



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2025

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)

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

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Madam Speaker	Hon. Mrs Shirin Aumeeruddy-Cziffra
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Vedasingam Vasudevachariar Baloomoody
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Mohamed Ehsan Juman
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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 11 of 2025

Sitting of Tuesday 15 April 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry of Finance

Ministry for Rodrigues and Outer Islands

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):
 - (i) The Supplementary Appropriation (2023 – 2024) (No. 2) Bill (No. VIII of 2025); and
 - (ii) The Supplementary Appropriation (2024 – 2025) Bill (No. IX of 2025).
- (b) Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2023-2024) (No. 2) of 2025.
- (c) Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2024-2025) of 2025.
- (d) The Income Tax (Financial Assistance for Payment of Special Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 35 of 2025)

B. Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Research

The Annual Reports and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the University of Technology, Mauritius for the years ended 30 June, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

C. Ministry of Arts and Culture

The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the English-Speaking Union for the year ended 30 June 2024.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the floor is yours.

STC – FINANCIAL SITUATION – EXPECTED WINDFALL GAIN

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the –

- (a) financial situation thereof for the year ending 30 June 2024, and
- (b) expected windfall gain to be derived by the Corporation over the next four months with respect to the unchanged retail prices of Mogas and Gasoil.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Minister!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for this question.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the financial statements of the State Trading Corporation are currently being audited by the National Audit Office and will be submitted to the House in due course.

I am further informed that in Financial Year 2023-2024, the State Trading Corporation (STC) recorded a net surplus of Rs1.5 billion from the sales of non-subsidised products. As of 30 June 2024, the Corporation's cash and cash equivalents stood at Rs2.7 billion, while inventories were valued at Rs637 million. However, by 11 April 2025, the net cash available had decreased to Rs1.7 billion, reflecting ongoing financial commitments and market conditions.

It is worth noting that the surplus is used to cater for the daily operational expenses of the STC, which includes the purchase of foreign currency to effect payment to suppliers for all the products that the STC imports for the country, which amounts to about Rs4 billion each month.

Additionally, I wish to inform the House that the subsidy account of the STC currently has a deficit of around Rs1.8 billion, while the Price Stabilisation Account has an overall deficit of Rs2.8 billion as at date.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question on the expected windfall gain, I wish to provide the House with the following clarification and facts –

1. As hon. Members are aware, the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011, as amended, provide a robust framework to ensure transparency and fairness in fuel pricing.

The Price Stabilisation Account (PSA) was established to absorb fluctuations in global fuel prices and smoothen the impact on consumers. The difference between the regulated retail price and the actual calculated price of fuel is credited or debited to the PSA accordingly.

2. The Petroleum Pricing Committee (PPC) met most recently, on 11 April 2025, to assess the current market data and projection. It was observed that for Mogas, the calculated price stood at Rs59.70 per litre against a maintained retail price of Rs61.20, a marginal over-recovery of Rs1.30 per litre. For gas oil, the calculated price was Rs52.61 per litre against a retail price of Rs58.95, indicating a greater over-recovery of Rs5.51 per litre.
3. Based on the national consumption levels of approximately 500 million litres annually for both fuel types, that is, Mogas and Gasoil, the four months consumption is projected at around 166 million litres for both products. Subject to there being any turbulence in the global prices of Mogas and Gasoil, the STC may make an estimated notional surplus or windfall gain of Mogas Rs108 million, and Gasoil Rs459 million, a total of Rs567 million over the period April to July 2025.
4. However, it is imperative to note that these funds do not constitute commercial profits for the STC; rather, they are automatically credited to the Price Stabilisation Account as mandated by Regulation 4 of the 2011 Regulations. These proceeds are used to compensate for past periods of under-recovery when global prices exceeded retail prices, build reserves to mitigate future volatility in global petroleum markets, and safeguard the purchasing power of consumers through stable pricing.
5. As of 08 April 2025, the PSA continued to reflect a net deficit of Rs2.8 billion down from Rs4.2 billion at the end of June 2024 and its peak of Rs5.2 billion in September 2023, while the PSA for Mogas moved into a slight surplus of Rs300 million. The PSA for Gasoil remains in deficit to the tune of Rs3.1 billion. It is,

therefore, clear that the notional surpluses are being used to offset this accumulated deficit.

6. Furthermore, the STC has had to resort to foreign currency loans amounting to Rs8.1 billion to ensure uninterrupted fuel imports during periods of USD shortage. This further underscores the importance of using any other recoveries to strengthen STC's financial position and protect national energy security.

In conclusion, while a national surplus of Rs567 million may accrue over the next four months if international trends hold CD, this must be reviewed in context. These are not profits, but regulated buffer accumulation intended solely for price stabilisation and the financial recovery of the PSA.

The Ministry and the STC remain firmly committed to ensuring that every rupee collected under this mechanism is transparently accounted for and used in the public's interest.

Madam Speaker, as I have explained in my recent intervention on the media, this Government has inherited a catastrophic economic legacy from the previous government as published in the recent State of the Economy Report, which details the excesses done and the financial mismanagement by the previous government. We have a public debt of not less than Rs644 billion, representing 90.4% of GDP. Government deficit stands at 9.3% of GDP. We are on the watchlist of Moody's. Any downgrade to 'Junk Status' will be catastrophic for the country.

We already have the unpredictability of trade tariffs and potential global recession looming. We have to ensure that the country and its institutions are rebuilt on strong foundations where ethics and good governance prevail. This is where we intend to go and lead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition! You have a supplementary question?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. I have listened carefully to the hon. Minister. In view of the profit recorded - he said of the order of Rs1.5 billion - by the State Trading Corporation, may I ask him whether he will inform the House why Government is not keeping its promise of reducing the prices of Mogas and Gasoil by at least Rs20? A

promise which was made by the hon. Prime Minister, by several hon. Ministers on the other side, and also by MPs before the last general elections.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister, I thought you had replied!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I will reply, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Again!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madame la présidente, le MSM nous a laissé un héritage lourd et déficitaire. Dans la plupart des ministères et corps paraétatiques, on note les suivants. Ce monsieur ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Non, non!

(Interruptions)

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: ... il était ministre...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Non, non!

(Interruptions)

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Le leader de l'opposition...

(Interruptions)

I will rephrase.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I will rephrase.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: We do not...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Le leader de l'opposition était ministre de l'Énergie. Au *CEB*, il y avait R 243 millions de déficits, mal gérés malheureusement ! C'est pourquoi on voit la *FCC* partout. La *CWA* a un déficit de R 300 millions. À la *Wastewater Management Authority*, un déficit de R 527 millions. Il y a des emprunts partout.

À la *STC*, je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, le *subsidy account* de la *STC* a un déficit de R 1,8 milliard. On a hérité, Madame la présidente, ...

An hon. Member: *Dan valiz!*

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Et aussi, la *PSA* avait un déficit de R 3,4 milliards en novembre 2024.

Ms Anquetil: Lamentable !

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Et aujourd'hui, ce déficit a été réduit à R 2,8 milliards. Je dois aussi dire qu'on va tenir nos promesses. Je dois vous dire, Madame la présidente, que *some of our measures in our Programme have been implemented; some will be implemented in the next month, and some will be implemented next year. We will do whatever needs to be done to redress this country. We will do everything to redress this economy!*

Ms Anquetil: Yes!

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Another question?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Madam Speaker. The hon. Minister is trying to make us understand that they were not aware of the situation at the level of the *PSA*. Madam Speaker, the *STC* has press releases every time the *Petroleum Pricing Committee* sits. So, they were very much aware of the situation. Then, why did you make that promise to the population?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, one moment! Are you questioning him on his action or on his promise?

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: On both, Madam Speaker!

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, do you want to reply?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I can reply, Madam Speaker. I will tell him why he did not do the...

Madam Speaker: Do not call him 'him'!

(Interruptions)

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Okay, no problem!

Madame la présidente, au niveau de la PSA, en 2023, le 30 septembre 2023, il y avait un déficit de R 5,2 milliards. Ce que le leader de l'opposition propose, il aurait pu le faire avant, en 2023 !

Madam Speaker: Voilà!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mais pour nous, notre priorité, c'est de redresser l'économie. C'est cela qu'on va faire !

Madam Speaker: Très bien!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Et de soulager les consommateurs quand on pourra le faire. On est sérieux et on va le faire !

Madam Speaker: Merci. L'honorable Jhummun!

Mr Jhummun: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: I have a point of order, Madam Speaker! PNQ is my question time, Madam Speaker. I need to finish my question! Then, you can give questions to Members of Parliament.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Under what...

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, of course! This has been...

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhummun: You are challenging the authority of the Speaker!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Which Standing Order are you referring to?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if I may. We have until 12:04hrs. What if he does not get a chance to talk? He caught my eye!

Mr Lesjongard: No, but as a matter of principle, Madam Speaker!

An hon. Member: *Aster princip!*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhummun!

Mr Jhummun: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Be to the point, please!

Mr Jhummun: Yes. Can the hon. Minister inform the House about the year-on-year financial state of the Price Stabilisation Account (PSA) over the last five years, and what was done with surpluses or windfall gains, as we have just heard, in those days when same arose? Thank you.

An hon. Member: *Zot ti pe kokin !*

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madame la présidente, malheureusement, l'ancien gouvernement n'a rien fait. Mais j'ai le plaisir de *table* les chiffres de la PSA depuis 2021. Peut-être, je peux mentionner quelques points. Donc –

- le 28 décembre 2021, il y avait un déficit de R 1,5 milliards ;
- en février 2022 : R 2,1 milliards ;
- le 19 avril 2022 : R 2,8 milliards ;
- le 18 mai 2022 : R 3,3 milliards ;
- le 13 septembre 2022 : R 4,5 milliards ;
- le 12 janvier 2023 : R 4,4 milliards ;
- le 11 mai 2023 : R 4,7 milliards ;
- le 2 juin 2023 : R 4,3 milliards ;

- le *peak*, le 30 septembre 2023 : R 5,2 milliards ;
- en octobre 2023 : R 5 milliards ;
- le 27 janvier 2024 : R 4,2 milliards ;
- le 24 mai 2024 : R 4,2 milliards ;
- le 18 septembre 2024 : R 3,8 milliards, et
- nous, en novembre, nous avons hérité de R 3.4 milliards.

Et aujourd'hui, on a pu faire baisser la *PSA*, et elle est arrivée à R 2,8 milliards, parce qu'on a une équipe sérieuse. On est là pour redresser l'économie, et c'est ce qu'on va faire.

Madam Speaker: Merci, Monsieur le ministre!

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please! Hon. Members!

Mr Lesjongard: From what the hon. Minister said, then, can I request or ask the hon. Minister whether he can consider reducing further the deficit of the Price Stabilisation Account through the surplus made by the STC for the year 2024 with a view to decrease the retail price of Mogas and Gasoil?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, you spoke of national energy security.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: We will definitely reduce the deficit because *en fait, on est une équipe expérimentée – l'équipe du Cabinet – et aussi, une équipe sérieuse.*

Madam Speaker: Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In view of the continuing decline of petroleum product prices on the world market, now with the OPEC countries increasing their production by 410,000 barrels per day as from the month of May, will the hon. Minister consider scheduling monthly meetings of the Petroleum Pricing Committee so that consumers benefit same and do not have to wait for four months for the revisions of prices of Mogas and Gasoil?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, his question is irrelevant, but I am pleased to inform him that...

The Deputy Prime Minister: Childish!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: ... the PPC can meet every four months, and also, we can meet more than once in these four months. We can also meet next week or tomorrow if we want. We do not need to wait for four months. If the price goes down and we see that we can decrease the price, we will do it. Okay? We do not need to wait for four months.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, the Petroleum Pricing Mechanism has been frequently criticised by several members of the current Government who were at that time in the Opposition. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has plans to review and make changes to that Petroleum Pricing Mechanism, and if so, what is his time frame?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: First of all, we need to reimburse the deficit, then we can think about other calculations and so on. First of all, we need to replenish the deficit.

Madam Speaker: Okay. You have finished, Leader of the Opposition?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Because, Madam Speaker, we have inherited from the previous government of which he was a member.

An hon. Member: Clear your mess!

Madam Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, your friend is asking ...

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I'll give him the floor. Do not worry...

Madam Speaker: In the past, let me say ...

(Interruptions)

One moment!

In the past, when hon. A. Duval has asked to speak on your time for PNQ, I have often given him the time before you finish. I just wanted to make sure that everybody sees that I am not looking one way only. So, you will give him time, perhaps. We do not have much time left.

Mr Lesjongard: I have two last questions, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Maybe he will not get time then.

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to the price structure, in the electoral manifesto of the actual Government under the heading “*Coût de la vie et Pouvoir d’Achat*”, it is stated that Government will review the price structure of Mogas and Gasoil with a view to reduce the retail price. May I ask the hon. Minister whether this is still on the agenda of Government and what is the time frame?

Madam Speaker: I think he has already answered this question.

Mr Lesjongard: No, on the price structure, Madam Speaker!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, everybody is going to a Speaker today?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: *2 fwa mem kestion.* It is the same question!

Madam Speaker: I am here until very late and the day is very young.

(Interruptions)

Yes, hon. Prime Minister, the day is young now.

So, I want you to be... I mean, we can do the usual, but the day is young, we have got plenty of time; and time is running. So, he has already replied to that question. Your last question!

Mr Lesjongard: This is on the price structure and not on the mechanism...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I can reply, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay, price structure!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, in fact, as I have said before, the PSA has a deficit. We have a deficit of Rs2.8 billion right now. We need to reimburse this deficit, and then, from there, we may decide. It will be a government decision to see whether we will review the price structure. But, first of all, we need to look for this money; the deficit that they created.

(Interruptions)

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Last question, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: My last question, Madam Speaker: will the hon. Minister agree that there is a growing frustration and anger among consumers with the recent decision to

maintain the status quo on the prices of Mogas and Gasoil, and not only on that but also on the high prices of foodstuffs despite the Government promised to tackle the cost-of-living crisis?

(Interruptions)

I still remember, when the hon. Minister was in the Opposition...

Madam Speaker: Question! Question!

Mr Lesjongard: ...he brought *chouchou* to this House, saying that people were complaining. This is the actual situation out there, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It does not call for any reply. I have Mr Ramdass who has asked and then you.

Mr Ramdass: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, would the hon. Minister be in a position to enlighten the House as to the composition of the Board of the STC, if he has this information available, of course?

Madam Speaker: Yes! Is that okay? Can you answer?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Yes, Madam Speaker, I have the composition of the Board of STC. Yes, I can table it, the Chairperson is Dr. Takesh Luckho. I will table the details.

Madam Speaker: You will table!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Hon. A. Duval!

Mr A. Duval: Madam Speaker, does the Minister not find it most unfair that the CIF price, for example, of Mogas is Rs26.8 and the retail price is Rs61, more than double, due to taxes, on top of which the VAT – the only product in Mauritius on which VAT is charged, taking into consideration all the taxes plus the CIF price – on Mogas is Rs7.8 and on Gasoil is Rs7.6? Does he not find it most unfair then that VAT is being charged on the value of the CIF plus excise duty and all the other taxes and, therefore, does he not propose...

Madam Speaker: Do not repeat!

Mr A. Duval: Yes! Does he not propose *de tenir sa parole* and to abolish this system of computation of VAT on the total price?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let the Minister reply, please!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, his party was in Government at a certain time.

(Interruptions)

Pourquoi n'ont-ils pas changé la structure ? Mais je dois ajouter, Madam Speaker, that the money that is being collected on Mogas and Gasoil is given back to the population through subsidies. It also helps to maintain our welfare State. The contribution was introduced in the past, and they have not been removed by successive governments in a spirit of solidarity.

Mr A. Duval: VAT, Madam Speaker!

Madam Speaker: He is talking. Please!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: *Taler to repoz li!*

Your dad was Minister of Finance, *kifer li pann tir sa?*

Mr Jhummun: Exactement !

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Mr A. Duval: Madam Speaker, the pledge that was taken by the Government was taken at a time when the *Alliance du Changement* was fully aware of the Price Stabilisation Account deficit. In fact, Madam Speaker, if you look at the peak, 5.1, for example...

Madam Speaker: I am sorry; this question has already been asked by the Leader of the Opposition!

Mr A. Duval: No, Madam Speaker. May I ask my question? The question is at the peak, the previous government had reduced the deficit by more than Rs1.2 billion on Mogas and, at the same time, you made the pledge to decrease the price of fuel by Rs20, by a third, knowing that there was the Price Stabilisation Account, and by the way, the deficit has been reduced to a greater extent by the previous government. The question is: why then have you made such a pledge?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, we were not aware of the state of the economy at that time.

(Interruptions)

On a hérité d'une situation catastrophique. Premièrement, il faut redresser l'économie le plus vite possible !

(Interruptions)

C'est cela qu'il faut faire.

(Interruptions)

Il faut mettre de l'ordre !

(Interruptions)

Et c'est pourquoi, entre temps, on voit qu'il y a beaucoup de soucis dans plusieurs ministères, et on a vu à travers les médias que la FCC est en train de faire beaucoup d'enquêtes. Beaucoup d'anciens ministres...

(Interruptions)

... font le va-et-vient entre la FCC et chez eux.

(Interruptions)

Et on a vu les dégâts que l'ancien gouvernement et ses ministres ont faits. Malheureusement, on en a hérité. Il faut reconstruire le pays actuellement, et on va le faire ensemble avec le peuple.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Next question!

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the composition of the Board of the Petroleum Pricing Committee?

An hon. Member: Table it! Table it!

Mr Beejan: No, for PPC!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, yes, I do not mind tabling the...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Ce n'est pas la même chose !

(Interruptions)

Je crois que ce n'est pas la même chose !

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: ...list, the composition of the Petroleum Pricing Committee. Okay? I have the paper here.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Yes, alright. I got two minutes left.

Okay, now we move on!

Hon. Members: Bravo! Bravo Michael! Own goal!

Madam Speaker: Questions! Hon. Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil! Yes, hon. Beehook!

MRA – VAT REGISTERED ENTITIES – TAX COLLECTION – 2019-2024

(No. B/355) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Mauritius Revenue Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number of entities registered for Value Added Tax thereat for the period 2019 to 2024, indicating the –

- (a) number of companies and persons registered therefor, and
- (b) annual amount of tax collected therefrom.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the MRA that the total number of VAT registered entities, including companies and persons, was as follows –

- (i) 16,231 in 2019;
- (ii) 17,393 in 2020;
- (iii) 19,368 in 2021;
- (iv) 21,543 in 2022;
- (v) 24,046 in 2023, and
- (vi) 26,467 in 2024.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I am tabling the number of VAT registered entities, including the number of companies and persons.

As regards part (b) of the question, the total amount of VAT collected was as follows –

- (i) Rs35.8 billion in 2019;
- (ii) Rs29.6 billion in 2020;
- (iii) Rs31.5 billion in 2021;
- (iv) Rs43.4 billion in 2022;
- (v) Rs50.6 billion in 2023, and
- (vi) Rs57 billion in 2024.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister.

Yes, please.

Mr Beehook: *Merci*, Madam Speaker. From information I gather, some 20,000 businesses ceased operations from 2019 to 2024. No doubt thousands of SMEs ran out of business due to an average inflation rate of 3.5%. Since the VAT threshold of Rs6 million has remained unchanged for almost a decade, will the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, out of compassion, kindly consider increasing that VAT threshold in order to support SMEs which are the backbone of this economy?

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

The Prime Minister: In fact, when you say that for a decade it has not changed, well, it has nearly changed – it was Rs4 million in 2015, and it became Rs6 million, but, as the hon. Minister of Commerce has said, the problem is that we have a huge debt. I cannot afford to allow the debt to increase. We just cannot do it!

Madam Speaker: Yes. Hon. First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix!

PHOENIX – NEW POLICE STATION

(No. B/356) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new Police Station at Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Phoenix Police Station is housed in its current location since 1959. The Phoenix Police Station serves an extensive jurisdiction covering approximately 21 square kilometres,

with an estimated population of 125,000 residents. It provides law enforcement services to several localities, including commercial zones and shopping malls.

I am further informed, Madam Speaker, by the Commissioner of Police that a tender has been launched on 28 March 2025, for the construction of a new, modern Police Station at Phoenix. The new Police Station will be constructed adjacent to the existing building and is designed to meet the contemporary needs of the Police in the region. The construction is expected to start in August of this year.

Madam Speaker: Yes, alright. Hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière!

MAURITIUS POLICE FORCE – NEW RECRUITS & BASIC SALARY

(No. B/357) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Mauritius Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number of Police Officers recruited since 2019 to date on a yearly basis, per batch, indicating the number of officers who have –
 - (i) successfully completed the training programme, and
 - (ii) left the Police force and the reasons thereof, and
- (b) starting basic salary of new recruits.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as regards parts (a)(i) and (ii) of the question, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. member.

However, I wish to highlight that from 2019 to 2024, out of a total of 2,511 recruits, 159 have resigned for various reasons.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the starting salary for Temporary Police Constables/Woman Police Constables is Rs18,650 monthly. After completion of the Recruit Foundation Course, which varies from six to nine months, they are also paid a salary compensation of Rs4,010 which then brings their gross salary to Rs22,660.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. Le Premier ministre peut-il informer la Chambre quels sont les critères de recrutement pour la force policière qui sont actuellement en cours ?

The Prime Minister: This is the same criteria laid down by the Discipline Forces Service Commission, Madam Speaker. I believe, when I was Prime Minister, I myself asked for it to be changed to lower the entry requirements.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Mr Quirin: Madame la présidente, le Premier ministre peut-il nous dire comment est calculé le nombre de policiers qui doivent être recrutés chaque année, et combien de policiers doit-on avoir dans chaque poste de police – si jamais il a les informations, bien sûr ?

The Prime Minister: Difficult to say that. In fact, it is like asking how long is a piece of string; we cannot just say that. I do not know. Apparently, they recruit when there is actually the need for recruitment. This is what we are told.

Madam Speaker: Yes?

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. Le Premier ministre vient de nous dire effectivement qu'il compte revoir les critères de recrutement dans la mesure du possible...

