire ce centre qui va évidemment nous coûter beaucoup parce que *this is a centre where all new drivers will have to come and be trained for one or two days for some hours*. Qu'est-ce qui se passe aujourd'hui, M. le président ? C'est un oncle, c'est le papa, c'est le frère aîné qui nous forme, n'est-ce pas ? Mais, il n'est pas le professionnel, il n'est pas le technicien. C'est pourquoi malheureusement beaucoup de nos jeunes – c'est vrai – ils obtiennent leur permis de conduire, mais sans vraiment de bonne formation. Ils ne peuvent pas vraiment contrôler une moto/autocyclette ou même une voiture.

L'année dernière à Beaux Songes, M. le président, un jeune qui a eu son permis de conduire, une semaine après, il tue un policier à Beaux Songes. C'était le jour de *Ganesh Chaturthi*, je me rappelle bien de cela, M. le président. Sept jours après, son accident. C'est pourquoi nous avons un projet de venir aussi avec un *probationary licence* et le PwC est en train de nous aider. Donc, ce que je veux dire c'est que nous sommes conscients de ce problème de formation, nous sommes conscients que *repressing* seulement n'est pas la solution. Nous sommes conscients qu'il faut adopter un *holistic approach*. C'est ce que nous faisons pendant des années, M. le président, mais quelle est la cause de tous ces accidents ? C'est l'imprudence, la négligence malheureusement de quelques chauffeurs ou chauffards.

Je viens de vous donner le nombre d'accidents causés par les personnes qui sont en train de conduire sous l'influence de la drogue, de l'alcool. Malheureusement, pas de culture, pas de courtoisie, pour eux la route n'est pas un espace commun. C'est leur propriété privée, ils font ce qu'ils veulent. Alors, c'est à cause de cela, M. le président, *we did not shy away when we came with this piece of legislation and we heard the outcry. We were reasonable, we changed, we adjusted, we amended but we were not cowards, Mr Speaker, Sir! We took the challenge of coming with this piece of legislation because we know we are doing the right thing. We are protecting our population, we are protecting our young people, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is not a question of politics. Although elections are this year, this was not a reason for us to withdraw these two clauses from this Bill when some haters and, unfortunately, a section of the press was hitting at us, hitting at me 'Lake fer blan Ganoo', M. le président, because brave men die only once, cowards die many a time, Mr Speaker, Sir.*

Voilà ce que je voulais dire, M. le président. Le *Driver Education and Training Centre* qui sera implémenté à Seizième Mille sur un terrain de 23 arpents, j'ai déjà dit cela, nous allons donc introduire le *Graduated Driving Licencing*. Cela s'appelle comme cela, c'est-à-dire un *probationary licence*. Une fois que vous avez eu votre permis de conduire, ne croyez pas que vous pouvez faire ce vous voulez sur la route. On peut vous reprendre ce permis. C'est cela le *Graduated Driving Licence Scheme*. Nous avons en ce moment des consultations pour revoir cet aspect des choses, M. le président.

Et, l'honorable Bodha a posé la question concernant les pèlerins de Grand Bassin. Qui va être responsable de *l'enforcement* et les règlements etc. ? M. le président, la réponse est claire. Je

suis un peu surpris de comment l'honorable Bodha, ancien ministre, n'a pas vu la réponse à sa question. C'est dans le *Bill*, c'est la police, M. le président, *the relevant clause provides as follows* –

“(2) *A police officer may have such powers as may be necessary to enforce the provisions of subsection (1).*”

Donc, c'est la police et bien sûr on va venir avec les règlements, etc.

L'honorable X. L. Duval, M. le président, je dois faire ressortir, il a parlé de trottoirs. Bravo, l'honorable X. L. Duval, mais vous oubliez que vous étiez vice-Premier ministre pendant trois mandats à Quatre Bornes. Aujourd'hui vous reprochez – je ne sais pas si vous avez reproché à l'Etat ou à mon ministère de n'avoir pas construit les trottoirs pour protéger les *pedestrians* à Quatre Bornes – mais vous étiez vous-même député, ministre, vice-Premier ministre à Quatre Bornes pendant de longues années, M. le président.

We always become brighter when we come in the Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir, wiser after the event.