(Interruptions)

Non ? Ce n'est pas cela qu'il a dit ? Mais, moi, ma question est la suivante, Madame la présidente. Ne pense-t-il pas que la qualification académique minimum pour la force policière – et je vais dire pourquoi – devrait être le *School Certificate*, mais aussi privilégier le physique, parce que, de nos jours, quand nous sommes sur le terrain, le constat qu'on fait malheureusement, ce sont des policiers qui n'ont pas le physique de l'emploi ? Le Premier ministre peut-il nous dire s'il compte revoir ces critères et favoriser les recrues qui ont un physique à faire douter les voyous ?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Thank you. I believe that is what I said...

(Interruptions)

I believe that I myself...

(Interruptions)

Mr Quirin: Next time!

Madam Speaker: Very interesting!

The Prime Minister: Next life!

(Interruptions)

I believe I myself, when I was Prime Minister, asked – and it was done – that we reduce the entry requirements to a lower level. And as for the physical, I have already mentioned that, but I think I must agree; there are certain cases...

Madam Speaker: It exists...

The Prime Minister: ...where we see...

Madam Speaker: It exists already!

The Prime Minister: It exists...

Madam Speaker: Of course!

The Prime Minister: ... I think, as far as I know, because I asked for it to be reduced. I think it has been reduced because I remember *Père* Grégoire came to see me to thank me for that because he felt that certain communities were being discriminated, but, as you say, I agree with you that the physique of the person is very important. I believe it is being taken care of. What happens probably is that they grow fat afterwards.

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: *Elle est bonne celle-là !*

Madam Speaker: But they go for training. They do training every day from what I know!

Yes, where are we now? Hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, Mr Caserne!

MAURITIAN PASSPORT – BIOMETRIC FORMAT – CONVERSION

(No. B/358) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in

regard to the Mauritian passport, he will state if consideration will be given for the conversion thereof into biometric format and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as announced in the Government Programme 2025-2029, my Government will introduce biometric passport with advanced encryption and anti-tampering mechanism.

The biometric passports, known as e-Passports, will incorporate biometric data which will facilitate the verification of the identity of the passport holder. It will also reduce the risk of identity fraud. It will also ensure faster immigration clearance, and visa waivers for many countries. Many countries tend to waive the visa requirement if you have the biometric passport.

My Office, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, is currently working on the specifications for the biometric passport.

There was an attempt to do that in the past, but *cela paraissait très louche*.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

POLICE INQUIRIES – RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS’ RANKS

(No. B/359) Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Police inquiries, he will, for the benefit of the house, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the rank of the Police Officers responsible for the determination of the section of the law under which charges are preferred against suspects, indicating if legal advice is sought prior thereto.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, in accordance with section 131 of the Police Standing Orders, the responsibility to determine the section of the law under which charges are preferred against accused parties, rests upon completion of the enquiry. It is as follows –

- (i) For cases classified as crimes, it is by the Superintendent of Police and above;

- (ii) For cases classified as Misdemeanours, it is by Assistant Superintendent of Police and above, and
- (iii) For cases classified as contraventions, it is by Chief Inspector of Police/Inspector of Police and above.

Certain cases that are not classified as either a crime, a misdemeanour, or a contravention, such as industrial accidents and injuries, loss of documents and cards, minor road traffic accidents, and missing persons, are dealt with an officer not below the rank of Chief Inspector of Police.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that for certain offences under specific legislation, such as drug offences, fatal road accidents, homicides, and sexual offences, after completion of the enquiry, such cases are referred to the Office of the Director of the Public Prosecutions for advice.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mrs Savabaddy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that sometimes the charges against suspects are not proportionate to the offences? Cases of severe wounds and blows or severe assault causing effusion of blood, for example, end up as simple larcenies, and this must be addressed. Can the Police take legal advice from the DPP before levelling proper charges against accused parties so that the faulters do not get away scot-free? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: I will certainly pass on that suggestion to the Police.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

**2% CORPORATE CLIMATE RESPONSIBILITY LEVY – MUR 50 MILLION
TURNOVER FIRMS – REVENUE GENERATED**

(No. B/360) **Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the 2 per cent Corporate Climate Responsibility levy charged on firms having a turnover of more than MUR 50 million in the global business sector, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the revenue generated since its introduction to date, and
- (b) state its impact on the global business sector, indicating the purpose thereof.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that the revenue generated since the introduction of the levy up to end of March 2025 amounted to Rs2.1 billion, out of which, Rs652 million were paid by enterprises holding a global business licence.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that the effective rate of the levy for many enterprises in the global business sector is actually 0.4% or lower in view of the fact that these enterprises avail themselves of a partial exemption of 80% on specified income or foreign tax credit offsets.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Jhummun: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there is the possibility of removing the 2% levy tax because other jurisdictions like the Islands of Man and Jersey, our two main competitors, have a lower rate than us?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I wish to inform the House that representatives of the global business sector have expressed concerns about the CCR levy, claiming that it will negatively affect the long-term competitiveness of the services sector.

I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that data for the period July to December 2024 – which I think you asked for – is 6 months after the announcement of the introduction of the CCR levy. Therefore, the new global business company licence has increased by an average of 8% compared to the period of July to December 2023.

Now, these concerns are being analysed by my Ministry, together with the Ministry of Financial Services and Economic Planning, in consultation with the Mauritius Revenue Authority, the Financial Services Commission, and other concerned stakeholders.

To complete, the CCR levy was applied indiscriminately to all enterprises with a turnover exceeding Rs50 million.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

GOODLANDS POLICE STATION – POLICE OFFICERS & VEHICLES

(No. B/361) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Goodlands Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of –
 - (i) Police Officers posted thereat, indicating their respective rankings;
 - (ii) vehicles attached thereto, and
- (b) the measures, if any, being envisaged to increase the manpower thereat for more effective policing within its jurisdiction.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that Goodlands Police Station covers an area of 33 km² and has a population of approximately 34,000 residents. The station's jurisdiction includes the areas of Goodlands, Petit Raffray, Roche Terre, Cottage, and Saint Antoine.

The number of staff at Goodlands Police Station has increased over the past years due to the increase in economic and commercial activities as well as traffic flow in the areas.

Presently, there are 88 Police Officers of different ranks posted at the Goodlands Police Station.

As regards part (a)(i) of the question, the number of Police Officers posted at Goodlands Police Station is as follows –

Assistant Superintendent of Police	-	1
Chief Inspector of Police	-	2
Inspector of Police	-	3

Police Sergeant	-	21
Woman Police Sergeant	-	3
Police Constable	-	45
Woman Police Constable	-	13

As regards part (a)(ii) of the question, two Police vans are attached to the Police Station.

Additionally, Goodlands Police Station is supported by Police Officers from other units and branches of the Police Force. I should say, if there are major events, additional personnel from other police stations are also called upon to reinforce the personnel of Goodlands Police Station.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Police contingent at Goodlands, supported by 26 Safe City Cameras and resources from other units and branches, is adequate for effective policing in the area.

However, Madam Speaker, I am informed that the current building housing the Police Station dates back to 55 years ago, and with the increase in services to be delivered, the office and parking spaces thereat are now found to be insufficient. It is, therefore, proposed that – I think the procedures have already started – a new police station be built to relocate that police station.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister!

Yes, the hon. Fourth Member for Rodrigues, Mr Edouard!

**RODRIGUES – NEW ECONOMIC MODEL PLEDGE (GOVERNMENT
PROGRAMME 2025-2029)**

(No. B/362) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of

Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Government's pledge to construct "A new Economic Model" for Mauritius and particularly to pay an urgent and special attention to Rodrigues as outlined in the Government Programme 2025-2029, he will state the measures and/or actions being envisaged to achieve same for Rodrigues.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government Programme 2025-2029 is a Programme for the Republic of Mauritius, including Rodrigues and the Outer Islands.

We recognise that each outer island has their own specificities.

In this context, at Paragraph 19 of the Government Programme, we have stressed that "Government will pay urgent and special attention to Rodrigues, Agalega, and St Brandon".

With regard to Rodrigues, the Government Programme also announces that –

- (i) the development of the airport in Rodrigues will be integrated in the master plan for the overall development of our airports;
- (ii) special attention will be given to the water situation through the improvement of the distribution network and storage system;
- (iii) food security will be enhanced through an agricultural land suitability mapping, the rational use and management of prime agricultural land and introduction of the latest methodology for the traceability of food and food products; and
- (iv) a Land Drainage Masterplan will be commissioned by the Land Drainage Authority. The consultancy contract has already been awarded.

Madam Speaker, as announced in the Government Programme, we are coming up with a new economic model, on which we will elaborate in the forthcoming Budget, taking into consideration the state of the economy.

However, nobody knew in what precarious economic situation the previous regime has left the country.

Total public sector debt, as hon. Yeung Sik Yuen just mentioned, as a percentage of GDP is just over 90% and budget deficit would be above 9% by June of this year.

We need to bring down the level of budget deficit and public sector debt, and this will be the priority of the Government.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Edouard!

Mr Edouard: Merci, Madame la présidente. Depuis les années soixante, on a parlé de la nécessité de prendre des mesures pour que Rodrigues puisse rattraper son retard sur Maurice dans les différents secteurs ?

The Prime Minister: Je n'ai pas trop bien compris la question.

Madam Speaker: It is a tall order. He is talking about catching up...

The Prime Minister: On?

Madam Speaker: ...development in Rodrigues in general. Is that right, Mr Edouard?

Mr Edouard: Oui.

Madam Speaker: Oui, voilà !

Mr Edouard: Le retard que Rodrigues a accumulé. On a pris l'engagement, on a fait la promesse qu'on va faire en sorte que Rodrigues puisse rattraper son retard sur Maurice. Mais au fil des années, on a vu que l'écart se creuse par rapport au développement...

Madam Speaker: Don't make a statement!

Mr Edouard: Mais est-ce que le Premier ministre peut nous dire si ce gouvernement va prendre l'engagement de faire en sorte, autant que possible, pour que Rodrigues puisse rattraper son retard dans les différents secteurs ?

The Prime Minister: I would love to be able to say yes, but we have to take into account the context of this economic situation, which is disastrous.

Madam Speaker: Okay, Mr Beehook, Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

BAIE JACOTET CABLE LANDING STATION – ALLEGED SNIFFING CASE – INQUIRY

(No. B/363) **Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the inquiry

initiated into an alleged case of sniffing at the Baie Jacotet Landing Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, let me from the very outset point out to the House, that there had been serious allegations in the public, including the press and social media, with regard to potential installation and use of equipment for sniffing the internet traffic to and from Mauritius at the Baie Jacotet Cable Landing Station.

The former Chief Executive Officer of Mauritius Telecom, Mr M. S., had during the live radio programme *'Au coeur de l'info'*, on *Radio Plus*, on 01 July 2022, publicly made allegations to the effect that a foreign team had been allowed to make interventions on the SAFE Cable and which acts might constitute a threat to National Security, and violation of the fundamental rights of expression as enshrined in our Constitution.

These allegations have seriously affected the image of Mauritius Telecom which owns the Station, and have also tarnished the image of Mauritius both locally and internationally.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, following the allegation on the radio programme, the former Prime Minister made a statement to the Police on 11 July 2022 in respect of a case of 'Diffusing false news' against Mr M. S. intimating that, at no moment, he had given instructions to the latter or Mauritius Telecom to allow any foreign party or Telecom Operator to install or use equipment to enable sniffing, interception, monitoring or recording of internet traffic to and from Mauritius and/or countries in the region.

Furthermore, the Police subsequently received four other complaints following that allegation. These cases have been referred to the Central Criminal Investigation Department for investigation as they relate to the same facts and the circumstances as the case reported by the former Prime Minister on 11 July 2022.

In the course of Police investigation, between the 11 July 2022 to 03 February 2025, twenty-three persons were interviewed in connection with the cases and their statements were recorded.

As of 10 April 2025, no person has been arrested in connection with these cases. Surprisingly, no one had been before.

The inquiry is going on and I am setting up, I should say, a National Crime Agency which I mentioned before and which will enlist the services of foreign investigators to shed light into such high-profile cases.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle, Mr Seeburn!

**AIR MAURITIUS LTD – FINANCIAL SITUATION (2014-2024) – LOSSES
INCURRED & CAPITAL INJECTED**

(No. B/364) Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the financial situation thereof for the period December 2014 to December 2024, indicating if –

- (a) any losses were incurred during that period, particularly in relation to the sale of aircrafts, and
- (b) capital was injected therein and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that for Financial Year 2013-2014, Air Mauritius Ltd realised a profit of Rs359,219,000, whereas from 2015 to 2024, Air Mauritius Ltd incurred a loss amounting to Rs17,721,683,000. We cannot even call this mismanagement.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, I am also informed by Air Mauritius Ltd that during the Financial Year 2017-2018, the company disposed of one A340-300 aircraft on a Sale and Lease Back arrangement and this incurred a loss of Rs107,800,000.

In Financial Year 2021-2022 when the company was placed under voluntary administration, the following aircrafts were disposed of –

- (i) in June 2021, two A319-100 aircraft and consequently, losses to the tune of Rs338,100,000 were incurred, and
- (ii) in November 2021, one A330-200 aircraft was sold and a loss amounting to Rs637,000,000 was recorded.

It is worth highlighting that in June 2021, Air Mauritius Ltd entered into a consignment agreement with a private company for the disassembling of two A340-300 aircrafts estimated at Rs220,500,000 to have them as spare parts for sale by the private company to any third party. The sum received from the partial disposal of the two aircraft was Rs151,900,000, out of which Air Mauritius Ltd received Rs83,300,000. It was an agreed formula that Air Mauritius Ltd incurred a loss of Rs137,200,000.

The net loss incurred for the sale of aircraft amounts to Rs1,220,100,000.

(Interruptions)

This is how they managed Air Mauritius! This is what they did! It's a crime!

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that Government has not injected capital directly in Air Mauritius Ltd but it did so indirectly through Airport Holdings Ltd (AHL) by providing the latter with an advance of Rs12 billion in September 2021 in the context of the Watershed meeting to enable the company to provide funds to Air Mauritius Ltd – don't forget that an Administrator was appointed – for meeting its urgent financial requirements and to cater for other associated cost. I am informed that this advance was used by AHL as follows –

- Rs9.5 billion as loan to Air Mauritius;
- Rs812 million for acquiring shares of Air Mauritius Limited;
- Rs42 million for acquiring shares of Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Company Ltd;
- Rs135 million for acquiring shares of Jet Prime Ltd;
- Rs14 million injected as capital in subsidiaries of AHL;
- Rs1.007 billion as loans to subsidiaries of AHL; and
- Rs324 million for the acquisition of floors at MEDCOR building;
- further, Rs166 million on the administrative expenses from August 2021 to June 2024.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Finance needed Rs25 billion to show, to fool the people, to give the illusion that there is economic growth. In fact, they needed Rs25 billion to show that the debt was lower as related to the GDP ratio. This is what they did: lies, illusions, false figures! AHL was set up comprising 23 entities, including Air Mauritius Ltd.

The actual net assets were valued at Rs10 billion. However, a goodwill amount of Rs41 billion was added to the Rs10 billion to reach a figure of Rs51 billion.

What is worst, Madam Speaker, is that the MIC was instructed to buy 49 % of AHL at a value of Rs51 billion. MIC paid Rs25 billion to acquire 49 % of the shares of AHL where the actual assets were worth only Rs5 billion. In other words, somebody has stolen the money – in other words – and we will find out. No culprit will be left without being forfeited!

And I must emphasise, Madam Speaker, that the World Bank has confirmed that the 49% was worth only Rs5 billion. Confirmed by the World Bank! This is a case of excessive overvaluation carried out at the expense of MIC, which is 100 % owned by the Bank of Mauritius. It will mean, therefore, that MIC will have to impair with obvious consequences.

I wish to apprise the House that, following the injection of Rs25 billion by the Mauritius Investment Corporation in AHL on 09 December 2021, AHL reimbursed the advance of Rs12 billion to Government on the same day – same day transaction.

On its part, Air Mauritius reimbursed an amount of Rs830 million to AHL and an additional amount of Rs622 million has been offset by AHL through the purchase of the subsidiaries of Air Mauritius.

The House may also wish to note that the Board of AHL has at its meeting held in March 2025, agreed to convert the remaining loan balance of Rs8.045 billion of Air Mauritius Ltd into Non-Voting Convertible Redeemable Preference Shares.

Madam Speaker, KPMG has been requested by AHL to probe into an amount of Rs2.5 billion which should have been retained for working capital – cash flow need for MK, but was instead used for other purposes for which we have yet to understand where the money went if there was proper authorisation as that amount was derogated from its original purpose. A forensic audit by KPMG is underway to understand all these very loose calculations that were done.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, time is up! Time is up! No supplementary!

Mr Quirin: *Pena kestion?* First time!

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/366, B/374, B/381, B/391, B/393, and B/394.

I now call on Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes, Ms Anquetil!

PAVILLON FOOTBALL GROUND – STREET LIGHTINGS – MAINTENANCE

(No. B/365) MS S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the Pavillon Football playground in Quatre Bornes, he will state if consideration will be given to –

- (a) improve the lighting thereof;
- (b) replace the defective fencing, and
- (c) fix the rocky surface thereof.

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes that there are 13 floodlights at Pavillon Football Ground. These are the combination of LED and Halogen and they are broad-beamed, high intensity artificial light providing functional area lighting.

With regard part (a) of the question, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes has apprised that according to a survey carried out on 19 March 2025, four units of those floodlights were found to be defective and consequently have to be replaced. Quotations are being sought by the council for the purchase of four LED floodlights to replace the defective ones by end of April 2025.

In addition, in order to increase the luminosity thereat, the council has decided to fix one additional unit of floodlight on each pole. This project will be undertaken in the next financial year.

Madam Speaker, as for the part (b) of the question, I am advised that the fencing of the football ground was fixed more than 20 years ago. The metal poles holding them are in an advanced state of decay and rusting. This is a glaring example of how the former government failed to maintained sport infrastructure.

I am further advised by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes that in the first instance, for the security and safety of joggers and players, one side of the fence of a length of 110 metres has already been removed. Actions are being taken to replace the defective fence of 110 metres out of 460 metres. Bids were launched under the Small Committee Projects through restricted bidding on 07 March 2025. The closing date for submission was on 18 March 2025. Three bids have been received; the Executive Committee held on 03 April 2025 approved the lowest substantially responsive bid. The expected start date of the works is on 30 April 2025 and the expected completion date is 30 July 2025.

In view of the fact that the funds are not available in this financial year, the replacement of the remaining 350 metres chain link fencing and including minor levelling works inside the football playground will be carried out in the next financial year.

Madam Speaker, I am now answering part (c) of the question. According to the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, as a result of continuous use of the ground throughout time, the soil has settled and the rocks were spotted at the playground. These rocks have been removed by in-house labour. Let us reassure the House, that my Ministry is closely monitoring the implementation of all remedial works with the assistance of all local authorities. The safety of our citizens is our utmost priority. Unlike the former government, we are committed to improve our sport infrastructure and other amenities.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil : *Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente.* Madam Speaker, may I ask the Minister what specific measures will be put in place to ensure the regular upkeep and long-term maintenance of the Pavillon Football Ground upon completion of the proposed improvement works? Thank you!

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes will implement a structured maintenance programme upon completion of the improvement works once it's completed. And, this will include routine inspections, timely repairs, cleaning and upkeep of all the key components such as lightings, fencing and playground. A dedicated team within the Council will oversee all these tasks and provision has been made in the annual budget to ensure the sustainability and safety of the facility in the long term.

Ms Anquetil: A last one, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Ms Anquetil: Thank you. Madam Speaker. In the event that the Pavillon Football Ground is temporarily closed to facilitate renovation works, will the Minister indicate whether alternative recreational facilities will be made available to the local community during that period? Thank you.

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Council that these renovation works of the Pavillon Football Ground would not necessitate any temporary closure.

Madam Speaker: Okay. That's it.

Yes, hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, Mr Caserne!

SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRES – CHAIRPERSON & MEMBERS

(No. B/366) Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to Social Welfare Centres, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof, and
- (b) procedures established for the election of the Chairperson and members of the committees thereof.

(Withdrawn)

STRAY DOGS – REMEDIAL ACTIONS

(No. B/367) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to stray dogs, he will state if he has been made aware of the increasing number thereof over the past five years and, if so, indicate the remedial actions being envisaged in relation thereto.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the issue of stray dogs is one of our priorities and we are adopting a humane and multi-stakeholder approach to ensure long-term sustainable solutions. I co-chaired a meeting with the Junior Minister, the hon. David, on 17 March 2025, along with key stakeholders, including NGOs, the vet professionals and the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare to take stock of all the issues.

Madam Speaker, following proposals spearheaded by animal welfare advocates, a series of actions are being undertaken –

- a) the board of MSAW has been reconstituted with Ms Ghoorah as part-time Chairperson;
- b) the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare will be restructured to be an internationally compliant body to access global support;
- c) collaboration with foreign veterinary professionals has been sought, particularly from India, to review the mass sterilisation programme, humane dog-catching methods and the Catch-Neuter-Release approach currently implemented by MSAW;

- d) the Commissioner of Police has been requested to inform as to whether stun-gun or anaesthetic darts could be used for catching of dogs;
- e) the Veterinary Council has been requested to expedite registration of Veterinary Professionals;
- f) the Animal Welfare Act of 2013 is being reviewed to empower MSAW to act against animal abuse, regulate dog breeding and importation, and introduce stronger penalties for defaulters;
- g) The Animal Welfare Act 2013 is being reviewed to empower MSAW to act against animal abuse, regulate dog breeding and importation, and introduce stronger penalties for defaulters;
- h) A first meeting to review the legislation was chaired by the Senior Chief Executive on 26 March 2025 with representatives of NGOs. All proposals received thereon will be examined by different subcommittees to expedite its coming into operation, and
- i) The Ministry of Education and Human Resource has been requested to consider integrating the concept of animal welfare into the education system to sensitise students from an early age.

Meanwhile, MSAW is continuously implementing its sustainable project for dog population control through mass sterilisation, dog registration and Catch, Neuter and Release Programme. The catch-neuter release method being used since 2022 no longer serves its purpose as stray dogs are being returned on the streets. This is why Government has taken the bold initiative to construct dog shelters region wise and an animal hospital.

Madam speaker, it is worth to note that the last survey on stray dogs was conducted as far back as December 2013 by the Humane Society International and it was reported that Mauritius had a total unowned dog population of approximately 246,000 and roaming street dog population of 57,000. The report also indicated that a large majority of stray dogs' population in Mauritius is owned, and the number of stray dogs was relatively low.