Aujourd'hui, le *TMRSU* est en train de construire des trottoirs pour les piétons à Antelme. Et pour les piétons, M. le président, savez-vous combien de campagnes nous avons organisées ? Je ne sais pas si vous avez vu un de nos *billboards*, '*Pieton pena bofor*'. Vous savez qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? Vous êtes protégés dans votre voiture avec votre beaufort. Mais, vous, comme piétons, vous êtes - excusez-moi d'utiliser cette expression – 'nus' quand vous marchez, vous n'avez rien pour vous protéger. *Pieton pena bofor*. Nous sommes conscients de ce problème, de la fragilité, de la vulnérabilité, M. le président, donc, c'est pourquoi nous avons organisé beaucoup de campagnes, sensibiliser les automobilistes, faire des vidéos que nous avons lancées sur le *social media* pour protéger les piétons.

Maintenant, concernant les trottoirs, je dois faire rappeler à l'honorable Duval que tous les nouveaux projets de développements, j'appelle comme témoin mon collègue, l'honorable Hurreeram, comme les morcellements, les nouvelles routes sont conçus de façon à faire provision pour les trottoirs aux normes internationales, ainsi que d'autres aménités par les piétons. Quand, malheureusement, dans nos villages ou bien à certaines routes existantes, il est

clair, M. le président, que nous avons plusieurs contraintes en termes d'espace et c'est la raison pour laquelle nous sommes venus de l'avant avec des *speed zero*.

Et par rapport au papier de gage, je crois que l'honorable Uteem a soulevé cette question, et j'apprécie que les membres de l'opposition sont d'accord avec ce que nous proposons au niveau du Certificat de gage mais, je vais lui dire que nous commençons avec les transactions entre individu et individu et par la suite cela s'étendra aux autres usagers, M. le président.

Il y a un autre sujet sur lequel je voulais revenir, M. le président, c'est cette nouvelle disposition que nous avons introduite, obligeant la police maintenant, *make it mandatory for the Police to bring before the Magistrate somebody who has been arrested and suspected of having driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs*. M. le président, ceci était important pour nous. Vous savez qu'est-ce qui se passait ? Il y a des chauffards qui refusaient de se soumettre aux demandes, aux requêtes de la police quand la police leur demandait de faire un test d'alcool ou d'urine ou de *breath*, etc. Donc, maintenant, la police a un mois pour traduire cette personne devant le magistrat. Est-ce qu'on peut ne pas être d'accord avec cette proposition ? Qui a peur d'une telle proposition ?

Mr Toussaint: *Inn bwar siro touse !*

Mr Ganoo: Seulement ceux qui boivent et conduisent, M. le président.

Et quand on nous reproche cet après-midi, depuis le commencement des débats, *'fines are not the only solution'* ; nous disant que nous sommes peut-être trop répressives, *'it is not the only solution on the answer'*. M. le président, qu'est-ce que nous faisons aujourd'hui ? Je viens de vous le dire, nous augmentons certaines pénalités ; nous avons augmenté le nombre de *cumulative road traffic offences* ; nous avons ciblé les *immatriculation plates* ; et nous avons amendé cette loi concernant ceux qui refusent de se soucrire à un test d'alcool à la demande des policiers. C'est tout ce que nous avons fait dans ce projet de loi, M. le président.

Je vous le dis, je ne suis pas pour la répression ni personne d'entre nous de ce côté de la Chambre. Mais, écoutez ce qu'a dit la Cour suprême, M. le président –

“With the heavy increase in traffic on our roads, offenders like the appellant represent a high security risk, seriously putting at stake not only the personal life of passengers travelling in their vehicles and other vehicles but also that of the more vulnerable users of our roads, such as cyclists, motorcyclists and pedestrians.”

Écoutez ce qu’il dit –

“Past sentencing policy consisting of substantial fines and disqualifications and cancellation orders has utterly failed to prove effective as a deterrent.”

Ils nous reprochent que *fines*, disqualifications, *pa asse sa*.

“In view of the number of such offences, which is constantly on the increase, and the serious threat which the commission of such offences represents to the lives of other innocent and law abiding road users, nothing short of a custodial sentence is likely to act as a deterrent to potential offenders. There must be a clear signal to potential offenders of that sort that they would not be dealt with leniently by the courts. The public interest in curbing such offences and in protecting human life therefore eloquently requires a custodial sentence, even for a first offender, unless there exists any special mitigating reason which could justify a non-custodial sentence.”