The Government is taking decisive action to implement a humane, sustainable and collaborative approach to managing the stray dog population after years of inaction. The welfare of animals and the safety of our citizens remain at the heart of the Government's initiative.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Yes, hon. Caserne!

Mr Caserne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Minister for his reply. It is a concern. Recently, many incidents have been reported with regard to the issue of stray dogs, causing accidents. Mainly, the two-wheelers have been impacted. I thank the hon. Minister.

Another phenomenon which has been brought to our attention is the rearing of cattle also disturbing the peaceful environment within the region of Sainte Croix, Morcellement Goolamally and Morcellement Raffray. May I ask the hon. Minister if he can look into this issue also.

Dr. Boolell: I thank the hon. Member. We will seriously look into the matter.

Let me come to the issue of stray dogs. What we are trying to do is to increase the stabilisation rate to bring down the reproductive capacity. It is not an easy task, but we are praying and hoping that we will be there in due time.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Edouard!

Mr Edouard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The problem of stray dogs and other animals like cattle is also a big problem in Rodrigues. Will the hon. Minister inform the House if the actions proposed will be extended to Rodrigues also.

Dr. Boolell: Yes!

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, does that not concern the Rodrigues government?

Dr. Boolell: The Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Dr. Boolell: But the message will be conveyed loud and clear to our friends in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Madam Speaker: Yes! I am a little bit surprised!

Everything does not concern the Mauritian government since you have your autonomy now.

Yes, hon. Mr A. Duval!

Mr A. Duval: Yes, thank you. Madam Speaker, there seems to be a degradation of stray dogs in Mauritius, unfortunately. Since it is recognised that the stray dogs, in fact, have

owners, may we know from the hon. Minister, since November to date, how many contraventions have been served to owners of stray dogs in combatting that *fléau* ?

Dr. Boolell: Well, I need notice of this question. But I can find out and relay the information to you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, next time!

(Interruptions)

We have 15 more minutes to go. Let us carry on, please!

Hon. Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

POSTE DE FLACQ REGION– FLOOD MITIGATION PLAN

(No. B/368) Mr R. Beechook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the recurring flooding issues in Poste de Flacq and surrounding area and the subsequent site visit effected by Officers of the Land Drainage Authority on Wednesday 05 February 2025, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand as to the proposed mitigation actions plan to be implemented thereat.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the region of Poste de Flacq has been subject to recurrent flooding due to the swelling of Poste de Flacq River during torrential rains. As the topography of the land is relatively flat with wide flood plains, severe flooding problems have been encountered in this region since 2008. Despite the implementation of flood mitigating measures in 2013, these have not been successful in alleviating the flooding problems in the region.

In view thereof, several projects have been identified for implementation under the National Flood Management Programme by the Land Drainage Authority, namely flood mitigating measures at Allée Mangues, Poste de Flacq, Debarcadère, La Source, Bramsthan, Seeraully and Cité Hibiscus.

Madam Speaker, the site visit which was carried out on 05 February 2025 pertains particularly to the flood mitigating measures at Allée Mangues, Poste de Flacq. I wish to inform the House that this region has been declared as a high-risk flood prone area by the Land Drainage Authority and the project was initially entrusted to the National Development Unit for implementation.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that in October 2018, NDU appointed a consultant for a feasibility study and the report was submitted in November 2019, that is, more than one year later. A second contract was given to the same Consultant in January 2020 to submit a detailed design proposal. Only a preliminary design report was received in September 2020 and discussions lingered between the NDU and LDA for one and a half year as to determine the best alternative to be adopted, that is, either Alternative 1, comprising the construction of a dike closer to the urbanised areas so as to increase the capacity of the river or Alternative 2, which involves the construction of a floodwall along the bank of Poste de Flacq on the urbanised side.

Subsequently, the project was handed over to the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd in June 2022. The Project Consultant from DICL submitted a detailed design report in April 2023. Following geotechnical investigations carried out in 2024, a supplementary report to the detailed design report was forwarded to the Land Drainage Authority for approval. On 07 February 2025, the authority conveyed its no objection, subsequent to which, the DICL requested the project consultant to prepare the draft bidding document.

I am now informed by the DICL that land acquisition procedures for 29 plots are ongoing and it is expected that bids will be invited for the appointment of a contractor once wayleaves are obtained to be able to start the works.

Madam Speaker, I would like to deplore the fact that it took nearly nine whole years to start initiating actions to implement this project, least to say how urgent issues were being dealt with by the previous government. I am reassuring the House that now, my Ministry will ensure that the works will be undertaken at the earliest possible.

Madam Speaker, I wish to point out that in terms of short-term measures, the dredging of Poste de Flacq River was carried out by the NDU in November 2023 and by the District Council of Flacq in November 2024, respectively, in view to mitigate the risk of riverine flooding. Furthermore, I am informed that, the District Council is undertaking regular cleaning works and removal of debris and aquatic plants that obstruct waterflow to prevent flooding.

Madam Speaker: Yes, next question. Hon. First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix!

**MORCELLEMENTS LES PLAINES DE L'HERMITAGE, HIGHLANDS ROSE &
PINWOOD – MAINTENANCE**

(No. B/369) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the Morcellements LesPlaines de L'hermitage, Highlands Rose and Pinewood, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix, information as to the actions taken on complaints made for the –

- (a) irregular garbage collection services;
- (b) improper maintenance of green spaces, walking and jogging tracks, and
- (c) poor street lighting thereat.

Mr Woohit: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the Morcellement LesPlaines de l'Hermitage and Pinewood were set up more than 20 years ago, whereas Highland Rose was set up around the year 2017.

As regard to part (a) of the question, the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix has informed that no complaints have been received from the inhabitants of Morcellement LesPlaines de l'Hermitage and Pinewood regarding the scavenging service thereat.

However, four complaints were registered at the Citizen Support Unit Portal from the inhabitants from Morcellement Highlands Rose on scavenging service and one on the removal of bulky waste.

Madam Speaker, each household is provided with scavenging service once weekly either in the morning shift or in the afternoon shift. The distribution of scavenging works for refuse collection is undertaken on a zonal basis as follows –

- (i) Morcellement LesPlaines de Hermitage morning shift: Monday for zone one and Tuesday for the remaining zone, and in the afternoon shift, it is on Tuesday.
- (ii) Morcellement Highlands Rose morning shift: Thursday for one zone, Friday for another zone and Wednesday for the remaining zone. In the afternoon shift: Friday for one zone, Saturday for another zone and Wednesday for the remaining zone, and

- (iii) Morcellement Pinewood, morning shift: Thursday for one zone, Friday for the remaining zone. Afternoon shift: Friday for one zone and Saturday on the remaining zone.

Moreover, there should be a public holiday or any unforeseen circumstances, the Council ensures that the waste is collected from the household on the next day. Additionally, bulky waste collection is carried out twice yearly. The last exercise was conducted in some areas of aforementioned Morcellement on 05 and 06 October 2024. It is to be noted that Rs328,432.82 were provided to the Council for this exercise instead of the required amount of Rs1.8 m.

Hence, the bulky waste collection would only be carried out for part of the Morcellement. The Council has already been given the green light to proceed with the second campaign of bulky waste collection which will be done in May 2025.

Madam Speaker, what is the use of participating in so many international conferences on climate change and protection of the environment. Going as far as to pledge to save this planet but failing to put words into action, they could not even cater for a basic service like refuse collection – an absolute wastage of public funds. As a short-term measure, the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix has been requested to inform every household as to the exact date and time of waste collection.

Additionally, I have requested my Ministry to instruct the Council to ensure that scavenging service is provided to the entire Morcellement on one day or, at the most, two days instead of splitting same into several days for different zones of the same Morcellement with effect of 01 May 2025.

Madam Speaker as for part (b) of the question, I am apprised by the Council that Morcellement Les Plaines de Hermitage has six lots of green space of a total extent of 11,672 m². Highlands Rose has 13 lots of green space of a total extent of 50,000 m² whereas Pinewood has 10 lots of green space of the total extent of 55,700 m². Furthermore, there are no jogging tracks at Highlands Rose. However, there is one jogging track of 2 km at Morcellement Pinewood as well as one jogging track of 1 km at Les Plaines de Hermitage.

My Ministry has instructed the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix to initiate immediate action for maintenance of all green spaces and jogging tracks within all the aforementioned morcellements and other morcellements as well. My Ministry has also

requested the Council to prepare a proper maintenance plan so as to effect cleaning and mowing of the above morcellements by in-house labour on a monthly basis.

Madam Speaker, as for part (c) of the question, the Council has informed that it has not received any complaints regarding the street lighting at Morcellement Pinewood. As for Morcellement Les Plaines de Hermitage, the Council reported a loss of street lighting cables thereat to the Moka Police Station on 23 December 2021. Financial clearance was obtained from then Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development as far back as 26 July 2024 to the tune of Rs1.5 m. for the repair of the street lighting network. The materials have already been purchased. However, the street lighting cables have not been installed yet. Nevertheless, I wish to assure the House that this Government is here to work for the betterment of the inhabitants. The lost cables at Morcellement Les Plaines de Hermitage will be replaced by the in-house labour and the works are expected to start as from this month itself.

Madam Speaker, for the Morcellement Highlands Rose, a survey was carried out in July 2024 whereby it was observed that around 300 street lanterns were defective. Upon investigation, it was found that most of them date back to more than eight years and have reached their lifetime. Hence, replacing them with new ones would be more cost-effective and even then, nothing was done by the former government to remedy the situation. This clearly depict a severe lack of responsibility and seriousness when it comes to initiating prompt action for the well-being of the community which is not surprising when it concerns the former government.

Madam Speaker, I am now informed that the bidding documents are under preparation for the acquisition of 300 street lanterns at an estimated cost of Rs3 m. for Morcellement Highlands Rose. My Ministry has requested the Council expedite matters in a bid to resolve this issue as early as possible.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Are you happy with this? Very happy?

I have got three minutes left. Ms Anquetil! Question and short answer from Minister.

NTC – RETIREMENT BENEFIT PLAN – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/370) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the retirement benefit plan for the

employees of the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the current financial situation of the fund set up therefor.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am informed by the NTC that it has 93 employees governed by the PRB whose retirement benefit plan is carried out under the NTC Corporation Pension Fund. This fund which was created on 25 July 1979 in accordance with the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act is administered and managed by SICOM. The monthly contribution to pension fund for an employee is made at the rate of 11% of the pensionable emoluments by the employer and 6% of the pension emoluments by the employee.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that the latest actuarial report of NTC Pension Fund dated 22 December 2022 indicates deficit of Rs231 m. This deficit has further increased to Rs285.4 m. as per the consultation with SICOM in January 2025. Rs285.4 m. for 93 employees tantamount to have to a hefty figure of more than Rs3 m. per employee. The actuarial firm recommended cash injections over a period of 5 to 10 years over a mix of cash injections over a period of 5 to 10 years and an increase of the contribution by 3% to address the situation. However, the recommendations were not implemented by the NTC.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the actuarial review is carried out every five years. The report in 2018 also indicated a deficit of Rs78.7 m. on the recommendations made therein were not implemented. It is worth mentioning that we are in this situation today as the past service deficit disclosed in previous valuations have not been funded. Compound with that, as I have mentioned the House before, the financial accounts of the last nine years were not prepared and audited for the NTC. These accounts, if prepared and audited, would surely have highlighted the situation of the pension fund and trigger appropriate notices by the Director of Audit. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: One? Two?

Ms Anquetil: Two very small. Thank you, Madam Speaker. *Je suis choquée mais bon.* Would the Minister clarify the responsibilities of the management and the board members of the National Transport Corporation with regard to the pension rights of its employees? Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in the House before, and it is now already well-known, the NTC was marred in a quagmire of corruption over the last nine

years. There are several enquiries going on at the FCC for fake spare parts, for tyres that last only for 4000 km – never seen before! When I took office I cleanse to the management, we fired the then General Manager and now we are recruiting a new one through open advertisement; it is being evaluated now. All the board members who were there have gone as well including the ex-officials, it is only left with one person now and he is elected by the workers. His name is Mr Luchannah whom I have no say to his appointment over the board. I leave it to the employees of NTC to ask him how he has spent his years on the board of the NTC while this was happening before his own eyes.

Madam Speaker: Last question. Yes!

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the hon. Minister inform the House of remedial measures currently being envisaged. Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Well, first of all, to implement the recommendations of the actuarial review mainly to fund the past deficits I highlighted before. However, the NTC is now a financial situation that it is in and we only know the state of affairs once the audited accounts have been completed. Only then, we can know the financial means available at the NTC to fund the pension funds which are due to the employees. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. I think we will break for an hour and a half. This time I am not mistaken. We coming back at to 14.30 hrs.

At 1.02 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.33 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated! Okay, now I think we have hon. Second Member for Grand Baie and Poudre d'Or, Mr Beejan!

MORCELLEMENT MONT PLAISIR, FOND DU SAC – FLASH FLOODS VICTIMS– COMPENSATION

(No. B/371) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the damages caused by flash floods to the residences of Morcellement Mont Plaisir in Fond Du Sac prior to November 2024, he will state if consideration will be given for the compensation of the victims thereof.

Madam Speaker: This question will be replied by hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. Yes!

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron): Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me first inform the House that my Ministry is considering the setting up of a fund to compensate victims of climate-related disasters, first and foremost, to bereaved families who have lost their beloved ones and to people who have lost basic necessities and properties during a flood or any other climate-related disasters.

Madam Speaker, this Government, conscious of the deepening of the impact of the climate crisis on our people, made an electoral pledge in the PTr/MMM/ND/ReA Electoral Agreement to set up a permanent compensation system for reparation to victims. Contrary to the previous Government, we do not intend to address this issue on an *ad hoc*, piecemeal basis. As soon as the mechanism and the financing of such a compensation scheme be discussed and finalised within Government, we will be in a position to specify the beneficiaries and its retroactive application to past victims, including those who suffered damages caused by the flash floods to the residences of Morcellement Mont Plaisir in Fond Du Sac prior to November 2024.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that presently, in accordance with the First Schedule of the Social Aid Regulations (1984), only the following allowances are payable by Government for cyclones and floods through my Ministry –

- (i) a cyclone allowance of Rs250 per person per night spent at evacuee centres, and
- (ii) a flood allowance of Rs250 per member of a family per day for a maximum of three days subject to a police memo certifying that their premises have been flooded and their foodstuffs have been damaged.

Madam Speaker, in this context, I am informed that following torrential rains in 2019 at Fond Du Sac, the Ministry has effected payment of the above food allowance to the tune of Rs79,352 to 141 households. Additionally, *ad hoc* compensation of Rs6,000 per adult and Rs3,000 per child under 18 years was paid to them. Funds were received from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund and a total amount of Rs1,761,000 was paid to 99 households by my Ministry.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes?

Mr Beejan: Can the hon. Minister clarify whether a formal assessment of the damages was conducted at Fond Du Sac, as mentioned by the former Government, and if so, will the findings be tabled?

Mr Subron: Thank you. As for the flood allowance that I mentioned, the assessment has been made by the Police; the Police memo certifying that their premises have been flooded and their foodstuffs have been damaged. So, this allowance is paid by my Ministry.

As for the fund payable from Prime Minister's Relief Fund, I am not aware of the criteria upon which the assessment was made but I will look into it and come back to the hon. Member in due course.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Second Member for Grand Baie and Poudre d'Or!

VINGT PIEDS ROAD, GRAND' BAIE & CAP MALHEUREUX – RESURFACING WORKS

(No. B/372) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'or) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to Vingt Pieds Road from Grand' Baie to Cap Malheureux, he will state when resurfacing works will be effected thereat, indicating the expected start and completion dates thereof and, if not, if consideration will be given for budgetary provisions to be secured therefor for the next financial year.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, the Vingt Pieds (B45) Road connects the villages of Grand Baie and Cap Malheureux and may be divided into four stretches, namely –

- (i) Stretch 1 – from roundabout near La Croisette to junction with Plaine des Papayes (B11) Road near Shell filling station, over an approximate length of 1 km;
- (ii) Stretch 2 – from its junction with Plaine des Papayes (B11) Road to its junction with Vieux Moulin (B165) Road, over an approximate length of 1.2 km;
- (iii) Stretch 3 – from its junction with Vieux Moulin (B165) Road to the first roundabout of Cap Malheureux Bypass, over an approximate length of 2.2 km; and
- (iv) Stretch 4 – from the first roundabout of Cap Malheureux Bypass to its junction with the Mon Choisy Cap Malheureux (B13) Road, over an approximate length of 1.6 km.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the RDA that the Stretch 2 and Stretch 4 are in fairly good conditions. As regard other stretches of the Vingt Pieds (B45) Road, during the current Financial Year 2024-2025, the RDA will proceed with resurfacing works along Stretch 3, namely from Vieux Moulin (B165) Road to the first roundabout of the Cap Malheureux Bypass. Works Order to the tune of Rs12.5 million has already been issued in this respect and works are expected to start in the third week of April and will be completed by the end of the month.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that as regards Stretch 1, from La Croisette roundabout to its junction with Plaine des Papayes (B11) Road, the presence of cracks and settlements have been noted. The RDA has, accordingly, earmarked funds for resurfacing works along that stretch during the Financial Year 2025-2026.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister inform the House whether the resurfacing works at Chemin Vingt Pieds, Grand Baie, includes additional improvements such as drainage upgrades, pedestrian pathways or street lighting to enhance road safety? Thank you.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, the original question concerns the resurfacing of an existing road. So, there are no additional drain works or lighting. But anyway, I will ask the RDA to carry out a survey. If need be, we will see and do the needful if funds are available.

Madam Speaker: Of course! Thank you, hon. Minister!

Now, the Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, Mr Jhummun!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – ASBESTOS HOUSING UNITS – DISMANTLING & REDEPLOYMENT PLAN

(No. B/373) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to housing units containing asbestos, he will state the number thereof identified in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, indicating the –

- (a) expected time frame for the dismantling thereof, and

- (b) redeployment plan, if any, devised for the occupiers thereof.

Mr Bhagwan: Madam Speaker, according to information obtained from the Ministry of Housing and Lands, I am informed that there were initially 3,013 ex-CHA/EDC housing units containing cemented asbestos sheets, constructed in the 1960s over 59 sites island-wide. Of these, 366 were found in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac.

According to a joint survey carried out by officers of the Ministry of Housing and Lands and the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry in 2022, there remains a total of 1,453 ex-CHA/EDC housing units that need to be dismantled. Out of the initial 366 houses in Constituency No. 13, some 162 had already been demolished with remaining 204 houses.

With regard to part (a) of the question, there is no specific time frame for demolition of these housing units as request for dismantling emanates from the owner directly or through the Citizen Support Unit, local authorities, the Ministry of Housing and Lands and CEB officers and are, thus, attended to on a case-to-case basis.

Since 2015, the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry procures the services of contractors for the dismantling of houses containing asbestos and disposal thereof. Requests received from owners are, thus, directed to the contractor for necessary actions. A total of 218 housing units remained containing asbestos have just been dismantled around the island from 2015 to 2024.

A new bidding exercise is being undertaken at the level of the Solid Waste Division of my Ministry for dismantling, removal and disposal of cemented asbestos sheets from ex-CHA/EDC houses for a contract period of 24 months. It is expected to have a new contract by end of this month.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that all the targeted housing units could not be dismantled for the following reasons –

- (a) Very few requests for the dismantling of asbestos houses are received.
- (b) Many applicants are not owners of the housing units. They are either heirs or tenants without any formal document, and in many cases, are either abroad or

untraceable. It becomes difficult for the Ministry of Housing and Lands to establish ownership of the houses.

- (c) In cases of unoccupied houses where notices have been served and affixed by local authorities, and whose owners could not be traced during a survey, they intervene just prior to demolition of these houses and prevent the dismantling thereof.
- (d) Owners and occupiers also request for the reconstruction of their houses or for financial assistance prior to giving their consent for dismantling of the houses.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (b) of the question, my Ministry will consult the Ministry of Housing and Lands so we come up with a redeployment plan to address all the mentioned issues as there is actually no redeployment plan.

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

Mr Jhummun: Thank you, hon. Minister. It is a request. Can the hon. Minister try to arrange a meeting with all the inhabitants concerned and propose them with alternatives, such as the new houses that will be offered in Souillac? So, can a meeting with the inhabitants be arranged? Thank you.

Mr Bhagwan: Definitely, Madam Speaker. My colleague and I have spoken, and we are moving in that direction once the Minister of Housing and Lands comes back.

Madam Speaker: Okay, thank you. Now, Mr Rookny, Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 – SPORTS FACILITIES

(No. B/374) Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to recreational sports, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sports Council, information as to the number of sports facilities of the Council available in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, indicating –

- (a) their locations, and

- (b) the activities held thereat since November 2024 to date and the mode of communication therefor.

(Withdrawn)

NORTHERN REGION – IRRIGATION RESTRICTIONS – IMPACT & GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

(No. B/375) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplémousses se& Triolet) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to limitations on irrigation imposed on the planters of the northern region, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether –

- (a) any survey has been carried out on the economic impact thereof on the planters, and
- (b) Government proposes to provide any support thereto and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Madam Speaker, the sustained, inadequate rainfall in the recent months has resulted in a significant decline in water levels in the La Nicolière Reservoir and Midlands Dam. Consequently, the Water Resources Monitoring Committee, under the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, had to impose stringent conditions on water usage for irrigation through a series of regulations enacted under the Central Water Authority Act.

In fact, since December 2022, restrictions have been consistently imposed on the irrigation of sugarcane for consecutive promulgation of a series of Dry Season Regulations under the Central Water Authority Act.

Also, the Central Water Authority, by virtue of its act, has priority of use over all water resources in times of drought. Therefore, penalising the Irrigation Authority. Consequently, the Irrigation Authority has had to seize all irrigation of sugarcane since August 2024. In contrast, vegetable crops are receiving only a minimal allocation of irrigation, three hours for two days a week, which is grossly inadequate for ensuring viable crop production.

Madam Speaker, regarding part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that approximately 3,200 hectares of land in the northern region, occupied by some 3,500 small

planters and three corporate planters rely on La Nicolière Reservoir, have experienced irreversible effects on yield growth and overall crop development.

A preliminary assessment of the impact of the prevailing drought has been made as follows, and I will circulate the relevant document –

- The revenue of planters is expected to decrease by Rs718,512,000. A committee has been established at the Irrigation Authority, comprising various stakeholders, including Mauritius Cane Industry Authority, the Food and Agricultural Research Extension Institute, the Small Farmers Welfare Fund and leader planters from the region. This committee is tasked with assessing the impacts of the drought and proposing effective mitigation strategies.
- The Sugar Insurance Fund Board and Small Farmers Welfare Fund shall be consulted on the way forward for compensation to small planters.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (b) of the question, my Ministry has, in response to these challenges, come up with several immediate and transitional support measures aimed at assisting planters in navigating through this difficult period until the detailed assessment – I will highlight them – just to give relief to the planters.

In order to alleviate the financial burden on affected planters, my Ministry has decided to forego the collection of irrigation dues, totalling some Rs10 m. from sugar cane planters impacted by these restrictions for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025. Furthermore, as part of next year's budgetary proposal, my Ministry is advocating for financial assistance package. In respect of one specific area, Rs3.5 m. has been earmarked to support small sugar cane planters in replanting their fields at Pointe aux Piments.

The Irrigation Authority has started a project in order to replace its pivot system with drip system which allow for more efficient use of available and scarce water resources. Recognising that the cost of drip irrigation equipment poses a significant financial challenge for small planters, we are offering financial assistance of Rs50,000 per arpent to facilitate the purchase of drip irrigation system by small sugarcane planters. Also, the strategies which will be adopted in order to mitigate the effect of the annually recurring drought will consist of the following –

- a) construction of retention basins, mini dams along rivers so as to store water for irrigation;
- b) construction of water harvesting infrastructure and storage basin in agricultural areas;
- c) shifting towards more water efficient irrigation methods such as drip irrigation in contrast to overhead irrigation and if need be, we will make use of drones to ensure that there is efficient use of water and fertilisers;
- d) promotion of a cultivation of drought-resistant crop varieties that are better suited to our changing climatic condition;
- e) training and support to planters on adoption of water efficient and climate smart agricultural practices.

All these measures shall be discussed in detailed in the forthcoming *Assises de l'Agriculture*.

Madam Speaker, the rainfall pattern over the past years and the consequential water supply regime appears to be establishing a new normal necessitating a comprehensive reassessment of our medium and long-term agricultural and irrigation strategies for the northern plane. With the collaboration of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, we are exploring the development of new water resources to ensure the sustainability of our agricultural sector.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Yes, Mr Rookny.

Mr Rookny: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I gather from information provided by the hon. Minister that some 3,000 planters of the north have seen their revenues depleted by some Rs17 m. which effectively means they have been asphyxiated and which also means that it will cause them significant difficulty to restart their activities once we have adequate water. Will the hon. Minister advise if consideration will be given to compensate these planters in order to allow them to put food on our tables? Thank you.

Dr. Boolell: They are already being given accompanying measures but I grant you, it is a tough situation due to the vagaries of climatic condition but in the light of on-going pre-budgetary discussions, you can rest assured we will do our level best to respond to the needs of this afflicting community.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Your next question!

DRUG ADDICTS – REHABILITATION PROTOCOLS & TREATMENTS

(No. B/376) **Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the rehabilitation of drug addicts, he will state the –

- (a) protocols put in place therefor, indicating the treatments administered;
- (b) amount of funds spent by Government on such programs over the past three years, indicating if any survey has been carried out to assess the effectiveness thereof, and
- (c) number of drug addicts salvaged from this scourge over the past ten years, indicating the number of cases of overdose recorded due to drug abuse.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the protocols put in place for various programmes run by the Harm Reduction Unit with the ‘Protocoles de Prise en Charge de l’Usage de Drogues à Maurice’ which has been validated in March 2023. The protocol has been designed to ensure consistent and effective patient care. It defines the diagnostic procedure treatment guideline, patient management, safety measures and ethical considerations. These relate to drug users who consume illicit substances, including heroin, synthetic drugs, cannabis and cocaine.

The medical treatment of heroin addiction typically involves a combination on Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). It uses medication to alleviate withdrawal symptoms, reduce cravings and prevent relapse. The most common medications used include methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone and naloxone. Synthetic drugs also known as New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) are a diverse and rapidly changing group of substances. This makes it difficult to develop specific medications to counteract their effects. The effects of synthetic drugs can be unpredictable and vary widely depending on the specific substance and the individual using it.

There are generally no specific medications to reverse the effects of most synthetic drugs. Treatments focuses on managing the acute symptoms, settle agitation, psychosis and seizures. Cocaine is a highly addictive stimulant and there are currently no FDA approved medications specifically for cocaine addiction. While cannabis is often considered less addictive than other substances, chronic use can lead to cannabis use disorder. There are currently no FDA approved medications specifically for cannabis addiction. It is essential to

address that any co-occurring mental health disorders in addicts can significantly impact substance use.

The protocol focuses on the psycho-social support and rehabilitation aspect for people who use drug. These constitute vital components of effective drug addiction. Drug addiction is not simply a physical dependence, it is a complex condition that affects an individual's brain chemistry, emotional well-being, social relationship and overall life functioning. Therefore, treatment must address all these factors, not just the physical aspect of withdrawal.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the amount of funds spent over the past three years for Methadone Substitution Therapy Programme is around Rs165 m. From the end of 2021 to May 2022, the National Audit Office conducted a performance audit on enhancing the effectiveness of intervention related to drug demand and harm reduction. The NAO also carried out a performance audit at the levels of National Drug Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Wellness, and other stakeholders including non-governmental organisations involved in the fight against drug use. The Audit focused mainly on the following –

- adequation and effectiveness of drug use prevention activities;
- adequation effectiveness of drug use disorder treatment rehabilitation, and social integration activities, and
- adequate coverage and effectiveness of harm reduction intervention.

The recommendations of the NAO are being implemented by the Harm Reduction Unit.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (c) of the question, in June 2016, 4,591 drug addicts were on their Methadone Substitution Therapy Programme. In February 2025, the number increased to 8,851. It is accepted worldwide that the assessment of recovery from drug addiction is inherently complexed, moving to the multi-facilitated nature of addiction itself. In essence, the complexity of assessing drug addiction recovery system from multidimensional factors such as individual variability and the dynamic nature of the recovery process itself amongst others. This accounts as to why the exact number of drug addicts salvage cannot be assessed precisely.

Madam Speaker, it is to be noted that figures are available only for deaths due to overdose. In 2019, 43 deaths due to overdose were recorded. In 2020, there were 40 deaths. In 2021, 50 deaths. In 2022, 41 deaths. In 2023, 39 deaths and for 2024 to June, 17 deaths.

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

Mr Rookny: Madam Speaker, from the information provided by the hon. Minister, I heard the number of overdoses recorded. How will he reconcile the number of overdoses recorded compared with the death certificates that are produced where this is never mentioned as overdose, it is mentioned as consequence of taking drugs?

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, as I have just mentioned it is very difficult also at times for the doctor to certify the death has occurred as to what reason and I would request the hon. Member to be patient, a Bill will be debated today and all the details...

Madam Speaker: Exactly!

Mr Bachoo: ... the consequences as well as the results will be found there.

Madam Speaker: It's a good day for discussing drugs today. Thank you, hon. Minister!

Next question, Mr Lobine, First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix!

**PBAT – HEADMASTER & DEPUTY HEADMASTER CASE – RETIRED
OFFICERS – PENSION BENEFITS**

(No. B/377) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to cases referred to the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal regarding the appointment of officers to the grades of Headmaster and Deputy Headmaster since 2019 to 2021 and after the final determination of the Tribunal confirming their substantive appointment, he will state if a High Powered Committee was set up to that effect and, if so, indicate the recommendations made by the Committee regarding payment of gratuity and pension benefits for all those officers who retired before the final determination of the Tribunal.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the offer of appointment to the grade of Headmaster in a temporary capacity for a period of six months was made to 260 officers in eight different batches, starting on 16 December 2019.

These concerned the appointment of officers to the grade of Headmaster only and they could not be appointed in a substantive capacity on completion of their six months temporary period as four appeals were lodged before the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal against the decision of the Public Service Commission regarding their appointment.

You may wish to note that on 07 July, 14 and 19 December 2022, my Ministry was informed that the Tribunal had given its ruling whereby the four appeals lodged were all set aside on 08 June, 03 and 11 November 2022.

Madam Speaker, subsequent to consultation with the then Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms, my Ministry was informed that the matter was not referred to the High-Powered Committee per se, but was rather dealt with in accordance with prevailing policies applicable in the public service and a precedent decision taken by the High-Powered Committee in a similar case. On 21 December 2021, the then Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms issued Circular Note No. 66 of 2021.

Madam Speaker, I am tabling a copy of the Circular Note No. 66 of 2021, containing the recommendations of the High-Powered Committee on precedent cases. It must be highlighted that the Circular Note makes reference to one main recommendation made by the High-Powered Committee at its meeting of 15 November 2021 whereby the retiring benefits of officers appointed in a temporary capacity and who have retired since 01 January 2016, that is, the implementation date of PRB Report 2016, on attaining the compulsory age limit and whose cases are still pending before the PBAT or Supreme Court, be calculated on the salary they would have drawn had they been appointed in a substantive capacity in the higher grade at the time of retirement, provided they had served for at least two years in the temporary capacity. However, following representations from aggrieved Headmasters who had not been not been paid their retiring benefits, the then Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms was consulted anew on the duration of their temporary appointment that is, whether it should be six months or two years.

On 13 November 2023, the then Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms advised my Ministry that officers who were promoted Headmasters in a temporary capacity for more than six months and who would not have required any additional qualification for the substantive appointment, would be eligible for the retiring benefits on the

salary attached to the post of Headmaster as they fell between the ambit of both Paragraph 13.20 and 13.40 of the PRB Report 2021 and the advice of the Attorney General's Office.

My Ministry acted on that basis and 56 out of 68 Headmasters were eligible for payment of gratuity and pension benefits have already been paid. As regards, the remaining 12 eligible Headmasters, the Account General's Office has already been requested to effect payment.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you very much. Are you happy?

Yes, the hon. Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet!

**REGIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE – OVERSEAS MISSIONS – COST
INCURRED**

(No. B/378) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the overseas missions undertaken by the staff of the Regional Centre of Excellence during the period January 2019 to December 2024, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Centre, information as to the number thereof, indicating in each case –

- (a) the costs incurred therefor
- (b) if same were undertaken jointly with other Ministries or designated delegates, and
- (c) table copy of the report on the outcomes thereof.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that during the period January 2019 to December 2024, six overseas missions, namely to France twice, Belgium, Brazil, Japan, and Isle of Man and UK were undertaken by the officers of the FSC Regional Centre of Excellence.

Out of the six missions, five were undertaken by the head of the Regional Centre of Excellence, Mrs K.R.H. In one of the missions, in Isle of Man and UK, organised by the Small Countries Financial Management Centre, she was accompanied by the Senior Manager Human Resources of the FSC, Mrs S.P.B. This mission was funded by the organiser. In another mission to Brazil, she was accompanied by the analyst, Mrs Z.I. and one mission in France was attended by an analyst, Mrs N.S.

Madam Speaker, regarding part (a) of the question, the cost of the five missions amounted to Rs935,943. As for the mission to Isle of Man and UK, as I said, it was fully funded by the organiser.

I am tabling a list of the overseas missions undertaken and the cost incurred for each of them.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the missions were not jointly undertaken with other Ministries. As for my Ministry, according to records, no officers have attended those missions.

Madam Speaker, with regard part (c) of the question, a report on the outcome of those missions is being tabled.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister! Yes, Mr Rookny!

Mr Rookny: Could the Minister therefore confirm that the head of the RCE did not accompany the former Minister of Finance on any of these missions?

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: I will need to look into that. This is the information that I have so far and it does not say whether she accompanied the Minister of Finance. She has attended six overseas missions and all of them were either herself or with the persons I have mentioned. This is the information that I have been given by the FSC. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: You will let us know in due course. Yes?

Mr Beehook: Can the hon. Minister please inform the House whether the *per diem* of the head of the RCE was generously increased beyond the rates applicable to the FSC staff upon the special request of the former CEO of the FSC?

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: I do not have that specific information at this point in time but I will look for it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Looks as if you will have to look for quite a lot from what I can see.

Okay hon. Members. Are you happy, for the moment?

Mr Beehook: No!

Madam Speaker: You are not happy?

Mr Rookny: No!

Madam Speaker: How can we make you happy? Honestly! Let's wait for the Minister to come with more information in due course.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: I will table that information, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Don't be in a rush to be happy! Where are we now?

Yes! Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

**RIVIERE DES ANGUILLES TRAFFIC CENTRE – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION –
SCOPE OF WORKS & PROJECT COST**

(No. B/379) **Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac)** asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the proposed construction of the Rivière des Anguilles Traffic Centre, he will state –

- (a) the scope of works and estimated cost thereof;
- (b) the expected date of coming into operation thereof, and
- (c) the bus routes that the Traffic Centre will serve, and
- (d) if a feasibility assessment was made prior to embarking on the project.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry that the Rivière des Anguilles Traffic Centre Project that seeks to facilitate the commuting of inhabitants to the Market Fair, the Rivière des Anguilles SSS, found nearby and existing residential Morcellement development and future proposed developments such as Smart City, a shopping mall in the vicinity of the new station.

With regards to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the traffic centre covers an area of 6453 square metres constructed over a plot of land of 8900 square metres and comprising the following –

1. Construction of five concrete boarding platforms;
2. Construction of one concrete alighting platform;
3. Installation of five smart bus shelters;
4. Construction of concrete footpath;
5. Construction of nine bus parking areas;
6. Construction of drains and absorption pit;

7. Asphalt work;
8. Provision of street lighting;
9. Provision of traffic signs and road markings, and
10. Construction of a green space and landscaping.

Madam Speaker, the works began on 26 September 2024, that is before the General Elections and have been completed recently on 15 March for an amount of Rs24,593,622 inclusive of VAT.

Madam Speaker with regard part (b) of the question, I am informed that the bus station is expected to start operation in and around mid of May 2025 – next month.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the NLTA that buses of Route No. 10, that is, Mahebourg to Rivière des Galets; Route No. 61A - Curepipe to Benares, and Route No. 6 - Curepipe to Rivière des Anguilles, will operate through the Rivière des Anguilles Traffic Centre. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Sorry, there is one missing part here!

As regards part (d) of the question, I am informed by TMRSU that for such type of projects, no feasibility study is conducted – I was quite surprised as well – save for geotechnical investigation, which actually should form part of the feasibility study. However, consultations and several site visits with Village Councillors and the NLTA were effected to find the best suitable land for the project. Prior to start of the works, however, soil investigation was carried out to ascertain the suitability of the site.

Madam Speaker, a traffic centre has been constructed next to the market fair close to the Rivière des Anguilles SSS, like I said earlier, and the existing residential morcellement development. Moreover, the traffic centre will also facilitate commuting to the future developments, such as the Smart City and shopping malls already planned in and around the vicinity thereof.

Madam Speaker: That is it? No more?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, that is it! Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Jhummun!

Mr Jhummun: Madam Speaker, since no feasibility analysis/assessment has been made prior to the project, I am afraid to say that this project is likely to have the same fate as the Camp Diabie Traffic Centre where it is almost underutilised. Can the hon. Minister take this matter with all those concerned to try and see how to reengineer and divert some routes so that this traffic centre is used to its maximum capacity.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes. As matters stand, we will only know whether the project is feasible and not be a ghost town only when operations start. But if it warrants those other routes be channelled over there so that it becomes buoyant with activities, we will do it. However, the proposed developments that were announced, the Smart City and the shopping centre, if they are implemented, I think this will enhance the value of this huge investment.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

GOVERNMENT MOBILE APPS

(No. B/380) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Mobile Applications “MoKloud”, “MauPass”, “Mo Rendez Vous” and “Mwa Mo Wallet”, he will state if consideration will be given for all the services and facilities thereunder to be made accessible under a single Mobile App.

Dr. Ramtohul: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Member for the question. With regard to the apps, it seems there has been an explosion of mobile apps in the way it has been implemented. In the journey towards building a digitally empowered and inclusive society, Madam Speaker, ministries, departments and parastatal bodies have around 40 mobile apps.

However, these applications were not done in a cohesive manner and the approach was not holistic. The Ministry has been characterised by a series of lack of fundamental principles of establishing a digital infrastructure. It would be unimaginable that today, a country like Mauritius does not have a disaster recovery site for our main government data centre.

Madam Speaker, this implies that should the Atal Bihari Vajpayee building catch fire and the servers are down, all government services, including the parliamentary services, would not be available to the public. This, to me, is a crime when it comes to what the public expects us to do when we sit in Parliament!

Now we know why the people responsible for doing it in the previous government did not have the time to do it. They were queuing up in Burj Dubai for the discotheques! Now, MoKloud is one of the apps on which the question rests. So, it is good that I highlight to the House that MoKloud provides citizens with online access to official documents, such as birth certificates and marriage certificates. So, citizens can apply for these certificates and they can store it online in a secured manner. This is what MoKloud does. MoKloud is available today.

There is another app on which the question has been asked, which is called MauPass. MauPass creates the bridge between the physical and the virtual world. It means that if I have a mobile ID, this is my ID in the physical world. What is my ID in the virtual world so that the government can endorse any claim that I make of being the person I am or I claim to be. Therefore, this is what MauPass does. It is a critical application for our digital infrastructure.

It is actually not surprising when we see the level of incompetence to state that MoKloud is deprived of a legal basis today. Now, this, again, is a matter that we are addressing with the Office of the Attorney General.

A third application is MoRendezVous. It is good for the Members of the House to know that MoRendezVous allows citizens to plan meetings. It has been deployed for more than seven years. To date, there are only 5,000 users of MoRendezVous. That is good to know that the users/department that use MoKloud the most is the Passport and Immigration Office. We could have reduced the queues at the office for passport application processing, but we still see the queues, which means that this app did not really meet its objectives!

The fourth one is Mwa Mo Wallet which enables citizens to store their digital documents again. This is applicable to Mauritius and all the outer islands. It is good to note that all the users are suffering from a lack of features within these applications. And there are three others, actually.

So, whenever there was a problem highlighted, the approach was: 'okay, let us develop an app to address that problem.' But that is not how we digitalise the country, Madam Speaker! There has to be an approach, a strategy, a server, and data. We do not just sit in an office in Ebène and we wake up and we say: 'let us develop an app'!

Apps like MoPri, MoBis, MoKouran, *kiete sa* ? All these apps, Madam Speaker, have cost money! It has cost taxpayer's money! The worst of all is that it has cost us a lot of time. When we say that we have lost these ten sweet years in terms of digitalisation, when we realise the impact of that loss, the impact on our government processes, the impact on the

expectations of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, it is big! It is really big because MoKouran and MoPri are not what our people expect.

Our people expect to have a super app which actually aggregates all the government applications. This is what they expect. This is what they deserve! This is what they pay their taxes for! The former government has failed! And the Ministry of Information Technology, represented by the previous Minister for IT, has failed miserably!

An hon. Member: *Laptop inn eklate !*

Dr. Ramtohul: *'Eklate'* some people say!

Madam Speaker, there has been a low uptake of those users. Interestingly, it is a well-known fact that we cannot manage what we do not measure. There has been no measurement of the users of those apps. The user-friendliness of those apps actually tells that the apps were not really friendly to users! They were like an enemy to users, like do not use me! We mentioned the absence of the legal basis.

Madam Speaker, in the forthcoming blueprint for the ICT sector, priority has been set to actually rationalise all these applications into a single one so that it becomes a single window for all citizens for ease of access. These apps will be user friendly.

My Ministry has already started working on a single unified app which will ensure a streamlining of services, reduce redundancies, provide a standard interface, cater for multiple languages and provide for the use of Single Sign-On. So, with Maupass, you sign-in once, you have access to a series of applications. The committee is a multi-stakeholder committee that has been established within my Ministry together with the Central Informatics Bureau, Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council and the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency.

This is an ambitious and forward-looking project, Madam Speaker. We want to actually develop this in an efficient manner so that there is also a good uptake by the citizens. There will be an accompanying communication campaign so that we advise and we sensitise the population around the advantages of using this app.

The whole objective, Madam Speaker, as has been stipulated in our Government Programme, is to move citizens from being in line to being online. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you so much, very interesting. Yes, Mr Caserne, you are okay with that? Good! So, now we go to Ms Anquetil.

JEUX INTER COLLÈGES – REINSTATEMENT

(No. B/381) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether in regard to the Jeux Inter collèges, he will state the actions being taken by the Ministry and the Mauritius Secondary Schools Sports Association to restore same.

(Withdrawn)

**RÉSIDENCE PÈRE LAVAL MUNICIPAL COMPLEX – LEISURE ACTIVITIES –
OPERATING HOURS**

(No. B/382) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the Résidence Père Laval Municipal Complex, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, information as to whether the complex is currently operational and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) different leisure activities being provided thereat, and
- (b) opening and closing hours thereof and, if not, why not.

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker, it is with much regret that I have to admit that the Résidence Père Laval Municipal Complex is hardly operational during weekdays and weekends. It should have been open during weekdays from 8.00hrs to 18.00hrs and on weekends from 14.00hrs up to 19.00hrs, respectively. Following the parliamentary question set by the hon. Member during the request for information stage, the Chief Executive of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes informed that the complex was operational during weekdays and weekends, and it had all the amenities that facilitated the organisation of leisure activities for the citizens of the surrounding localities.

However, during a site visit effected by the hon. Member, and subsequently, by officers of my Ministry, it was noted that the Municipal Complex and the indoor games were in a rundown state. The following has been observed –

- (i) Ground floor – hanging wires at several places, only one toilet operational and other toilets inaccessible because of having no handles. Painting peelings off of certain parts of the wall and play equipment not functional and are stacked in a corner.

- (ii) First floor – leaking roof, toilets blocks need repairs, fans not functioning, and painting peeling off.

The general impression is that the building is not being used by the public. My Ministry has instructed the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes to refurbish the complex accordingly and to replace all the indoors games.

The attention of the Chief Executive is being drawn to the fact that answers to Parliamentary Questions should reflect the reality, and the sanctions that public officers are liable to, in case the august Assembly is misled by erroneous or false reply.