Voilà ce que dit la Cour suprême dans un jugement le 12 juin de cette année-ci, 15 jours de cela, M. le président. Voilà ce qu’a dit *two eminent judges of our Supreme Court benches*.

Donc, M. le président, pour terminer, je voudrais *remind the House that road safety issue is an issue which rises above petty politics*. Mr Speaker, Sir, *we all need to partake in this collective effort to make our roads safer*. Nous ne pouvons pas tolérer les comportements visant à mettre en danger la sécurité des usagers de la route.

M. le président, la révision des pénalités, que je considère maintenant aucunement exagérée, a pour but de dissuader les automobilistes, de les responsabiliser et d’adopter une attitude moins dangereuse sur nos routes. *Our Republic is no exception*.

Today, M. le président, et je dois corriger je crois l’honorable Bodha, il y a dans le monde au moins 1.5 million de décès causés par les accidents de la route par an. D’après l’Organisation

mondiale de la santé, le *road fatalities, fatal accidents* grimpera de la septième à la sixième position, mais *road accidents will become the first cause of accident among young people of the world.*

Donc, ce qui se passe ne se passe pas seulement à Maurice. Partout dans le monde, les jeunes sont en train de mourir sur leurs motos, dans leurs voitures de course, etc. *and our Republic is no exception. C'est pourquoi road engineering, education have been utilised by this Government together with enforcement, Mr Speaker, Sir, to cater for this problem. The only way that authorities have to deter people from contravening the laws are sometimes, unfortunately, enforcement and repression, and this is a known fact by all the governments of the world, Mr Speaker, Sir.*

I have listened to a lot of unjustified and unfounded criticisms levelled against the proposed measures in this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir. The question of security of our citizens must not be ground for political demagoguery.

Je vous ai dit, M. le président, the socio-economic costs of road crashes in our country today est de R 6 milliards according to the University of Mauritius.

L'honorable Bodha a parlé d'observatoire ou quelqu'un d'autre, nous avons un observatoire de *Road Safety*, M. le président, avec l'université de Maurice. Quelqu'un a parlé d'où sont les rapports ? Est-ce que les *Surveys* ont été faites ? Quatre rapports ont été faits par l'université de Maurice conjointement avec le ministère du Transport sur the *cost of accidents*. L'honorable François a parlé de nos *roads are not properly lit and so on*. Un deuxième rapport, quatre rapports, M. le président, ont été commandités par notre ministère et que nous avons remis à d'autres autorités concernées.

C'est pour cela, M. le président, que pour nous aujourd'hui, *these fines have increased because existing ones no longer act as a deterrent due to the increase in cost of living. I have myself several times highlighted the numbers in road accident and the calamities that they entail,* M. le président. Et je vous le répète, tout ce que nous avons ciblé dans le *cumulative* ce sont des délits de *rash driving* qui peuvent *lead to serious accidents*.

M. le président, je termine en disant, pour répondre aussi à l'honorable leader de l'opposition qui a parlé de quel contrôle que nous avons sur le *Vehicle Examination Centres* ? Je

pense qu'il aurait pu poser la question à Monsieur A., M. le président. *The Vehicle Examination Stations are closely monitored by the NLTA in terms of –*

- *vehicle examiners are posted physically to monitor operations;*
- *the Vehicle Examination Stations have to submit returns to the NLTA, and*
- *installation of CCTV Cameras within the premises of these Vehicle Examination Centres by the NLTA.*

Alors, finalement concernant les taxis marron, le délit est sorti de R 1000 pour venir à R 2000. Il y a un membre qui a évoqué les taxis marron mais nous avons aussi à nous rappeler qu'il y a des opérateurs de bus, des taximan qui opèrent légalement dans notre pays, M. le président et c'est vrai les taxis marron aident quelques personnes à voyager dans leur transport mais ça aussi comme nous le savons, M. le président, ceux-ci comportent des risques, il n'y a rien en termes d'assurance pour la simple et bonne raison que ces véhicules illégaux opèrent sans une licence octroyée par la NLTA. Donc, c'est pourquoi, M. le président, nous avons profité pour responsabiliser aussi les passagers sur cette question de taxis marron.