I have also requested that disciplinary actions be initiated against officers of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes who have failed in their duties of care by not performing their duty for which they are being paid. Having said the above, the multipurpose complex comprises a social centre at the ground floor and hall on the first floor. Upon request the hall can be rented for the organisation of wedding, reception, birthday celebration among others subject to the payment of an appropriate fees.

I am also of the view that the hall should be made available on Sundays and public holidays subject to the payment of an appropriate fee to enable the inhabitant to organise their activities. I will request my Ministry to instruct the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes to see to it that the Municipal Hall is available accordingly once it is refurbished. The refurbishment is expected to be completed in some two months' time. My Ministry will monitor that the delay of the completion of refurbishing works is respected.

Madam Speaker, it is sad to say that the government and the service to the citizens are the same at the level of some local authorities in the last few years have left much to be desired due to the *laissez-aller* of some officers. The basic rights for leisure of the people, that is, the citizen have not been respected and they have not been provided with quality service due to some partisan councillors. Madam Speaker, it is my firm intention to redress this situation.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Ms Anquetil.

Ms Anquetil : Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente. Madame la présidente, je souhaite...

Madam Speaker: Ne criez pas!

Ms Anquetil: Je ne crie pas.

Madam Speaker: Non, non c'est un peu fort.

Ms Anquetil: Madame la présidente, je souhaite exprimer ma reconnaissance au ministre pour les mesures rapides qu'il a prises en réponse à la situation déplorable au complexe municipal de Résidence Père Laval. Le Ministre peut-il informer la Chambre si une révision de la programmation des activités est envisagée en vue de redonner vie à ce complexe et répondre aux aspirations clairement exprimées par les habitants de Résidence Père Laval. Merci.

Madam Speaker : Le Ministre a déjà répondu. Il y a les élections municipales avec, j'espère, de nouveaux élus qui vont, aussi j'espère, faire leur travail. Je ne pense pas que le ministre peut répondre plus. Je passe à la nouvelle question. Alors, M. Quirin !

**PRIMARY SCHOOLS – *KREOL MORISIEN* EDUCATORS – WORKING
CONDITIONS**

(No. B/383) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the *Kreol Morisien* Educators in primary schools, he will state the measures being envisaged to address the disparities in working conditions thereof compared to other primary educators, particularly regarding working period, pupil-educator ratio and resources made available thereto and, if not, why not.

Dr. Gungapersad: I have been informed that currently there are disparities in the working conditions of *Kreol Morisien* Educators in primary schools. Particularly regarding the number working periods, pupil-teacher ratio and available resources.

In terms of working periods, *Kreol Morisien* Educators like those teaching Asian languages, are required to work up to 58 periods per week and ensuring that there is no disparity in this regard. Regarding the pupil-teacher ratio, the standard class size is set at 40 pupils. However, depending on the region and the number of pupils enrolled in KM, the ratio can range from 1:1 to 1:47 per class. If the ratio exceeds 30, additional support is provided by either another *Kreol Morisien* Educator or a supply teacher to ensure that the teaching environment remains conducive to quality education.

Measures to address the situation, Madam Speaker, the recruitment of additional educators is underway including the 51 trainees recruited in 2022 of whom 18 have successfully completed their training at MIE. Further, 31 more trainees were recruited in 2024 and are expected to complete their training by 2026. Additionally, supply *Kreol Morisien* teachers will be engaged for the year 2025 and recruitment procedures for these

teachers will commence shortly with the recent constitution of the PSC Board. My Ministry is committed to ensuring that the set norms and standards are complied with through ongoing recruitment and the mobilisation of supply teachers in the future. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Mr Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. Bien que le Kreol Morisien ait été introduit dans les écoles primaires depuis 2012, aucun *Deputy Head Teacher* ni inspecteur d'école spécialisé en Kreol Morisien n'a encore été nommé pour assurer un encadrement pédagogique approprié. À quand, M. le ministre pouvons-nous nous attendre un changement dans le bon sens ?

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, that is why we have this change. This has not been happening, rightly said by the hon. Member, and this is something we are going to address. Whatever was not done properly by the previous government, we are here in order to address that issue.

Mr Quirin : Madame la présidente, je pense que l'honorable ministre a dû l'affirmer dans sa réponse initiale, contrairement aux enseignants de General Purpose, d'informatique ou de langue asiatique, les enseignants de Kreol Morisien ne disposent pas, dans certaines écoles, de salle dédiée pour l'enseignement. Donc cela paraît comme une discrimination et que compte faire justement l'honorable ministre pour y remédier ?

Dr. Gungapersad: Definitely, this also will have to be addressed because we do not want any streak of discrimination to exist in whatsoever school, hon. Member. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It would be unconstitutional. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix. Mr Lobine! The hon. Minister of Industry, SME and Cooperatives will be replying this question.

AFRICA GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT – EXPIRY – ECONOMIC IMPACT

(No. B/384) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, he will state –

- (a) if his Ministry has undertaken any assessment of the potential economic impact of the expiry thereof in September 2025, and

- (b) the measures being implemented and/or envisaged to safeguard the export sector, particularly the textiles and other key industries.

The Minister of Industry, SME and Cooperatives (Mr A. Ameer Meea): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for this PQ as this will give me the opportunity to shed some light on AGOA and the issue of US Reciprocal Tariff.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which became effective in May 2000 has been a lifeline for our industry operators to make inroads into the US market through duty free and quota free access for some 6,400 product lines. I wish to remind the House that the initial discussions on the Mauritian side around the establishment of AGOA were held in the late 1990's under the leadership of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, our current Prime Minister.

The AGOA was last renewed in 2015 for a period of 10 years and is therefore due to expire in September 2025. I am informed that prior to its expiry, Government authorities took the necessary steps to initiate discussions with the US counterparts to forcefully lobby for an early renewal of AGOA in an endeavour for our exporters to have more visibility on the US market. There was a general indication that AGOA was set to be renewed for an additional 16 periods, up to 2041 following the AGOA Renewal and Improvement Bill that was introduced in the US Senate in April 2024.

As the House is aware, on 02 April 2025, the US President came forward with an executive order to impose a reciprocal tariff of 40% on imports from Mauritius. I wish to inform the House that on 07 April 2025, the Prime Minister chaired a meeting in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, myself as Minister of Industry and the Junior Minister of Finance, also the Ag. Financial Secretary, the Economic Advisors at the Prime Minister's Office to take stock of the situation and decide on the way forward.

Thereafter, on 08 April 2025, the Prime Minister made a statement in the House, whereby he highlighted the importance of AGOA for Mauritius and the impact on the reciprocal tariff on our exports. He also outlined the course of action that would be followed by Mauritius to safeguard the interests of the export manufacturing industry. The Prime Minister also informed the House that he is writing to President Trump with a view to discuss the concerns of Mauritius.

Consequently, on 09 April 2025, the US Government announced a 19-day pause on the new tariff and a lowering of the reciprocal tariff rate at 10% effective immediately. I should

emphasise that with the coming into force of this US trade policy, the advantages enjoyed by our industry operators under AGOA would cease to exist. I should apprise the House that USA is our fourth export market destination for locally manufactured products such as wearing apparel, live primates, jewellery, fish, fish preparations, medical devices and optical goods amongst others.

As a matter of fact, domestic export to the USA stood at Rs6.8 billion in 2024, with 79 enterprises exporting to this market. Out of them, there were 41 export-oriented enterprises exporting to this market. Out of them, there were 41 export-oriented enterprises exporting to the US market to the tune of Rs5.7 billion. And out of these 41 export-oriented enterprises, 11 derived more than 50% of their export revenue from USA. Altogether, these 41 enterprises employ around 21,000 workers, out of whom 10,000 are Mauritians.

In the wake of the event of the recent imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the US Government, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry conducted a quick survey from 07 to 10 April 2025 among the 41 export-oriented enterprises exporting to the USA, to assess its potential impact on their business operations. Most of these enterprises surveyed have indicated that –

- (a) They have contacted their clients in the USA who are awaiting clarifications on the reciprocal tariffs' applications by the US custom operatives to decide on the way forward.
- (b) There is a sense of uncertainty amongst some clients who have put their orders on hold.
- (c) At this stage, it is still premature to assess the full cost implications and spillover effects on the new tariffs imposed on them, particularly if US clients proceed with cancellation of orders in the coming months, and
- (d) They are envisaging to explore new market destinations, thus this process will take time to materialise. Furthermore, the Prime Minister will be chairing a follow-up meeting tomorrow 16 April 2025 to have latest updates on the matter and to decide accordingly on the next course of action.

Madam Speaker, with respect to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the export manufacturing sector is already being supported through a host of measures, among which –

- (a) Reduce corporate tax for 3% on profits derived from exports of goods;

- (b) Flexible work permit policies whereby there is no ratio, no quota for export-oriented enterprises;
- (c) Provision of a refund of 60% on basic air freight cost incurred on exports for all products to the USA under market destination under the Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme;
- (d) Provision of a grant of 25% of the basic ocean freight cost up to a maximum of USD 600 per 40 feet container exported to 47 eligible ports in Africa through the Freight Rebate Scheme;
- (e) Provision of a 50% subsidy on the Export Trading Guarantee Insurance Premium incurred by enterprises when they subscribe to an insurance policy to cover their exports to all countries under the Export Trading Guarantee Insurance Scheme;
- (f) Provision for a subsidy on the rental and administrative cost of warehouses operated by Mauritian companies in Tanzania, Kenya through the African Warehousing Scheme, and
- (g) A refund of Rs500,000 annually for the SMEs participating in international fares under the SME Refund Scheme.

Madam Speaker, it has been a long-time policy of my Ministry to move towards rebalancing our exports, so as to cushion against setbacks in any one of our traditional markets, including the USA. In this vein, we consider that Africa holds promising potential for our industry operators, in view of the fact that the AfCFTA, SADC and COMESA Freetrade Agreements have opened up the gateway for a more diversified market base. Furthermore, there is a need to consolidate and expand market outreach in Europe and also tap new opportunities in economies having high purchasing power such as the UAE, Australia and Japan.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, my Ministry will coordinate efforts with relevant institutions to urgently elaborate an action plan backed by significant financial and human resources to aggressively conduct targeted export promotion campaigns in these high potential economies, by leveraging on free trade agreements wherever applicable, which was unfortunately not being performed by the Economic Development Board during the last ten years.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. Yes?

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I ask the hon. Minister whether Government will envisage appointing a foreign consultant or a lobbyist in the United States

to help the Mauritian Government with regards to future negotiations with the US or in the aftermath of the 90 days of President Trump?

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Madam Speaker, we already have a lobbyist doing this job and we have a panel of experts working on this issue under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Hon. Second Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien!

**BASALT LTD, PLAINE MAGNIEN – LANDS & RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES –
CONSTRUCTION PERMITS GRANT**

(No. B/385) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the lands and residential properties situated in the vicinity of Basalt Ltd., at Plaine Magnien, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Grand Port, information as to the reasons why construction permits are not being granted to build additional floors on existing houses thereat, indicating the remedial measures, if any, being proposed thereon.

Mr Wochit: Madam Speaker, can I table this PQ because it is too long?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Yes!

(Interruptions)

Mr Wochit: The answer is too long.

Madam Speaker: That would be perfect.

(Interruptions)

That would be perfect.

Mr Wochit: No, it is too long.

Madam Speaker: Because we really want to move on a bit. So, please table it, do not hesitate. Thank you. Mr Apollon, is that alright? Can we deal with this?

Mr Apollon: It is okay.

Madam Speaker: Then we will come back.

Mr Apollon: No problem!

Madam Speaker: You got plenty of time! Next week, the week after, you know. Hon. Second Member for Grand Baie and Poudre D'or, Mr Beejan!

**BEAU PLATEAU, GOODLANDS – NETWORK COVERAGE – IMPROVEMENT
MEASURES**

(No. B/386) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the mobile and internet network coverage in the region of Beau Plateau, Goodlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the measures being envisaged to improve same, giving details thereof and the expected start and completion dates of the proposed measures.

Dr. Ramtohul: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I am informed that the region of Beau Plateau in Goodlands is developing and, at present, still sparsely populated. There are three licensed operators, Cellplus Mobile Communications Ltd, which is a subsidiary of Mauritius Telecom, Emtel Ltd and Mahanagar Telephone (Mauritius) Limited, also known as MTML. They cover the aforementioned region with 2G, 3G and 4G from their base stations which are located in the vicinity of Goodlands. Additionally, Cellplus and Emtel provide 5G and 4G+ coverage within the same region.

Emtel and MTML have indicated that they have not received any complaints from the inhabitants and users within that region. However, Cellplus Mobile Communications Ltd has confirmed that it has received two complaints from the same customer: one on 02 July 2024 and another on 21 March 2025. Accordingly, taking into consideration residential density and subject to necessary approvals from the relevant authorities, Cellplus will proceed to identify an appropriate location for a mobile site.

A typically new mobile site deployment will take around 12 months roughly. Depending upon the acquisition and the process, the speed at which the process is executed, including the Building and Land Use Permit along with a regulatory clearance, we are looking at around 12 months.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to add, also in relation to PQ B/221 during the Sitting of 25 March, I informed the House that the Information and Communication

Technologies Authority (ICTA) is currently implementing, in collaboration with a French network testing solution provider, nPerf, a quality-of-service measurement application that will allow any subscriber to test its internet service subscription and to report the results to the ICTA through the mobile application. What are we doing with this? We are actually empowering the end-users so that they can assess the quality of the network. In case they face difficulties, they can, with evidence that is revealed on the mobile app, send their request to the ICTA. Ultimately, ICTA will communicate with the service provider.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

(Interruptions)

It seems to me that maybe there are some microphones which are louder than the others. I do not know. Maybe you should look into it.

Anyway, was that answer okay?

Il y en a beaucoup qui ont été withdrawn.

Hon. Third Member for Pamplemousses and Triolet!

FSC/OECD REGIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE – MANDATE & OVERSIGHT

(No. B/387) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the Financial Services Commission/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (FSC/OECD) Regional Centre of Excellence, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) background, objectives and mandate thereof;
- (b) specific achievements made under each of its objectives to date;
- (c) annual expenditure of the Centre, and
- (d) key performance indicators put in place to ensure that public funds are utilized efficiently, and

- (e) term/duration of the Memorandum of Understanding between the FSC/OECD.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the Regional Centre of Excellence (RCE) was established in March 2019 following an MoU signed between the Government of Mauritius and the OECD in September 2018. The RCE operates under a governing board which advises on strategies and actions to be adopted.

The objectives and mandate of the RCE are –

- (i) to deliver capacity building programmes aimed primarily at the financial services regulators and law enforcement agencies from the Southern and Eastern African region;
- (ii) research topical areas relevant to financial services and financial malpractices for the regional market, and
- (iii) advice on minimum standards as regards best practices, guidelines and principles that must be introduced at the regional level.

The RCE offers all its events free of charge. Mauritius is the only country in Africa, through the RCE, where the OECD has a dedicated framework of cooperation in respect of the financial sector.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the RCE has, as to date, carried out the following activities in accordance with its objectives –

- (i) in terms of capacity building, it has carried 17 workshops in collaboration with the OECD and one event with the CFA Society Mauritius.
- (ii) from November 2020 to June 2024, some 6,530 participants from approximately 113 countries have been trained.
- (iii) in terms of trainers, 111 trainers delivered virtually and 81 trainers provided training in person.

With regard to the second objective of research and advice on policy, on the basis of the workshops carried out, information gathered and research carried out, four publications have been issued in relation to the events hosted by the RCE –

- (i) the blockchain adoption in Africa trends in market activity and policy development;
- (ii) open finance in Africa and open banking in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- (iii) FinTech lending in Sub-Saharan Africa, and
- (iv) sustainable finance trends and development in Africa.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the annual expenditure of the RCE amounted to Rs8,691,146 and Rs6,719,505 for the years 2023 and 2024, respectively. These were co-financed by the FSC and the Bank of Mauritius at 50% each. These excludes grant agreement signed with the OECD. The amount, I am told, cannot be divulged as it is part of a grant agreement between the OECD and the FSC.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (d) of the question, the RCE operates under strategic oversight of its governing board which reviews and approves its activities and associated costs. I am also informed by the FSC that the RCE's budget is subject to a two-tier approval, namely by the RCE governing board and subsequently, by the FSC Board. Thus, ensuring accountability.

It is also important to note that the OECD has a strict budget reporting regime, internal controls and accountability mechanisms which are applicable to its financial management structure and system, and ensure that the expenditure of public funds is transparent and represents value for money.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (e) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that the MoU between the Government of Mauritius and OECD was signed in September 2018 for an initial duration of two years. Thereafter, it has been extended in October 2020 for a duration of five years ending September 2025. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Rookny!

Mr Rookny: Madam Speaker, can the Minister please confirm that the transparency requiring OECD is now requiring secrecy about a grant given to FSC?

Madam Speaker: It is the other way round, if I am not mistaken. The grant given by OECD to the FSC or the other way round?

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: From OECD to the FSC.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: So, the grant is provided by the OECD to the FSC to finance partly the operation of the research centre. But I have to get legal advice. I have been told that, legally, we are not allowed to disclose the amount.

Madam Speaker: Of the grant agreement.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Yes!

Madam Speaker: Okay. Yes!

Mr Rookny: Madam Speaker, can the Minister advise if 17 workshops over the last six years could be considered as meeting the objectives of the RCE?

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: I will need to come back on that, Madam Speaker. It is a judgment that we will have to make on whether the sessions that have been held meet the objectives.

Madam Speaker: Of course!

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: It is a judgment that we will have to make.

Madam Speaker: Of course! Mr Rookny, is that enough? Are you happy this time?

(Interruptions)

Now, Mr Caserne, hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

RING ROAD PROJECT, PHASE 2 & 3 – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/388) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to Phases 2 and 3 of

the Ring Road Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to whether consideration will be given for the implementation thereof and, if so, when and if not, why not.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the main objective of the Ring Road Project is to relieve traffic congestion in and around Port Louis as well as to improve connectivity between the city and the north, south and western parts of Mauritius.

In fact, the first phase of the Ring Road Network which was completed in the year 2014 and which currently provides access to the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre and the surrounding areas, is only part of the major link of the Ring Road Project. The complete Ring Road Project comprises two additional phases as follows –

1. Phase 2, extending over a length of around 4.7 km, will start at the Ring Road Phase 1 Project at Pailles, it will cross Quoin Bluff Mountain and Moneron Hill through two tunnels and will connect to the end of Boulevard Victoria and to Tranquebar through a great separated junction;
2. Phase 3, extending over a length of around 2.85 km, will start at Vallée Pitot and will continue as a new route parallel to the Military Road connecting Nicolay Road at Plaine Verte and Motorway M2 through an interchange between Quay D and Mer Rouge roundabout and will end at the port near the Container Park via a dedicated overpass.

The complete Ring Road forms part of the National Road Strategy Networks of the RDA designed to support the sustainable development of the island by providing safe and fast connectivity addressing traffic congestion and allowing decentralisation.

Madam Speaker, the Ring Road Phase 2 and 3 projects will require massive investments and in view of the budgetary constraints of Government, as elaborated in the State of the Economy Report, it is proposed to implement the projects in phases to be scheduled in the years to come.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. If I may, at this stage, we don't have much time left, I got three questions, I would like you to help me to go through these three questions. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil, hon. Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes!

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF QUATRE BORNES – CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/389) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether in regard to the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the current financial situation thereof.

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker, a request for funds for an amount of Rs553,882,752 was made to the Ministry of Finance for Financial Year 2024-2025. This amount was calculated on the basis of forecasted expenditure and forecasted revenue to be generated including contributions from Councils owned funds and probably efficiency gain.

However, I am informed that for the Financial Year 2024-2025, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes was provided with a grant-in-aid of Rs344 m. only. As at 10 April 2025, it has generated a revenue of Rs110,644,246 to date and the total revenue available to the Council stand at Rs454,644,246. It is noted that the Ministry of Finance anticipated that the contribution from the Councils' own fund for an amount of Rs25 m. and probably efficiency gain to the tune of Rs44,288,770, this never materialised.

Madam Speaker, the Local Authorities Governance Unit of my Ministry undertakes a mid-term review of all local authorities including the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes in the months of December and January every year.

During that exercise, the Council has informed that its revised expenditure stands at Rs543,458,908 in view thereof based on actual as well as forecasted revenue and expenditures. The forecast in budget deficit would be around Rs89 m.

Madam Speaker, the deficit situation of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes is a reflection of what is happening in other local authorities also. The result of inadequate funding being provided by the Minister of Finance is that additional grant-in-aid for all local authorities have to be sought in March each year. This demonstrates a clear lack of foresight on the part of the former government which was more concerned in dilapidating public funds for their own motives instead of addressing the real issues. Hon. Members must have read now how the funds from the Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC) have been diverted to

unauthorised use. Had the same fund been injected in the local authorities, many projects, for the common good of the citizens, could have been implemented.

Madam Speaker, I wish to reassure the House that the mid-term review exercise has already been carried out and a request for additional grant-in-aid to the tune of Rs89 m. has been formulated in order to cater the current budget deficit and for the good running of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes.

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

Ms Anquetil: I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. Should we understand that the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes spent more than they were allowed? Did they get approval from your Ministry? Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Short and sweet. *C'est direct ça!*

Mr Wochit: Madam Speaker, in the Council we have for every expense, we have a vote and it is depending on the vote that they...

Madam Speaker: Je connais très bien les municipalités, n'oubliez pas !

Mr Wochit: Exactly, so all the expenses have been made according to the votes. So, we can't overspend on the same vote.

Madam Speaker: No overspending!

Mr Wochit: Yes!

Madam Speaker: You have another question, Ms Anquetil?

Ms Anquetil: No!

Madam Speaker: No, okay. Next question, hon. Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

MAURITIUS & RODRIGUES - RISING COSTS OF COMMODITIES - NEW POLICY

(No. B/390) **Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac)** asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of a new policy to address the issue of rising costs of commodities in

both mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues, he will state where matters stand, indicating if proposal will also be made for the protection of consumers against unfair practices.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, my Ministry currently imposes price control on 34 categories of essential commodities for Mauritius and out of which 12 commodities are controlled under the maximum fixed price mechanism which includes scheduled bread, LPG, mogas and gasoil and flour. In addition, there are 22 commodities comprising of more than 24,000 products which are controlled under the maximum markup mechanism including milk powder, breakfast cereals, infant food, edible oil, pharmaceutical products and basmati rice. For Rodrigues, there are 22 commodities which are now under maximum markup mechanism such as animal feed, edible oil, canned poultry, canned tuna and cheese among others. There are 14 commodities under maximum fixed price including fresh fish and garlicks.