To conclude, *M. le président, laissez-moi assurer à la Chambre que les trois amendements will bring changes to how road processions are held; a culture of discipline would emanate from benefit of the safety on one and all. Certainement, il y aura des changements as to how road processions will now be held après les regulations que le ministère va promulguer dans quelques temps, M. de président. Les changements que nous proposons aujourd'hui, will also be the foundation upon which the services offered by the NLTA would be enhanced. Last but not the least the amendments concerning the cumulative Road Traffic Offences and the penalty offences will without any doubt make rogue motorist think twice before committing any offence and increasing road safety for all road users.*

Par la même occasion, je voudrais lancer un appel pressant aux médias et aux personnes de bonne volonté – la sécurité routière n'est pas seulement l'affaire du gouvernement, du Premier ministre ou du ministre du Transport, nous avons tous notre rôle à jouer, M. le président.

Let us work together to enhance road safety and lend us support to better ventilate road safety practices. Let us all be a part of the solutions by trying to educate and inform the population on road safety practices and sensitise them on the dangers of speeding and driving under the influence of intoxicating substances.

My appeal is for everyone to join us in making our roads safer. My plea today is for a collective effort towards reducing the risk and severity of accidents in our country. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, a section of the press m'a littéralement lynché 'Lake fer blan Ganoo' voulant dire que je voulais embarrasser le gouvernement avec ce projet de loi ou que ce projet de loi serait un boulet rouge que traînera le gouvernement dans les mois à venir, rien de plus faux. J'ai eu les consultations comme je viens de le dire avec le Premier ministre, les membres du gouvernement qui sont plus concernés et avec le Premier ministre qui est le plus concerné que tout le monde peut être dans cette Chambre, au sujet de la sécurité routière.

*Vous avez entendu les membres, les orateurs de ce côté de la Chambre, venir défendre cette loi avec autant d'acharnement, M. le président, parce que nous aurions pu, comme je viens de vous le dire, battre en retraite avec les critiques de cette presse partisane et certains *haters* et d'autres *sycophants*, but we are not cowards, comme je viens de vous dire, M. le président. Nous avons fait les ajustements nécessaires, nous avons proposé des amendements raisonnables to make this law more consensual ; we did not shy away nor did we 'tuitt',*

M. le président. Ce projet de loi, pour nous, favorisera une meilleure sécurité sur nos routes pour nos enfants et notre population.

J'ai terminé. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: So, you commend the Bill!

Mr Ganoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. With the little voice that I still have, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. VII OF 2024)

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 (Section 6 of principal Act amended)

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill.”

Mr Ganoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendments to clause 4 –

“in clause 4 –

- (i) by deleting paragraph (a) and replacing it by the following paragraph –
 - (a) in subsection (1)(a) –
 - (A) by deleting the words “subsections (3) and (4)” and replacing them by the words “subsection (1A), (3) or (4)”;
 - (B) in subparagraph (i), by deleting the words “give notice by registered letter to” and replacing them by the word “inform”;
- (ii) in paragraph (b), in the proposed new subsection (1A), by deleting the words “give notice by registered letter to” and replacing them by the word “inform”;
- (iii) by deleting paragraph (c) and replacing it by the following paragraph –
 - (c) in subsection (3), by deleting the words “the Chief Commissioner” and replacing them by the words “the Chief Commissioner or Registrar-General, as the case may be”;

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 5 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Third Schedule to principal Act amended)

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill.”

Mr Ganoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 11 –

“by repealing clause 11 and replacing it by the following clause –

11. Third Schedule to principal Act amended

The Third Schedule to the principal Act is amended –

- (a) in item 8, in the third column, by deleting the words “SPED06” and replacing them by the words “SPED07”;
- (b) by adding the new items and their corresponding entries set out in the Schedule to this Act.”

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (Fourth Schedule to principal Act amended)

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill.”

Mr Ganoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendments to clause 12 –

“in clause 12 –

- (i) in paragraph (e), by deleting the figure “1,500” and replacing it by the figure “1,000”;
- (ii) in paragraph (f), by deleting the figure “1,500” and replacing it by the figure “1,000”;
- (iii) in paragraph (g), by deleting the figure “2,000” and replacing it by the figure “1,500”;
- (iv) in paragraph (h), by deleting the figure “2,500” and replacing it by the figure “1,500”;
- (v) by inserting, after paragraph (n), the following new paragraphs –
 - (na) in item 55, by deleting the figure “3,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
 - (nb) in item 56, by deleting the figure “1,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
- (vi) in paragraph (t), by deleting the figures “500” and “1,000” and replacing it by the figures “1,000” and “2,000”, respectively;
- (vii) in paragraph (w), by deleting the figure “5,000” and replacing it by the figure “2,000”;

- (viii) in paragraph (y), by deleting the figure “25,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
- (ix) in paragraph (aa), by deleting the figure “2,000” and replacing it by the figure “1,000”;
- (x) by inserting, after paragraph (aa), the following new paragraphs, the existing paragraphs (ab) and (ac) being relettered as paragraphs (af) and (ag), respectively –
 - (ab) in item 163, by deleting the figure “1,000” and replacing it by the figure “3,000”;
 - (ac) in item 164, by deleting the figure “1,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
 - (ad) in item 165, by deleting the figure “2,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
 - (ae) in item 168, by deleting the figure “1,000” and replacing it by the figure “5,000”;
- (xi) in the newly relettered paragraph (af), by deleting the figure “2,000” and replacing it by the figure “1,000”;

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 and 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

Motion made and question proposed: “that the Schedule stand part of the Bill”

Mr Ganoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendments to the Schedule as per amendment –

“by deleting the Schedule and replacing it by the following Schedule –

SCHEDULE

[Section 11(b)]

12. Failing to give way when coming out of a less FWAY03

important road onto a more important one

(section 163 and regulation 40(5) of the Road Traffic Regulations 1954)

- 13.** Failing to wear high visibility clothing whilst riding an auto cycle as rider MCAC34

(regulations 2, 3(1) and 5 of the Road Traffic (Use of High Visibility Clothing) Regulations 2013

- 14.** Failing to wear high visibility clothing whilst riding a motorcycle as rider MCAC35

(regulations 2, 3(1) and 5 of the Road Traffic (Use of High Visibility Clothing) Regulations 2013

- 15.** Failing to overtake traffic on the right DRIV49

(section 163 and regulation 40(1)(f) of the Road Traffic Regulations 1954)

- 16.** Obstructing traffic coming from the opposite direction whilst overtaking DRIV50

(section 163 and regulation 40(1)(g) of the Road Traffic Regulations 1954)

- 17.** Autocycle or motorcycle not fitted with a rear view mirror in the manner prescribed MIRR08

(Regulations 19(3) and 125 of the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations 2010

- 18.** Riding a motorcycle abreast of another two-wheel MCAC36

vehicle

(section 163 and regulation 40(14)(e) of the Road Traffic Regulations 1954)

- 19.** Riding an auto cycle abreast of another two-wheel vehicle MCAC37

(regulation 40(14)(e) of the Road Traffic Regulations 1954 and section 163)

- 20.** Failing to comply with traffic sign whilst driving by not conforming with lane selection arrow SIGN23

(sections 123AD and 163 of the Road Traffic Act and the Traffic Signs Regulations 1990)

- 21.** Breach of lane discipline on a dual carriageway LANE06

(section 123AM(2), (3), (4), (5) and (6) of the Road Traffic Act)

- 22.** Breach of conditions imposed by the Commissioner of Police when taking part in a race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on a road DRIV52

(section 125 of the Road Traffic Act)

- 23.** Taking part in a race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on a road without the consent of the Commissioner of Police DRIV53

(section 125 of the Road Traffic Act)

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 02 July 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Adjournment matters! Go ahead!

MATTERS RAISED

(10.47 p.m.)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 3 – MAGON STREET – JARDIN COCO & SURROUNDINGS – MAINTENANCE

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 hon. Minister of Local Government and it is in relation to the derelict state of Jardin Coco which is found more precisely at the end of Magon street just after the Mauritius Telecom building which is found in my constituency, Constituency No. 3.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister of inadequate lighting at the garden and also the nearby roads. Also, the presence of waste near and down the bridge, lack of slabs and leakage of CWA water which dates back to very long. So, I would

therefore request the hon. Minister if needful could be done to remedy the situation as soon as possible.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Yes, Mr Speaker Sir, I will pass on the message to the Municipal Council of Port Louis to look into it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Tour!

(10.48 p.m.)

CONGOMAH -BELVÉDÈRE ROAD – REPAIRS

Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable Dr. Husnoo, ministre des Collectivités locales concernant la route Belvédère à Congomah qui est endommagée. Je demanderai donc à l'honorable ministre de bien vouloir intervenir auprès du conseil de district de Pamplemousses pour réparer ce tronçon de route, car nous avons reçu plusieurs plaintes des habitants. La route impraticable. Merci.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Yes, Mr Speaker Sir, I will pass on the message to the District Council of Pamplemousses.