Moreover, my Ministry is already providing relief to consumers through the provision of subsidised flour to consumers with a subsidy of Rs8.04 per half kg. Long grain white rice with a subsidy of Rs8.30 per half kg and for a 12kg LPG cylinder, a subsidy of Rs386.68 is being granted.

The Government is already disbursing an estimated amount of Rs5 billion per year for the maintenance of those subsidies in order to make the essential commodities affordable to the vulnerable household both in Mauritius and Rodrigues. It is a fact that Mauritius is a highly import dependent country and is highly affected to the disruption on the international markets and exposed to foreign exchange volatilities variation in supplier prices and changes in the freight cost. My Ministry has initiated a series of action to protect consumers against upside volatilities in prices and protect consumer interest.

Madam Speaker, in order to ensure affordability and accessibility of essential commodities, my Ministry has recently introduced maximum mark-up on frozen pack vegetables and canned vegetables and is currently working on extending maximum mark-up on other essential frequently consumed commodities for both Mauritius and Rodrigues.

I also wish to inform the House that a proposed list of essential commodities is being finalised for bulk importation at lower prices for which partnership with international suppliers will be explored in order to increase access for all consumers and reduce inflationary pressures.

Furthermore, continuous market monitoring and analysis on the prices of essential commodities on the market are ongoing at the level of my Ministry. The latest finding of such exercise revealed that following the intervention of the Bank of Mauritius in order to stabilise the value of the rupee and to control inflation, the prices of several essential commodities are witnessing stability and notable decreases in retail prices since the beginning of the year 2025. These include products such as infant milk, baby food, processed cheese, pasta, breakfast cereals, basmati rice, canned sardines and corned mutton.

Madam Speaker, as regards unfair practices, my Ministry has inspected around 3,000 trade premises across the island since the beginning of the year including supermarkets, shops, pharmacies, bakeries, hardware shops, trade and market fairs among others and have issued 343 contraventions up to date.

Furthermore, the Consumer Protection (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 were promulgated to strengthen the enforcement of sanctions against unfair commercial practices. Since their implementation on 31 March 2025, a total of 31 traders have been issued fixed penalty notices in accordance with the revised fines.

Madam Speaker, additionally, in line with the measures announced in the Government Programme 2025-2029, my Ministry is currently working on different legislation in order to –

- a) prevent any unwarranted increase in price in times of emergencies and crisis and to prevent the holding of products for sale at higher prices in the future which is a crucial step in creating a market place that is not only fair but also resilient in times of uncertainty, and
- b) protect consumers from unscrupulous traders who have a tendency to increase their profit margin by reducing the size or weight of a product. This will enable consumers to compare prices based on consistent units and as such empower consumers with the information, they need to make informed purchasing decision while discouraging deceptive business practices,
- c) last but certainly not the least, I am pleased to announce that the New Consumer Protection Bill has successfully completed its drafting stage with a view to addressing the evolving challenges in the market place. The Bil represents a significant step forward in strengthening consumers' rights and enhancing protection against unfair business practices.

The Bill is expected to be presented to Cabinet soon and thereafter, it will be introduced in the National Assembly. The Bill represents a cornerstone of our broader consumer protection agenda and once enacted, it will significantly enhance the confidence and security of consumers in our economy.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister!

HANDBALL – REVIVAL ACTIONS – NOV 2024-15 APRIL 2025

(No. B/391) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to handball, he will state the actions taken by his Ministry since November 2024 to date to revive same.

(Withdrawn)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Savabaddy! Last question!

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – KREOL MORISIEN – TEACHING CONSTRAINTS & MEASURES

(No. B/392) **Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the Kreol Morisien, he will state the number of primary schools where same –

- (a) is being taught, indicating
 - (i) the number of teachers available therefor, and
 - (ii) if any shortage of these teachers has been reported at the Ministry, and
- (b) cannot be taught and the reasons therefor, indicating the measures being envisaged to address this issue.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, with regard to part(a), first part of the question, I have been informed that *Kreol Morisien* is currently being taught in 189 primary schools comprising 143 public primary schools and 46 Roman Catholic Education Authority Primary Schools. To support the effective teaching of the subject, a total number of 229 educators are available.

I am tabling the number of *Kreol Morisien* educators who are currently serving in primary schools.

With regard part (a), second part of the question, I wish to inform the House that no shortage of *Kreol Morisien educators* has been reported to my Ministry to date. However, I am informed that six KM educators are currently serving two primary schools where the pupil population studying KM is low. Pending the availability of supply teachers for the subject, I referred to that issue earlier to the previous PQ.

As regard part (b), there are 67 public primary schools where KM is not currently taught or due to a lack of demand for the subject. However, due to the establishment of new residential areas, eight of these schools have recently requested the introduction of KM.

Regarding the last part of your question, I enlisted the measures in the previous question to hon. Quirin.

Thank you.

CHILDREN - ONLINE EXPLOITATION & ABUSE - PROTECTION

(No. B/393) Dr. Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the protection of children from online exploitation, harm and abuse, she will state the measures, programmes or mechanisms, if any, put in place therefor, indicating –

- (a) how the Ministry proposes to empower families on the negative impact of the digital environment, and
- (b) the complaints mechanism, if any, put in place therefor.

(Withdrawn)

SAVANNE DISTRICT – SPORTS COMPLEX CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/394) Dr. Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the promotion of sports and leisure, he will state if consideration will be given for the construction of a stadium and/or gymnasium with a running track in the District of Savanne.

(Withdrawn)

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Time is up!

Hon. Prime Minister!

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, 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 Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**SUGAR INVESTMENT TRUST – ECONOMIC COLLAPSE**

(4.07 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a Statement with regard to the Sugar Investment Trust (SIT).

The Sugar Investment Trust is on the verge of an economic collapse. It is owned by some 40,000 small planters who own 95% of a company. The remaining 5% shareholding is owned by Government.

The Sugar Investment Trust has accumulated a debt of around Rs1.6 billion over the last ten years. It is being driven by deficit at all levels and within all its clusters, *inter alia*, Land Holdings, Leisure, Property and Corporate Services. The Sugar Investment Trust is generating losses to the tune of Rs150 million annually and debt levels increasing by around 10% annually.

This recurring trend from the last ten years has led to a deterioration of the asset base of the company coupled by a deep negative cash flow and a fragile balance sheet with all its assets encumbered with charges and pledges. Overdrafts are being employed to pay salaries and other auxiliary dues.

The previous management has been engaged in massive mismanagement and inaccurate reporting.

The situation of the SIT is as follows –

- (i) In 2014, the SIT's share valuation stood at Rs15,000 per share and has since, been depleted of its value by more than 92 %. The net asset value per share has fallen to Rs1.78;
- (ii) The SIT has pledged all remaining assets against debts;
- (iii) In 2014, the SIT had a land bank of 7,000 arpents and is today left only with 2,100 arpents;
- (iv) The sale of the land has been made with no benchmarking, no official valuations, and conducted in an unprofessional manner discounted by more than 40-60% below normal market rates;
- (v) In many instances, related party individuals, that is, directors and other related entities have engaged with the SIT to purchase these discounted lands, never settled accordingly, but continued to harvest sugarcane thereon;
- (vi) The proceeds of the above land sale have never been employed to repay outstanding liabilities, but rather to re-launch property projects with overstated costs and understated selling rates;
- (vii) According to SBM, loans of the SIT are close to reaching stage 3, that is, close to entering seizure proceedings;
- (viii) The SIT has invested in the rental building at Ebène named 'The Core'. This asset has cost the SIT Rs876 m. and has totally been financed by liabilities. The return on investment on this building is very low and is not adequate to service the debt incurred thereof;
- (ix) The Sugar Investment Trust income stream comprises Rs30 m. from rental; Rs35 m. from 10,000 tons of sugarcane cultivated on 265 hectares of land which adds up to approximately Rs65 m. Finance costs are in excess of Rs115 m., which rendered the SIT insolvent;
- (x) The debt capital is not being serviced at all since 2014 whilst interest is being serviced partly;
- (xi) Rs12.8 m. have been taken from DBM Ltd to undertake sugarcane cultivation in 2023, but it never happened;
- (xii) The SIT Leisure Water Park has been running on losses to the tune of Rs2 m. per month since 2015, whilst hefty unfinished investments have been apparently vested in this park without any feasibility plans or reports. At this instance, the

park is in a dangerous state and requires immediate closure. Rs100 m. have been invested in 2018 without any strict plans, and a further Rs250 m. have been normally invested with a loan from MauBank. None of these investments can be seen at Belle Mare;

- (xiii) Many contracts from service providers have expired in 2020 and have never been renewed by normal practice of tendering. The service suppliers have continued to be remunerated, often at higher than market rates, which is totally illegal;
- (xiv) Loans undertaken and proceeds of sale of land cannot be matched against projects and cash flows. Accounts provided are totally flawed and against international financial reporting standards;
- (xv) It is unconceivable to see that the SIT has sold in excess of 5,000 arpents, but still bears a debt of more than Rs1.6 billion, together with a negative cashflow;
- (xvi) As at today, arrears relating to rental stand at Rs50 m.

Madam Speaker, a proper forensic audit is warranted at the SIT and firms may be employed for same. Should the need arise or given strong suspicions of fraud and corruption, the matter may be directly referred to the Financial Crimes Commission for a more in-depth forensic investigation.

Meanwhile, my Ministry is presently looking in the restructuring of SIT for the organisation to become effective and efficient. I hope we can do it.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

- (a) *The Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill (No. VIII of 2025).*
- (b) *The Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IX of 2025).*

MOTION

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE – S.O. 73 REVIEW – PERFORMANCE-BASED BUDGETING (2025)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(4.14 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move the motion standing in my name

—

“This Assembly is of opinion that in view of the enactment of the Finance and Audit (Amendment) Act 2025 and the introduction of Performance-Based Budgeting, it is necessary and expedient that the Standing Orders Committee be, and is hereby, empowered to look into the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly 1995 presently in force, more specifically Standing Order 73, with a view to making recommendations for the necessary changes to be brought to the provisions relating to the procedure in connection with the Appropriation Bill”.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 69 (3) (b), the matter stands referred to the Standing Orders Committee.

We can go on if you want? Well, if everybody wants to go for tea, I do not mind.

Let us break for tea! *Laissez les neurones se reposer un peu !*

At 4.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.01 p.m., with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Prime Minister!

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR DRUG CONTROL BILL

(NO. VI OF 2025)

Order for Second Reading read.

(5.01 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the National Agency for Drug Control Bill (No. VI of 2025) be read a second time.

This Bill, in front of the House, is yet another concrete expression of the determination of this Government to honour its pledge of renewal to the nation.

Madam Speaker, I had the occasion the last few months to address the House on the appalling dilapidation of our institutions and the pillars of governance of our country. This was not accidental or adventitious. The nation at large has taken cognisance of the catastrophic state of our economy brought on by years of recklessness decisions and deliberate sabotage of those perceived to have an adverse political affiliation to the previous government. And it resulted in hundreds of millions of US dollars in costly awards and judgements against the same.

Equally alarming is the nefarious legacy of drug addiction, drug trafficking, and other drug-related crimes that the previous government has bequeathed us. The previous government failed dismally to combat the escalation of the drug crisis in Mauritius. It almost appears – I am tempted to say ‘appears’ – to have been deliberately delaying action to tackle drug trafficking, drug addiction and halt the proliferation of drug-related crimes. As a responsible Government, we are duty bound to do away with the previous regime’s toxic legacy arising from years of ineptitude, indifference and the obvious nexus between the drug barons and the MSM.

Madam Speaker, an American journalist, David Schrieberg, had written in an issue of Newsweek about the deadly dangers of drug proliferation. I want to quote him because it says exactly what we are saying. It says, and I quote –

“The largest, richest and deadliest criminal enterprise in history is penetrating deeply into civil structures that make democracy what it is: justice systems, police forces, political parties, legislatures, electoral campaigns, (...) government ministries and presidential palaces”.

This, Madam Speaker, rings a very uncomfortable but recognisable bell with all those who have observed with growing dismay the conduct of the previous government and the disconcerting admission of the previous Prime Minister, who said that – he admitted – the drug mafia has infiltrated all our institutions. The previous Prime Minister said that after nearly 10 years in power. Of course, we are familiar with that type of behaviour from the party that brought us so many infamous and shameful moments. Let me just recall the highlights of that tawdry – I think we could call it *sinema*.

The House may recall how in 1985, a bunch of notorious drug traffickers was invited officially to the garden party at Le Réduit for the independence celebration, where they lit firecrackers and were shouting, “*gouvernman dan nou lame, nou pou fer seki nou le*”. It

seems a new breed of traffickers still considered it until they were booted out that *gouvernman dan nou lame*, and it was during the lost and wasted decade of the MSM-led government.

Then, there was the episode of the Amsterdam boys: four MPs travelling with diplomatic passports. Madam Speaker, believe it or not, those passports were given on a Saturday morning. The PMO was open for them; there were instructions to open the PMO and give them these diplomatic passports because they had to have diplomatic immunity. Madam Speaker, as we all know, they were arrested in December 1985 in possession of 20 kgs of heroin worth Rs36 million at that time. I bet you, had they not been arrested in Amsterdam, they would have walked in here with red carpet treatment. That is what the previous government did; that is the mentality. And who can forget the hilarious and yet very serious incident when an exhibit of heroin in the custody of the police, when it was brought to court, turned out to be *lamous sinwa*. You can see the nexus. There has been cooperation right across the board.

In 2017, one Veeren Peroumal, a notorious drug trafficker; some people call him the Godfather. He deponed in the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking chaired by former Judge Lam Shang Leen. He explained the modality of his contribution. At that time, he said he spent Rs30 million to finance the electoral campaign of the MSM in 2014 – Rs30 million, one drug trafficker! The Commission of Inquiry heard from the drug trafficker, Veeren Peroumal, that he kept his representation in-house. We can understand what that means – a close circuit. All of them were members of the party of the government then. According to him and another dealer, one Siddick Islam even informed the Commission that they paid their counsels – believe it or not – with drug money, and the counsels accepted it. This is how the MSM operated.

In 2018, the Commissioner of Inquiry also referred, and I am quoting –

“Two very disturbing facts concerning one barrister-at-law representing Mr Peroumal and close to the previous Government who at that time occupied important positions”.

The Commission Report underscores and it says, I quote –

“[Those] controlling the casinos, the gaming houses, horse racing where the Commission has reason to believe, in the light of the various testimonies received, are the temples of money laundering by the accomplices of the drug traffickers [and] it is a matter of concern”.

The Commission of Inquiry, Madam Speaker, expressed caving criticism of the activities of certain barristers at law.

(Interruptions)

As going far beyond ethical, professional, and legal constraints in their representation of notorious drug traffickers engaging in the conduct amounting to an attempt to pervert the course of justice. Will you believe this – barristers perverting the course of justice?

The Commission of Inquiry mentions how a lady minister of the then government, hon. Mrs Roubina Jadoo-Jaunbocus, had visited 17 detainees in less than three hours and without being solicited.

(Interruptions)

She came voluntarily, as if. On another occasion she visited 15 detainees and groups of detainees.

Thereby, the Commission says, when we have a group of detainees together, they are all accused of drug dealing; you bring them together, and you are facilitating the exchange of information between them – a barrister doing this? It was also established that she had been in communication with the most notorious convicted drug trafficker, again this Mr Veeren Peroumal; that is why they all shouted the name, the pet name “*kala prizon*” – that is the name.

Another one Jeeva and one Bottesoie explained how they had been enticed not to implicate certain persons and to *devir lanket*. They are very strong at that. You are saying the FCC is arresting people. There are going to be attempts to *devir lanket la*, but I tell them, ‘Do you want to do this’? Think again! We have the response for them.

In 2017, Madam Speaker, a record seizure of heroin made the headlines; 119.5 kgs of heroin worth Rs1.8 billion was found onboard of a ship among imports from a company called Brilliant Resources Consulting Ltd. Owned by whom? By one Geanchand Dewdane. His proximity with the Leader of the MSM is well known. At first, he said ‘I did not know him’, and Dewdane responded, ‘ask him who used to put *brinzel*?’

(Interruptions)

Kamaron dan frizider !

(Interruptions)

Bred ossi mo kroir linn mete!

An hon. Member: *Bred sonz! Bred sonz!*

The Prime Minister: *Bred sonz!*

(Interruptions)

And what happened afterwards, Madam Speaker, is shocking! He is arrested. The former Prime Minister said he did not know him, then he made those remarks, and then believe or not, by magic, the provisional charges were dropped. Completely dropped, as if nothing happened! *Ankor enn fwa lanket inn devire!*

Equally shocking, in 2019, 95 kgs of cocaine estimated at – they do not talk about millions, these people, billions – Rs1.4 billion hidden in a *tractopelle*. It escaped the control of the Custom Officers at the port, despite the fact that the port was fully equipped with modern equipment and sniffing dogs to detect drugs. No, it went through! What is even more striking is that the cocaine travelled alongside Mauricio, that is, the first metro tram which reached Mauritius. And believe it or not, the tram came out; who was there? The whole Cabinet with the Prime Minister welcoming everybody. The tram has come! And the tram has come with drugs, right in front of the nose!

And you know, Madam Speaker, nobody up to now has been arrested. Nobody! As usual, *lanket devire!* We know, Madam Speaker, that regrettably, cocaine is used as a recreational drug by some of the most affluent classes in our country, but the law cannot and does not apply to only one class of persons. As I said in the recent passing out ceremony for Police Constables, and I quote again –

“We cannot allow unruly elements who may have thought they are above the law to threaten the very fabric of our society. No one is above the law.”

I am tempted to quote this great Judge who became Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning. This is what he said –

“To every citizen of this land, however powerful, I would use Thomas Fuller's words over three hundred years ago, 'Be ye never so high, the law is above you'.”

Madam Speaker, while the Labour Government has invested to transform Grand Bassin into Ganga Talao, into a peaceful spiritual sanctuary, some were busy transforming an area very close to Ganga Talao into a narco-sanctuary. That is what they did. The previous

government, under very suspicious conditions, granted a lease to Eco Deer Park. It was found out subsequently that the land had been converted into a fancy rave party...

Mr Jhummun: Stag Party!

The Prime Minister: Yes, Stag Party, where *cochon marron*, drugs, alcoholic drinks were available *à gogo*, and at least, one previous Minister, probably two, I am told, were there. And no less a person than the former Attorney General of this country! This is the level we had reached. The case is being investigated just now by the FCC, so I will not make more comments.

And then, Madam Speaker, who has not heard of Hubert Celerine, better known as Franklin? Notorious *Roi de l'Ouest*...

An hon. Member: Business Class!

The Prime Minister: ...who was actively involved in many questionable activities, perpetrated with the apparent blessing of the political masters of the day. He was even allowed to occupy State land, in this salubrious land at Rivière Noire. And when there were several requests for his extradition from Reunion Island where he had already been sentenced to imprisonment, he did not want to go into prison. So, what did they do? They protected him. The then government deliberately tried to prevent his extradition. So many times, the then Attorney General was answering questions here, looking for little change in the phrases to say that they are looking into it. They were looking as usual; with the MSM, they are always looking into it. When he was finally extradited, why? Because of public outcry and the then Opposition! What happened? He was given VVIP treatment, enjoying the comfort of business class. This is how drug barons were treated by the former regime.

It begs the question, Madam Speaker. Is it sheer coincidence that each time the MSM has been in power, each time we saw a prolific resurgence of drug traffickers in the country? Is it a coincidence? We have seen the same saga since 1985, and after 10 years, we have just seen, we have to see, everybody knows *les ravages et les torts que la drogue est en train de faire à notre jeunesse*. This is the legacy of the MSM.

We have stated in no uncertain terms in the Government Programme that the fight against drug trafficking and use will be one of the main priorities of the Government. We have no choice; every Government has to defend the citizens of the country. We will implement bold measures to end the suffering of families with an unflinching resolve to deal with this major societal scourge. It is important, Madam Speaker, to make a distinction

between the victim of drug abuse and the trafficker. In this respect, let me remind the House what the late Sir Maurice Rault said way back in 1986 in his report of the Commission of Enquiry on Drugs, which he chaired. He said –

“Addiction is the modern form of slavery. The addict is chained to the trafficker by bonds as cruel as those which tie the slaves to his Lord and he runs the same risk of moral defilement. Since he cannot disobey his master, he can be compelled to cheat, to steal or even sell his body.”

That is what he said in his report.

Madam Speaker, the National Agency for Drug Control, this Bill, represents a crucial step in fulfilling our commitment to fight against this blight which is posing a significant threat to the health, security and future of our nation. It has taken the proportion of as if a serious epidemic. Today, we present not just a legal framework but a vision for a safer Mauritius, free from the devastating impact of this deadly threat.

For the first time in the country, Madam Speaker, we are proposing a fully integrated strategy, actionable by an agency that will bring together all the various public bodies involved; all under one roof to combat drug trafficking, provide rehabilitation and support families of the victims of drug abuse. The legal provisions in respect of trafficking, consumption and treatment of drug addicts will be reviewed to cater, *inter alia*, for differentiated treatment of traffickers and consumers.

I remember, Madam Speaker, I was invited by the former President of the United States, President Clinton, at the Clinton Global Initiative, and during dinner he asked me, ‘are you using methadone in your country for treatment?’ I had to say no. I cannot say I was aware of it either, but I said no. And he said it is one decision that he regretted when he was President. He regretted that he never used methadone, and he immediately made funds available for antiretroviral drugs for HIV patients and earmarked part of it for the provision of methadone. We received 36,270 US Dollars in all. And what happened when we lost the elections in 2014? The previous Minister said, ‘Ah, methadone? Not necessary’. He stopped methadone.

(Interruptions)

Yes!

There was a prominent professor in La Réunion. He gave an interview – I think in *l'Express*, but I am not sure – and he said, ‘it is a huge mistake to stop methadone’. And what happened? He had to backtrack, and they restarted the methadone programme afterwards. Trial and error! There was no scientific purpose in what they were doing! They just tried this and that. Because the previous government had introduced this programme, they stopped it! And then, they had to backtrack!