(10.49 p.m.)

PORT LOUIS – MONSEIGNEUR LEEN AVENUE – CROSSWALK

INSTALLATION

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président, la requête que je souhaite évoquer concerne ministère de *Land Transport and Light Rail*. Les habitants de la rue Monseigneur Leen à Port Louis éprouvent des difficultés à traverser le chemin parce que la circulation est très dense. Donc, les enfants, les étudiants qui doivent traverser la route pour descendre jusqu'à la rue Moka pour prendre l'autobus ou le *Flyover* ne peuvent pas traverser la rue parce qu'il y a trop de circulation. Donc, à travers l'honorable ministre, je fais un appel à lui et au *Traffic Management Road Safety Unit* pour faire un passage pour piétons à la rue Monseigneur Leen près du passage qui mène au *Flyover* le long de la rue Moka. Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened very carefully to the hon. Member. I have taken good note of his comment and of his request. I will certainly liaise with the TMRSU in the coming days in order to find a solution to the problem.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell! Time to go home!

At 10.49 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 02 July 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT – SOUTH AFRICA’S ICJ CASE – MAURITIUS’ STAND

(No. B/445) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the case filed by the Republic of South Africa at the International Court of Justice for alleged violation by the State of Israel of its obligations under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, he will state the stand the Government of Mauritius proposes to take thereon.

(Withdrawn)

ELIMINATION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE – HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE – MEETINGS – JANUARY 2022-JUNE 2024

(No. B/446) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether in regard to the High-Level Committee on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence, he will state the number of meetings thereof held since January 2022 to date, indicating the main recommendations thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS – LEGISLATION AMENDMENT

(No. B/447) 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 Local Government Elections, he will state if consideration will be given for amendments to be brought to the relevant legislation with a view to render the holding thereof mandatory within a prescribed time period.

(Withdrawn)

**STC – PETROLEUM PRODUCTS – EXPENSES INCURRED – TAXES
COLLECTED**

(No. B/483) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to petroleum products, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, for the period January 2024 to date, information as to the –

- (a) volume of diesel and Mogas imported, indicating the expenses incurred at CIF value, and
- (b) taxes collected from the sales thereof.

(Withdrawn)

METRO EXPRESS LTD. – LOANS & OTHER FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

(No. B/484) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro Express Ltd., he will state the amount of loans and other financial support extended thereto by Government since its inception to date.

(Withdrawn)

**PRIVATE & PUBLIC PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – INDISCIPLINE –
NO. OF CASES**

(No. B/485) 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 indiscipline in private and public primary and secondary schools since January 2015 to 2023 and January 2024 to date, she will state the number of reported cases thereof category-wise, on a yearly basis.

(Withdrawn)

WAGE RELATIVITY ADJUSTMENT – STATUS

(No. B/486) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in regard to the wage relativity adjustment for workers following the increase in minimum wage, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

MORCELLEMENT CHAMPAN VIEW – CYCLONE BELAL – ROADS REINSTATEMENT

(No. B/487) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Morcellement Chapman View, Coromandel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin and Rose Hill, information as to when works for the reinstatement of the roads severely damaged thereat during the passage of cyclone Belal will start.

(Withdrawn)

LANDSCOPE MAURITIUS LTD – LA MARIE, GLEN PARK AND PLAINE SOPHIE – LAND – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/490) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the 2000 arpents of land which are managed by Landscape Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of planters who have benefitted therefrom, indicating the number thereof in the regions of La Marie, Glen Park and Plaine Sophie.

(Withdrawn)

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF VACOAS-PHOENIX – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/491) 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 Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the financial situation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

NTC – REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE OF BUSES – MECHANICS’ TRAINING

(No. A/31) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if the mechanics thereof are properly trained for the repairs and maintenance of buses thereof.

Reply: The National Transport Corporation has a total of 118 Mechanics, posted at its 5 Depots and its Central Workshop at Bonne Terre, Vacoas.

The main duties of the Mechanics are to –

- i. overhaul and reassemble the simple mechanical assembly of vehicles;
- ii. locate and repair minor mechanical faults, and
- iii. carry out minor adjustments to mechanical parts of a motor vehicle, both petrol and diesel propelled and perform its maintenance and that of its components.

Repairs, servicing and maintenance works of the NTC buses are carried out both in-house and contracted out to external service providers.

All recruited Mechanics are trained in-house under the supervision of the Workshop Supervisors and Technical and Mechanical Officers / Senior Technical and Mechanical Officers. In addition, a total of 78 Mechanics were trained by the ABC Coach Works Ltd, from year 2022 to year 2023.

The workshops are headed by a Technical and Mechanical Officer / Senior Technical and Mechanical Officer. The Mechanics report to the Workshop Supervisors and the latter to the Technical and Mechanical Officer / Senior Technical and Mechanical Officer.

Presently, the National Transport Corporation has 6 Technical and Mechanical Officers/Senior Technical and Mechanical Officers and 15 Workshop Supervisors.

The majority of the Mechanics at the National Transport Corporation have more than 20 years' working experience.

Furthermore, the recruitment of Mechanics is conducted through a selection exercise following an open advertisement. All candidates that have been recruited by the National Transport Corporation meet the eligibility criteria as laid down in the Scheme of Service. The requirements are as follows –

- i. Minimum age 22 years;
- ii. A National Trade Certificate Level 3 in Heavy Vehicle Mechanics, and
- iii. 3 years proven experience in repairs and maintenance of heavy duty vehicle.

ST LOUIS METRO STATION – AVERAGE DAILY RIDERSHIP

(No. A/32) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the St Louis Metro Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Metro Express Ltd., information as to the average daily ridership thereat.

Reply: According to the Metro Express Ltd., the average daily ridership for the St Louis Metro Station is around 400 passengers. The commuters are mainly from the Industrial Zone in that vicinity and the residents of St Louis, Camp Chapelon and Pailles regions.

MARE CHICOSE LANDFILL – JV SOTRAVIC/ENEOTECH CONTRACT – PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES

(No. A/33) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the new

contract allocated to the Joint Venture Sotravic/Eneotech for two months for an amount of Rs70m, he will state if emergency procedure has been resorted to for the allocation thereof and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Reply: The contract for the operation and maintenance of the Mare Chicose Landfill & works for creation of void space for the months of May and June 2024 was awarded to the JV Sotravic/Eneotech on 29 April 2024 based on Direct Emergency Procurement for the amount MUR 70,023,534.80 inclusive of VAT.

All statutory requirements have fully been adhered to procuring the contract. Hence, based on Section 21 of the Public Procurement Act, the scope of Emergency Procurement has been limited to the period of emergency. Furthermore, Direct Emergency Procurement was conducted with the serving Contractor JV Sotravic/ Eneotech in accordance with Regulation 5C(2)(e).

The award of this Contract has become necessary following delay in awarding the Contract for Vertical Expansion Works & Operations.

Although the CPB has in January 2024 recommended the award of a contract for the Vertical Expansion Works/Operations, same could not be effected as the land where the main civil works for the Vertical Expansion project would be executed had not been secured. At the end of April 2024, it was estimated that the purchase of land would materialise within a period of two months, thus justifying the selected contract period.

I must point out that we are now proceeding with the award of the contract for the Vertical Expansion Works and Operations as we have now been able to secure the land.

I wish to pinpoint that Landfill Works constitute a specialised field of civil and environmental engineering which requires the mobilisation of specialised plant and equipment to create void space as well as the amenities to enable landfilling operations. These equipment include a landfill compactor, high capacity bulldozers and adapted drilling equipment for landfill gas works which are not readily available locally. The mobilisation of these equipment from abroad would easily require 2-3 months.

Opening a short-term contract to international tendering, which itself requires a minimum period of ninety days, would have resulted in higher prices due to the mobilisation of numerous heavy/specialised equipment for a short period. These reasons amply justified the recourse to Direct Emergency Procurement as provided under Regulations 5C(2)(e).

On a commercial aspect, it is to be emphasised that the Emergency Contract with JV Sotravic/Eneotech was built on rates and other terms and conditions from an existing contract (Cell 7 Contract) itself awarded through a competitive procedure. The rates were however subject to cost adjustment based on a formula in the original contract to compensate for inflation.

Landfill disposal operations is an ongoing essential activity which we cannot take the risk of any disruption as this would lead to upstream accumulation of waste at generators' premises and open dumps with all associated environmental and public health impacts.

Hence, the Ministry had no other choice than to award a short-term contract under Emergency Procurement to the serving contractor pending the award of the Vertical Expansion Contract, which will soon be effected.