The measures we are proposing to the House today, Madam Speaker, evince the determination of this Government to address the multifarious challenges posed by drug abuse. Every day, we witness disastrous consequences on families. We see how families, without distinction of class or community, are totally shattered; how the healthcare system is having difficulties in coping with this problem; and how drug-related crimes are increasing. This is threatening our youth. Indeed, they are the future of our nation. The future of our nation is being threatened!

Over the recent years, Madam Speaker, no significant, effective and tangible measures have been taken to combat this crisis. It is abundantly clear that there was no genuine will to remedy the situation by the previous government. We all know how the conclusions and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drugs were mostly ignored. Just a few here and there were taken on board. The situation continued to deteriorate under their complaisant or complicit watch.

The previous government dismantled NATReSA and did not replace it with any alternative to carry out the important work of harm reduction. Nothing! Yet, it is clear that the traditional approach to dealing with such a complex problem with wide-ranging ramifications is totally outdated today.

The World Drug Report of 2023, Madam Speaker, warned of a proliferation of supply, demand and use of synthetic drugs as well as an increase in substance use disorders. The number of people using drugs has increased by 11 per cent globally but by as much as 40 per cent in Africa in 2023! In response to the growing threats posed by synthetic drugs, the United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drugs Threats, aimed at accelerating the international efforts to tackle this rising crisis.

As part of the Global Coalition Initiative, the Government of the United States provided funding to the UNODC to conduct a detailed assessment of the threats posed by synthetic

drugs. This project also evaluated the national and regional capacities of six East African countries. That includes Mauritius.

Look at what the report says. It is not finalised yet, but we have part of it. As part of the assessment, in July 2024, the UNODC conducted a study on synthetic drugs, especially in Mauritius. Among the main findings, I quote –

“Mauritius has been identified as the leading user of synthetic cannabinoids.”

Leading user!

The other findings include the following comments –

“(…) Drug rehabilitation efforts within the public sector remain severely limited. Although methadone treatment is now available, other forms of treatment remain underdeveloped and inadequate. Psychological support and interventions, including traditional medicine, where available, need further strengthening. [In fact, they were not using anything!] With limited resources and insufficient follow-up, many individuals either failed to comply or relapsed after finishing the treatment (…).”

Madam Speaker, the threat posed by synthetic cannabinoids and other drugs in Mauritius has already been highlighted in the Globalised Organized Crime Index of 2023, which actually measured 15 criminal markets, including drug markets, across 193 member States. And guess what? Mauritius ranked 7th, out of 193, in regard to synthetic drugs! 7th! Just behind South Africa!

However, in spite of Mauritius forming part of the US Global Coalition since November 2023, the previous government just allowed the situation to worsen. They could not care less. They failed to realise the benefits; there were benefits and resources available for the coalition to strengthen the country’s response, but they did nothing. This *laxisme* amounts to gross negligence – I would say criminal negligence – coupled with the obvious proximity of notorious traffickers with the previous regime. They have contributed greatly to the quagmire we find ourselves in today. I think – I am not mincing my words – it is tantamount to their betrayal; a betrayal to the whole nation of this country! We cannot, and we will not, continue to pay lip service to the challenges related to national security, including those relating to drug trafficking.

We know, Madam Speaker, most of the drugs available in Mauritius, from the reports we see from ADSU and others, come from the sea. Not all, but most. It is a fact that we cannot deal with the drug problem in isolation. We cannot! We are partners with the Indian Ocean Commission and with countries of the Indian Ocean for sharing of information and joint patrolling of our respective maritime zone. The actual Commissioner of Police, who was at ADSU, was cooperating fully. We were getting advanced information – I said mostly from the sea – but even in planes, information was shared. With the MSM, it seemed that they were not interested to share information.

The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar is responsible for producing a single recognised maritime picture of the Western Indian Ocean and identifying vessels of interest. The Regional Operation Centre in Seychelles is dedicated to the coordination of the regional operations at sea with respect to maritime safety and security in our region.

But the truth is, Madam Speaker, the previous government failed to act on the information they received on the suspicious movement of ships, most probably transporting substances through our waters. They did not respond. I will give an example. In June of last year, there were two ships nearing our shores. One was heading to Seychelles, and the other one was heading to Mauritius. The one that went to Seychelles – because they received the information – was arraigned by the Seychelles authorities, and 900 kg of narcotics were seized. 900 kg! However, what happened to the ship advancing in our waters? It was allowed to move freely! Nobody even stopped it. The police were made aware of this information; they were made aware, but either they received orders or they just turned a deaf ear! Much to the dismay and astonishment of the Regional Maritime Information Centre!

Similarly, we have the assistance of countries like India, the United States, and France to enhance this regional maritime security architecture to combat, on a broad range, all the illegal activities on the high seas.

To reinforce maritime surveillance, we are setting up a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre which will be fully equipped to monitor, analyse and report all vessels undertaking illicit activities in our EEZ. The invaluable support of the Government of India has been obtained to set up that centre. The building is under construction, and an Indian Naval Officer is in Mauritius to assist in the setting up of this centre.

Also, with the assistance of the Government of Japan, a new coastal surveillance system will be installed to replace the old one, the old one which I had procured at the time when I was Prime Minister. They allowed it to just be out of service. Nobody was interested in having that because, in fact, they did not want to monitor. Additionally, the operation of the Coast Guard is being thoroughly reviewed to ensure that information gathered regionally is used in an optimal way.

Madam Speaker, under this Government, the ADSU and the Customs Department have adopted a new approach to tracking drug dealers. I will obviously not mention what the new methods are. But from November 2024 to March 2025, we have witnessed a significant number of seizures of drugs, amounting to an approximate value of Rs1.2 billion. The Police and the Customs will be equipped with a state-of-the-art equipment to enable them to undertake their mandate in a more effective manner.

Madam Speaker, since this new Government came to power, it has started to devise ways and means to deal with the problem of drug abuse. I have listed the services, and I am glad he is here, of the former minister, Sam Lauthan, and Dr. Fayzal Sulliman, who is also here. The latter – everybody knows Sam Lauthan, but maybe not everybody knows Dr. Sulliman – is a graduate from Johns Hopkins University in the United States of America. He possesses wide experience in addiction medicine and HIV/AIDS. Both of them have extensive experience in the field, and they will focus on prevention, treatment and enforcement.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, what we need is people who want to do something and not people who are going to sit there like *des poupées en cire* doing nothing, just to show they are there and getting paid for it. This is what we don't want. We want people who are determined, like these two gentlemen are, to put an end to this terrible scourge that is happening. They have already worked closely in collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Attorney General and my Office, and, I must say, within a very short time they have come up with a Bill to set up an agency for drug control. We are indebted to them for their prompt and effective work.

Madam Speaker, the Bill will establish the National Agency for Drug Control as the apex body responsible for addressing all the problems that are connected with drug abuse, not just in Mauritius but also Rodrigues. They will look through the reduction of supply, drug use, prevention, treatment and all this. It will be a balanced approach. This is in line with the

most recent United Nations Resolution 79/191 of 2024, which continues to stress the importance of a balanced approach integrating measures for demand and supply reduction and ensuring that drug control policies are in line with human rights obligations. It underscores the necessity of international cooperation and the implementation of evidence-based practices in drug policies; it is not just somebody dreaming of something; it must be evidence-based. This is how you can fight this scourge.

Madam Speaker, let me give the House an outline of the Bill. The Bill provides for the setting up of this National Agency for Drug Control which will have broader responsibilities and powers than the defunct National Agency for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers (NATReSA).

Section 3 of the Bill provides for the setting up of a National Drug Control Commission under my chairmanship and comprising the Deputy Prime Minister as Vice-chairperson, the Minister of Health and Wellness, the Attorney General, eight Ministers as enumerated in the First Schedule, when they are needed, all the Ministers as the Prime Minister may designate. The Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly may, at the request of the Prime Minister, attend the Commission and persons who have wide experience in medical and health care, drug use prevention or treatment and rehabilitation, as I may designate.

Section 4 of the Bill defines the functions and powers of the National Drug Control Commission, which include, among others, setting up national objectives and goals, and determining policies and priorities with regard to drug control issues. Secondly, to oversee the overall coordination of all drug control activities in Mauritius - that is why I say it is under an apex body - for greater collaboration and synergy among stakeholders. Also, to collect and analyse data and publish a brief statistical and analytical bulletin on a quarterly basis and a comprehensive National Drug Observatory report annually to monitor the nature, magnitude, patterns, and trends in drug trafficking and drug use.

Section 5 of the Bill provides for the National Agency for Drug Control to be a body corporate.

Section 6 provides for it to have the following divisions –

- (i) a Policy, Research and Strategy Division;
- (ii) a Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division;

- (iii) a Prevention and Public Awareness Division;
- (iv) an HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division, and
- (v) such other Division as the Board may, with the approval of the Minister, set up.

Section 7 of the Bill defines the responsibilities of the Agency which are –

- (i) reducing the demands of drugs;
- (ii) coordinating the reduction of supply of drugs by preventing, reducing or disrupting the entry, production and availability of drugs.

Section 8 of the Bill defines the functions of the six Divisions of the Agency. In a nutshell, each Division will have distinct responsibilities and thus contribute to the overall functioning of the Agency.

The Supply Reduction and Coordination Division will coordinate national law enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with local, national and international drug control laws and international conventions. It will also facilitate cooperation with the Police, the Customs and Excise Department of the Mauritius Revenue Authority, and also with local and international organisations. More importantly, it will assist the Financial Intelligence Unit and any other relevant organisations such as the National Crime Agency, which we will legislate very soon, in due course, in tracing and detecting money laundering and forensic financial trades related to drug trafficking.

The Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division will work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the NGOs and the Drug Users Administrative Panel for the treatment and rehabilitation of persons who use drugs, and their social integration back into society. It will also establish and manage, in collaboration with the private sector and relevant Government organisations, vocational training and employment programmes for persons who are recovering from drug use disorders.

The Prevention and Public Awareness Division will lead national awareness campaigns, carry out workshops, and develop and implement a family-based drug prevention programme.

Section 9 of the Bill provides for the setting up of a Drug Control Board for the administration and management of the NADC. There will be a chairperson and

representatives of various ministries and organisations as well as representatives of civil society.

Section 18 of the Bill provides for the Agency to prepare an Annual Report and submit to the Minister together with an audited statement of accounts in every financial year – this was totally lacking before.

Section 21 of the Bill provides for no liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to the NADC, the Board, a board member, a committee member or any officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith – it has to be in good faith – in the discharge of its function under the Act.

Section 25 of Bill provides for the protection of whistleblowers to encourage reporting of illicit activities. We will be careful because we know how Mauritius is. There will be some fake whistleblowers as well; we will be very careful with this. No civil or criminal action shall be taken against any person who makes a report or disclosure; it has to be in good faith. If it is a false accusation, they will have to pay the consequences.

Madam Speaker, the success of this initiative depends on a unified approach. The fight against drugs cannot be won in isolation. It is not a question of Government on one side and Opposition on the other; we have to work together on this. *Il faut une prise de conscience collective. Il faut responsabiliser chaque Mauricienne, chaque Mauricien pour briser cette prolifération de la drogue qui est en train de faire des ravages dans notre pays, dans notre société et tuer notre jeunesse, notre avenir.* Government institutions, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organisations and the community at large must work together hand in hand. The NADC will play a pivotal role in promoting cooperation and systemic coherence in ensuring that our interventions are aligned and effective.

Furthermore, the Bill prioritises data collection and research to ensure that our strategies are continuously refined based on the latest evidence, enabling evidence-based policy making to tackle the evolving drug landscape. A real-time monitoring system with clear performance indicators will be implemented to track drug-related trends and assess the effectiveness of intervention programmes. The system will also be used to monitor patients on the methadone programme, thus ensuring better control and management. There have been, in the past, some complaints about whether methadone is becoming. We will also look at that.

The NADC will operate in 24/7 hotline specific for disclosures and work closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure swift actions on credible disclosures with the utmost confidentiality and protection for individuals involved.

During the last elections, not just in my constituency, in many constituencies across the island, probably all constituencies, we could see people dealing with drugs; nothing was being done. I get the feeling they were being given drugs so that they could disrupt the election; that was my feeling. What else? Don't forget, Wakashio! Why did Wakashio come at the time that it came? We must ask ourselves questions.

We are also positioning an HIV/AIDS Division under the agency within the Prime Minister's Office and this will bring several key advantages such as enhanced intersectoral coordination. HIV/AIDS is a cross-cutting issue as we all know, but it cannot be addressed just by the health sector alone. Locating the division within the agency at the highest level of governance will ensure all relevant ministries, that is, health, education, youth, gender equality, social security, and justice are all brought together under a cohesive national framework fostering a whole of Government approach.

Placing HIV/AIDS Division within the NADC will ensure better alignment between harm reduction strategies and national drug control, particularly regarding needle exchange programmes. This is where the connection is: opioid substitution therapy and rehabilitation initiatives. This integration will lead to smarter, more efficient, and more compassionate policies for vulnerable populations.

Madam Speaker, a centrally located division will better coordinate national budgets, donor funding technical support. It will facilitate synergy between the various partners and avoid what has happened in the past – duplication of efforts. And it will ensure that our national strategies are guided by consistent policies and unified vision.

Madam Speaker, the National Agency for Drug Control Bill is not merely a piece of legislation. It is a national commitment; it represents our collective resolve. We need to safeguard the future of our youth, as I said earlier, protect our communities, and ensure that Mauritius does not fall victim to the far-reaching consequences of drug abuse.

Madam Speaker, we have a duty to our children, to our families, to our nation to act decisively. I urge all Members of the House to support this Bill as it is a decisive step towards a drug-free Mauritius.

Let us stand together in demonstrating our unflinching resolve to fight drug abuse and trafficking, and secure a healthier, safer and a more prosperous future for all. Unless means are found to stop the decline and decay we have witnessed for the last decade, every one of our children is at risk. No Mauritian family is immune from this threat. Far too many have awoken up one day to the tragic realisation that a son or a daughter has fallen prey to the predators and parasites who seek to prosper from this disgusting criminal trade.

I remember, Madam Speaker, I went to a wedding at Camp Fouquereaux. When I came out, as usual, people wanted to take pictures with me; even when I was in the Opposition. One guy came up to me and asked –

“Can I take a picture with you?”

I said, “Yes, no problem.”

He stood there, he gave the phone to one of the policemen with me, and he said to me –

“You know, I want to tell you something. I had voted against Labour Party last time, but now I am praying every day that you come back to power because my son has fallen into drug abuse. He is coming at home; he is beating up his mother, beating up the father, stealing money, stealing jewellery, just to be able to buy drugs.”

This is what we have to stop. This is why I say we have a duty to act decisively. Unless, as I said, no Mauritian family is immune from this threat and we have to stop them. In this battle against drugs, none of us should look the other way. All of us must bear the responsibility of playing our part in defeating the social poison; this social poison that they have inserted into the lifeblood of our nation. That is what they have done. And, in that battle, each one of us, Madam Speaker, is on the frontline.

I commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Madam Speaker: Thank you!

Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(5.45 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Merci, Madame la présidente.

Si vous me permettez, je vais, avec la permission du Premier ministre, démarrer mon intervention en empruntant une phrase qu’il a mentionnée, surtout qui est en relation avec une

prise de conscience collective et c'est vrai parce que le sujet est d'ordre national et c'est un fléau qui fait beaucoup de tort au pays.

Madame la présidente, je suis conscient du désarroi des parents qui sont affectés par ce fléau. Je suis père de famille, je suis grand-père et je note de jour en jour que la situation s'aggrave dans le pays et que cette jeune génération que nous avons, petit à petit, s'enfonce dans ce fléau qu'est en train de ronger notre société.

Ayant dit ceci, Madame la présidente, we are today debating on a Bill which will replace the NATRESA by a new agency called the National Agency for Drug Control. And, I understand from the Explanatory Memorandum, that this agency will have a number of new attributes and the agency will provide additional support to authorities concerned in the combat against drug trafficking and drug use.

Like I said, Madam Speaker, it is indeed a subject that needs to be addressed quickly because the situation on our streets is getting alarming day by day. And one drug, in particular, which we commonly call synthetic drug. Our citizens are being transformed, we have seen that on the social media, into zombies, Madam Speaker and in some cases being led to their death and government seems to be helpless in the wake of this situation.

We understand, Madam Speaker, that the National Agency for Drug Control will be the apex body which will address drug issue prevention and drug control issues. Madam Speaker, let me tell the House that there are three major components in this struggle. First one is harm reduction, then supply reduction and demand reduction and all those three components aim at making Mauritius a better place to live but having different mission statements.

Let me say something with regard to harm reduction, Madam Speaker. It is the identification by the health authorities of the best practices as regards to medical treatment for the proper detoxification of drug addicts. The demand reduction comprises of the demand reduction strategies with rehabilitation possibilities in residential or daycare centres and for the follow up.

Madam Speaker, it must be remembered that addiction is the consumption of one or several substances meaning that after detox, if one restarts consuming drugs again, we are back to square one and we have to start the process all over again.

Madam Speaker, it should be noted also that participation to all above mentioned services should be inclusive of HIV/AIDS carriers. It is also understood, Madam Speaker, that drug demands strategies, also include another important part which is to carry out

extensive prevention programmes where we target workplace, women, youth, schools, be it pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary and also the community at large.

Madam Speaker, we have no other choice today than to prevent new cases of addiction and help those already hooked up to start back a new and responsible life.

With regard to supply reduction, this sensitive issue, Madam Speaker, must be left to the competent authorities of the country, that is, the Government, the Judiciary, law makers, the Police and the MRA, to be addressed at their respective levels. But they will have to work in collaboration with other stakeholders whereby those stakeholders can submit their suggestions and proposals to these authorities for consideration.

We should also, Madam Speaker, understand the difficulty faced by substance abusers to quit. These difficulties, I understand, are *la peur du manque, Madame la présidente, ce qu'on appelle fat yen, et le plaisir de l'aiguille* for those who are injecting, that is, *nissa zegui*. Madam Speaker, if we understand the above, addressing this scourge will be much easier.

I heard the hon. Prime Minister speak about methadone treatment. Madam Speaker, methadone is being proposed as maintenance or substitution therapy. Here, again, *c'est à la liberté du toxicomane de choisir*. Methadone was introduced in Mauritius not to stop drug addiction, but to break the fast spreading of HIV/AIDS disease among injecting drug users.

In fact, Madam Speaker, it must not be forgotten that methadone is a high addictive opiate and it will be more difficult for an addict to detox from it. It is a pity today, Madam Speaker, that more than 10,000 methadone users are on maintenance therapy which is almost imposed on them. I believe that they should be left with the decision to use it on a temporary basis until they are clean. If I am not wrong, the proposed dose to start the treatment is 40ml. How can you, Madam Speaker, expect a substance abuser, on 100ml methadone maintenance, to quit?

Another issue which I want to raise today, Madam Speaker, in this piece of legislation is related to the Certificate of Character. People having already undergone their sentence for mere consumption of drugs and petty larcenies should be allowed to have a clear Certificate of Character, Madam Speaker, so that they can start back a new and responsible life. Someone cannot pay Rs500 for possession of drugs and be sentenced for life with a Certificate of Character which will prevent him to get a job. In short, Madam Speaker, what I

am proposing in this House today is to give serious consideration to an amnesty for all those in such situations.

Madam Speaker, let me now come to some sections of the Bill. At clause 3 (5), Madam Speaker, it is mentioned that –

“The Chief Executive Officer shall attend every meeting of the National Drug Control Commission.”

However, at clause 5 (3), it is said that –

“Subject to this Act, NADC shall, in the discharge of its functions and exercise of its powers, not be under the direction and control of any person or authority.”

I can hardly imagine a CEO of such an agency, Madam Speaker, who is being nominated by the hon. Prime Minister, forced to attend meetings chaired by the same Prime Minister and make decisions that will go against the will of the very Prime Minister, Madam Speaker!

I believe, Madam Speaker, that this new agency should have been fully independent with no interference from the Executive, that is, the Cabinet of Ministers, but answerable to Parliament.

It is only through this way, Madam Speaker, that would be guaranteed the collect and analysis of real data on the situation of drugs prevailing in our country. I must say, Madam Speaker, I have no qualms with my friend, the proposed CEO of the National Agency for Drug Control, who has spent most of his life combatting scourges that affect our youth, including drug abuse. He was also one of the assessors on the Commission of Enquiry against Drugs instituted in 2017.

However, *il va m’excuser pour ce que je vais dire*. I believe that his views and methods might be outdated in comparison to what is being implemented in other countries to combat drug use. I will comment further on that at a later stage. *Mais je le souhaite bon vent et qu’il réussisse dans le travail qu’il va entreprendre*.

Comme mentionné, Madame la présidente, dans le projet de loi, cinq divisions vont opérer sous cette commission. Je voudrais faire deux commentaires. Le premier concerne the Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division. I hope it will look into the pharmacological and physio social treatment.

(Interruptions)

Yes, I said pharmacological and physio social treatment!

Le second concerne le Supply Reduction and Coordination division. I hope the role and responsibilities of that division will be clearly spelt in order to avoid any misunderstanding with the law enforcement sector. Madam Speaker, clause 7 deals with the objects of the National Agency for Drug Control. I wish to refer the House to clause 7 (b). My question with regard to clause 7 (b) is whether it will also include precursor chemicals and other chemical substances used in the manufacturing of illicit drugs?

Toujours, concernant cette section 7 (b), Madame la présidente, je cite –

“7. **Objects of NADC**

(b) to coordinate the supply reduction of drugs by preventing, reducing or disrupting the entry, production and availability of drugs.”

Ma question est : est-ce que cette section veut dire que la NADC va participer à la saisie des drogues ? Si c’est le cas, Madame la présidente, je ne pense pas que ce soit une sage décision de mélanger saisie de drogues, arrestation, réhabilitation et réinsertion. À la section 24 de ce projet de loi, il y a une clause sur la confidentialité et une amende pouvant aller jusqu’à R 100,000 et une peine de prison pouvant aller jusqu’à deux ans d’emprisonnement contre toute personne qui, sans aucune excuse valable, va à l’encontre de cette section.

Soyons sérieux, Madame la présidente !

An hon. Member: *Ah bon? Ah bon?*

Mr Jhummun: *Dix an to’nn dormi!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Met serye to mem!*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let him develop his ideas! *Allez-y !*

Mr Lesjongard: Nous savons tous, Madame la présidente, qu’un baron de la drogue peut récompenser une taupe avec deux, voire dix fois cette somme pour une précieuse...

An hon. Member: *To bien kone!*

Mr Lesjongard: ...une précieuse information qui permettrait d'éviter de perdre une importante cargaison de drogues, voire même de se faire arrêter.

Et d'une façon générale, je pose la question, sommes-nous pas en train d'ajouter une lourdeur administrative inutile sur un processus qui se devait être discret, efficace et une entité qui aura à sa disposition un budget colossal ?

(Interruptions)

Madame la présidente, nous sommes en train de remplacer la NATReSA que j'estime avait fait un bon travail...

(Interruptions)

...par le National Agency for Drug Control, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: NADC.

Mr Lesjongard : Ma question est : est-ce qu'il y a eu consultation avec ces acteurs avant de proposer ce projet de loi à la Chambre ?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker : Les acteurs ? Les partenaires vous voulez dire ?

An hon. Member : ... partenaires.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, under the previous Government, whether they agree or not, a huge step was made by amending the Dangerous Drugs Act in 2022.

(Interruptions)

La possession de drogue à usage personnel a été décriminalisée depuis trois ans. Comme c'est le cas dans plusieurs pays, nous avons décidé de traiter les usagers de drogues comme des patients qui sont ainsi placés sous des traitements par le ministère de la Santé. Dans la même foulée, Madame la présidente, nous avons introduit l'utilisation du cannabis médical et c'est cette décision qui a donné lieu au débat sur la légalisation ou non du cannabis à usage récréatif et j'estime que la question mérite d'être posée. J'aimerais bien que le Premier ministre dans son *summing up* nous donne les chiffres du nombre de saisies de drogues synthétiques effectuées depuis le début de l'année.

(Interruptions)

Bien sûr, Madame la présidente, je ne fais que relancer le débat mais cela ne veut pas dire que je suis pour la légalisation du cannabis.

(Interruptions)

Comme le Premier ministre adjoint l'avait affirmé sur une radio privée à la veille des dernières élections générales, je pense moi aussi que la question mérite d'être posée, Madame la présidente.

Concernant l'utilisation de la méthadone, malheureusement nous avons deux écoles de pensée dans le pays ; ceux qui estiment que la méthadone aide à réduire les risques de transmission du VIH sida en diminuant l'usage de seringues et en aidant un usager de drogue à arrêter la consommation de drogues dures, et d'autres qui pensent que c'est une perte de temps. Il faut faire une évaluation...

(Interruptions)

...il faut voir ce que disent les chiffres et évaluer sa réussite.

En tout cas, Madame la présidente, le trafic de cette substance est problématique et dans certaines régions de l'île, les habitants ne veulent plus voir des centres de distribution de méthadone et il y a aussi une stigmatisation terrible envers ceux qui prennent de la méthadone. Madame la présidente, la section 8(1)(b)(iv) de ce projet de loi fait mention d'un *Real Time Tracking system*. Est-ce que le Premier ministre peut donner à de la Chambre plus de détails sur ce système et comment cela va se passer dans les faits ?

Madam Speaker, I welcome the initiative to introduce the education sector on the agenda of the NADC. It should start with our youths; they should understand why it is not an act of bravery to consume any drugs. Obviously, there is peer pressure and lack of maturity. I am sure, we had all seen the video of a student inhaling what seems to be some kind of deodorant from a plastic apparatus and I hope the Minister does not claim that this happened when the previous regime was in power. We need to act, our children need to realise that their lives are at stake and such behaviour, Madam Speaker, is not tolerable. Taking on board the education sector, is, I believe, a step in the right direction when it comes to drug use.

Madam Speaker, with regard to HIV/AIDS, I notice that the Bill also includes the prevention and reduction of risks of transmission of HIV/AIDS. There is clause 8(1)(d), an HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division which as stated in the piece of legislation, has clear functions. I would like for the hon. Prime Minister to enlighten the

House as to what will happen to the NGO PILS whose sole function, Madam Speaker, is exactly what this Bill provides for. May I ask the question, has there been proper consultations with that NGO before coming forward with that proposal, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, we need to bear in mind that NGOs are essential in dealing with such matters as this subject is extremely sensitive and we know how reluctant people are to go to government services to benefit such facilities.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, like I said earlier, the drug problem has three axes namely: harm reduction, demand reduction and supply reduction, and right now, we are trying to place all these three components under one umbrella. Like I said, let us give time to time and see whether this will work out. *Le fléau de la drogue ne date pas d'hier.*

An hon. Member : ... *ti ena dizan pou sa...*

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Dizan !*

Mr Lesjongard : Le gouvernement précédent avait pris le taureau par les cornes...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member : *Taureau sa?*

An hon. Member: *Ki li pe koze do!*

Ms Anquetil : N'importe quoi !

Mr Bhagwan: *To kone to pe koz manti!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard : ... avec une commission d'enquête sur la drogue ; cela c'est un.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member : ... seconde commission !

Deuxième, les amendements à la Dangerous Drugs Act. Maintenant c'est au tour du ce gouvernement de maintenir la cadence.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Maintenir la cadence!

Mr Lesjongard: Voire, d'essayer de faire mieux, Madame la présidente. Pendant...

(Interruptions)

Soyons sérieux !

Pendant que nous sommes en train de débattre sur ce projet de loi, n'oubliez pas ceci, au même moment, il y a un jeune qui est en train de consommer de la drogue synthétique ou de s'injecter de la drogue dure dans ses veines. Il y a un père, une mère, une famille meurtrie par la perte d'un être cher emporté dans l'enfer de la drogue. Tout cela, Madame la présidente, c'est pour vous dire que j'ai des doutes sérieux, aujourd'hui, sur la capacité de cette nouvelle institution à fournir des résultats mais je reste optimiste...

An hon. Member: Prophète de malheur!

Mr Jhummun: *Profet maler !*

Mr Lesjongard: Je reste optimiste car cela concerne l'avenir de nos enfants. J'en ai dit, Madame la présidente.

Mrs Savabaddy : Pendant ce temps qu'est-ce que tu vas faire ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Duval mem pann reste pou ekout sa.*

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister of Health, please! Yes!

(6.10 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Mr A. Bachoo): Madam Speaker, this is not simply a legislation; this is a bold, historic and unparalleled step, a herculean task to reclaim our society, to rescue our youth and to restore public trust. We have to congratulate the Government in taking this revolutionary decision because we know everybody in the streets will tell you – “enough is enough, we have had enough of it, never again can we allow this scourge to afflict our society and our family”. Just imagine a father who loses his son or even his daughter or grandson, carrying the corpse of his young son to the cemetery or to the cremation ground. How must that person be feeling? And that, we witness almost every day in this country.

And so, this is a scourge which has to be washed out and we have to congratulate this Government. At least, it had the courage to come forward with such a legislation. We are here today to establish a National Agency for Drug Control under the direct aegis of the Prime Minister. I heard the Leader of the Opposition stating that this should not have been under the Prime Minister's aegis. I do not understand him. There cannot be any other person, any other institution better than the head of the Executive to undertake such a work and he deserves all of our congratulations.

This is a decisive structure, an important structure to lead the fight against drug epidemic that has crippled our nation for far too long. This Agency will represent a complete overall of our national drug response. It will strengthen our institutions, it will coordinate intervention with precision and compassion; ranging from education and prevention, to treatment and rehabilitation, to harm reduction, social integration and supply control. At the centre of this national revival, stands a man of courage, foresight and conviction, the Prime Minister. It cannot be any other authority better than this. Despite shouldering the monumental task of running a nation which is economically and financially shattered, a nation which is today on its knees and rescuing these shattered finances inherited from an MSM-led Government, he has chosen to take the personal responsibility for the leadership of this Agency. It is a mark of conviction, not convenience!

Madam Speaker, this is what true statesmanship looks like. I salute him for it and I salute the Deputy Prime Minister for the support and the contribution that he has brought to this project and I know how many hours he has spent in supporting this move.

Madam Speaker, if this new Agency represents our future, let us confront our past. The past is dead and buried but it is important for us to have a peep at it, to have a look at it so that we can forge ahead in the future. It is a past that is marked by criminal and political negligence, institutional decay and human suffering. It is a past that was shaped by the MSM-led Government whose record on drug is one of complete failure, a complete disaster and it was a complete curse for our country. We all know how heroin flooded Mauritius in early 1980s under the MSM-led Government and more recently, how synthetic drugs started to destroy our youth since they took office in 2014. How can we forget the dark days when MSM goons and drug peddlers would claim from housetop that *gouvernman dan nou lame*. We still remember that. We remember the crime that was committed in early 80s in *bazar* Port Louis where criminals were openly moving up and down the streets and claiming – ‘nobody can touch us because Government is in our hands’.

We still remember how four Members of Parliament had just – the Prime Minister spoke about it – been arrested abroad. The then High Commissioner of Mauritius in England was arrested. Those were darkest days of our Mauritian history, the shameful acts committed by political nominees and potentates and goons made us bow our head in shame. Internationally, we had lost all our respect and credibility. The recent case of *tractopelle* and gas cylinders before the nose of the Prime Minister and Ministers and involvement of the

famous *zanzan lakaz* was disgusting; all of us know about it. It is therefore no wonder that substance misuse exploded under their watch and the numbers are undeniable.

Madam Speaker, in 2021, 7.4% of Mauritians aged 18 to 59 reported using illicit drugs. Today, we have a population ranging from 55,000 to more than 100,000 of substance abusers. By 2024, drug abuse had become so widespread that 37% of citizens, according to Afrobarometer, identified it as one of the top two national issues; second only to the cost of living. The survey indicates widespread dissatisfaction with Government's effort to combat the drug crisis. 70% of citizens perceive these strategies as inadequate. The simple question that we asked when they had all these facts and figures was – 'what action had they taken?' You go to any street, either village or city or the towns, everybody knows the *adda*, the centres, the pivoting points where drugs are sold but no action was taken because these were the goons who had voted for them to bring them back to power again. That is the reason why they allowed their political ambitions to go higher than the interest of the Nation and the interest of the common men.

Madam Speaker, our streets are overrun by synthetic drugs like 'Black Mamba' and 'Rambo'. They are cheap, they are potent and widely available, particularly among our youth. Heroin trafficking through Madagascar has surged. In 2022, heroin was linked to 40.3% of all drug-related arrests. According to National Drug Observatory Report, in 2022 there were 1,008 drug-related admissions in public hospitals. 50.1% due to synthetic drugs, 30.7% due to opioids. Most patients were aged 20 to 37, the backbone of our future, that is, our youth were involved in that. While young people fought for their lives, our support system collapsed. This is so because a study among Mauritian male addicts published in 2022 showed that 17% were able to abstain from drugs for a period of only one to three years. That is not a reflection of moral failure, that is a reflection of systemic abandonment. Hardly, they will get out of it and they go back again to it.

What was the MSM Government's response? Let me state this clearly. As soon as they came to power, in December 2014, the then Minister of Health tried unsuccessfully at that time to stop Methadone Programme forthwith and National Aids Secretariat was removed from the Office of the Prime Minister deliberately. That was another nail in the coffin of those who are fighting against HIV and Aids and against the drugs. They dismantled NATReSA and just now, I heard the Leader of Opposition stating that NATReSA is being replaced but NATReSA was dead and gone at that time. They had destroyed it, killed it!

(Interruptions)

It is not the replacement; this law is not replacing NATReSA. NATReSA is finished, they had finished it and from that time, NATReSA was eliminated till today. See the harm, that calamity that has befallen the Nation and for this, they have to be condemned and never again allowed to take the wheels of power.

Madam Speaker, NATReSA was dismantled. The National Agency for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers which had been the cornerstone of coordinated care and rehabilitation. With NATReSA gone, it left a void. And the consequences, as I said, were devastating. Drug peddlers had the complete freedom to do as they liked. Just imagine, they were so powerful and so strong that they could defy anybody. To such an extent that even our gods and goddesses in Ganga Talao were not spared! This is what they have done!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, on one hand, the Labour-led Government once proudly claimed – I remember, we used to claim when we were in power – the Prime Minister used to say that our aim was to produce one graduate per house. The work of the previous government was to produce at least one drug addict in every house! That is the difference between our aim and their aim! So, that is a grim and shameful legacy that they have left us with! That is their achievement.

Instead of finding solutions, they were building illusions. To deceive the world, they set up a Commission of Inquiry on Drugs. That was a grand display to show the world that they were really concerned. The truth is that they ignored most of its recommendations. It was a slap on the cheek for those who claimed that they were working wonders. They publicly congratulated the very people who are blamed by the commission of inquiry for the drug situation in our country. We all know it!

Under the MSM government, the drug problem evolved into a public health catastrophe. It had a devastating impact on our HIV/AIDS response. Not to forget, in 2005, the MSM-led government left the country at the height of an HIV crisis. 925 new infections in one year, many among prison inmates with histories of injecting drugs. But the Labour-led Government took bold, evidence-driven and internationally acclaimed actions. We implemented the methadone substitution therapy.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition questioning the utilisation of methadone. But the methadone induction and follow-up are carried according to *la Protocole de la prise en charge de l'usage de drogues à Maurice*, validated by the Ministry of Health and Wellness in 2023! Its elaboration was supervised by experts, including David Mété from Reunion Island. Methadone is the gold standard as per WHO's recommendation. And the dosage recommended – he was talking about the dosage – is 80 mg to 120 mg. So, he can say whatever he wants, but we know what we have done!

They introduced medical cannabis. This was introduced, I think, in 2022. As at date, only six patients have been recommended and approved by Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee and they are undergoing treatment. Only six!

There was an amendment to the Dangerous Drugs Act in November 2022 and the Drug Users Administrative Panel (DUAP) became operational. It became operational in 2024. But over the past months, a number of intercepted individuals for drug possessions prefer the criminal justice system rather than DUAP. The DUAP needs to be revisited, and if need be, necessary amendment should be brought to it.

I was talking about the decisions that the Labour Government had taken. So, we –

- implemented the Methadone Substitution Therapy;
- introduced the Needle Exchange Programme;
- brought in HIV/AIDS legislation;
- set up the National Aids Secretariat under the Office of the Prime Minister, and
- developed a Harm Reduction Framework that reversed the trend from 2006 to 2010. HIV cases among People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) dropped significantly to about 50 per month. Up till 2014, we maintained real and true control. There was full vigilance.

But with the MSM back in power, we saw a terrifying resurgence. In 2024, 549 new HIV infections were detected. A 44% increase! Among men, infections rose by 60.3%. Among women, infections rose by 15%. 243 new cases were found among People Who Inject Drugs, with 70% identified at the point of entry in prisons. The epidemic has shifted.

Injecting Drug Use now fuels 45% of new infection while 50% comes from heterosexual transmission. This means that the virus is moving beyond high-risk groups into the population, carried by the back of unsaved behaviours stigma and reduced harm reduction coverage.

The Needle and Syringe Programme (NSP) and the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST), once effective, are now under-resourced and under-utilised. As HIV became more manageable, thanks to modern treatment, it is undetectable and, therefore, untransmittable. Hence, there is complacency.

Added to that, were the devastating impact of stigma, discrimination and legal barriers, with bright people leaving from services. People living with HIV are struggling with addiction, are forced into hiding. When they hide, the virus spreads. The addiction deepens.

But, Madam Speaker, we are here, today, to change all that. The National Agency for Drug Control will be a coordinating powerhouse, a unifying body across Ministries and communities, institutions and NGOs, prisons and private clinics, homes and schools. It will coordinate public education and prevention, demand reduction among use, rehabilitation that works, harm reduction that protects, social reintegration that restores dignity, supply reduction that disrupts trafficking networks.

Critically within this agency, we will establish a dedicated HIV and AIDS Coordinating Division to integrate the National HIV response with our drug policy. It will ensure alignment with UNAIDS 95-95-95 SDC and the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026. The 95-95-95 means 95% reduction in new HIV infections, 95% access to antiretroviral treatment and 95% viral suppression. It will roll out community-based testing treatment and prevention. The new agency will monitor and evaluate progress in real time. It will mobilise resources both nationally and internationally and drive right-based advocacy to end stigma and discrimination.

Madam Speaker, this is not merely a Bill. It is a blueprint for national salvation. This is a message of hope to a mother who is despaired and distressed to see her child slip into addiction. This agency will be your ally and your friend. To the young woman afraid to seek HIV testing, this agency will protect your rights. To the man behind bars, ready to rebuild his life, this agency will open that door. This is the moment of redemption.

This is our Government fulfilling its mission and its promise. This is the Prime Minister showing once again what leadership, vision, empathy and courage can accomplish. This is what true leadership means: to lead, not to mislead; to guide, not to misguide; and to serve the nation, not make the nation serve you.

I, again, thank the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and I will say, you have worked wonders. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Mrs Leu-Govind!

(6.29 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Arts and Culture (Mrs V. Leu-Govind): Merci, Madame la présidente. Ce projet de loi, Madame la présidente, représente une lueur d'espoir pour notre nation. Il marque une volonté sérieuse de structurer notre réponse à la crise nationale à travers une institution dédiée avec des objectifs bien définis.

Madame la présidente, dans ce projet de loi, trois mots clés ressortent et méritent toute notre attention : la réintégration, la prévention et la réhabilitation. Ces trois piliers doivent devenir des fondements d'une politique cohérente, humaine et efficace contre la drogue.

Madame la présidente, permettez-moi d'abord d'aborder clairement les différents points en lien direct avec le projet de loi sur la création de la *National Agency for Drug Control*. La clause 2 (b) est un point central dans la lutte contre la drogue. Si nous ne réussissons pas à perturber la chaîne d'approvisionnement, hélas, tout ce que nous allons mettre en place sous la clause 3 (b) sera en vain.

Je tiens donc à féliciter le ministre du Tourisme, l'honorable Richard Duval, pour l'initiative à venir équiper tous les bateaux de plaisance d'un *Automatic Identification System*. Ceci permettra de mieux contrôler et surveiller les déplacements ainsi la chaîne d'approvisionnement de la drogue sera fortement perturbée.

Madame la présidente, je voudrais humblement demander à l'honorable Premier ministre de bien vouloir modifier le *First Schedule* de cette loi afin d'inclure le ministre responsable du tourisme dans la liste des ministres dans la Commission nationale du contrôle des drogues ou utilisé sa prérogative comme lui permet, sous la clause 3 section 2(f) du *bill*.

Ce ministère joue un rôle important dans la lutte contre la drogue, contre l'offre de drogue dans notre pays car il réglemente et surveille les licences des bateaux de plaisance. Deuxièmement, il devrait inclure dans leur campagne aux touristes que Maurice impose une peine sévère pour les importateurs de drogue avec une peine maximale pouvant aller jusqu'à soixante ans.

Madame la présidente, en examinant les articles 3 à 7 de ce projet de loi, je constate que les trois points clés mentionnés précédemment sont traités par une division spécifique de la NADC. Le Conseil de control de drogue, composé de fonctionnaires et d'organismes qui agissent dans l'application des lois, ONG et d'organisation communautaire tels que définis dans l'article 9, gèreront la NADC. Il ne faut pas qu'avec une telle structure la lutte contre la drogue, la réinsertion, la prévention et la réhabilitation des toxicomanes s'enlisent dans les procédures administratives lourdes, ce qui empêcherait notre pays de mener à bien ce combat crucial pour libérer notre jeunesse de cette menace et pour cela je fais confiance à la National Agency for Drug Control.

Venons maintenant à la clause 8(1)(b) de ce projet de loi traitant de la *Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division*. Nous devrions inclure des dispositions pour faciliter les démarches administratives concernant la garde des enfants dont les parents sont toxicomanes. Une prise en charge simplifiée par les membres proches de la famille est nécessaire afin d'éviter des problèmes administratifs dans des écoles et des hôpitaux ce qui soulagerait les parents en cours de réhabilitation et les grands-parents qui souvent s'occupent de leurs petits enfants abandonnés par leurs parents toxicomanes.

La clause 8 (1) (c) liée à la préservation doit absolument prendre compte la réalité douloureuse – la prostitution infantile associée à la toxicomanie, Madame la présidente. Des jeunes dépendants se tournent malheureusement vers cette pratique pour financer leur addiction. La NADC doit donc prévoir des mesures spécifiques en collaboration étroite avec des ONG spécialisées pour protéger des enfants et leur offrir une alternative durable. Toujours dans la clause 8, il faudrait donner à la *Policy Research Strategy Division* la responsabilité de revoir les procédures concernant les allégations et charges provisoires, Madame la présidente. Imaginez-vous si Monsieur Peroumal Veeren avait fait des telles graves allégations de financement de trafic de drogues à l'encontre d'un simple citoyen : arrestation, pas de caution, charge provisoire, Madame la présidente ? Pour l'ex Premier ministre, comme on dit en créole, '*dilo lor bred sonz*'.

Madame la présidente, ce traitement différencié et injuste, doit immédiatement cesser. Nous devons assurer une justice équitable pour tous où chaque citoyen indépendamment de son statut social reçoit un traitement juste et impartial. Il faut impérativement redorer le blason de nos institutions et je salue le courage de l'honorable Premier ministre, le Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, qui a nommé un Commissaire de police digne de ce nom dont le travail a commencé à porter ces fruits avec les récents démantèlements et des saisis de record de drogue dure.

Madame la présidente, concernant la clause 8(2)(1) qui traite de la collaboration avec le secteur privé, il est essentiel de rappeler que la réhabilitation des toxicomanes et des ex-détenus doivent être sérieusement repensée. Aujourd'hui, le certificat de moralité représente une énorme barrière à la réinsertion sociale et professionnelle, Madame la présidente. À Maurice, ce certificat est exigé pour enregistrer une ONG, pour obtenir une carte de pêcheur professionnelle, pour effectuer des démarches administratives et pour trouver du travail pour subvenir aux besoins de sa famille. Pourtant, étrangement ce même certificat n'est pas requis pour être candidat aux élections législatives et devenir un membre de cet auguste Assemblée pour gérer les biens et les fonds publics. Cette incohérence est inacceptable et profondément injuste, Madame la présidente, d'où la valse des défilés des voleurs à col blanc à la FCC sans menottes et en plus, petite pochette à la main jusqu'à la fin, Madame la présidente. Nous devons mettre fin à cette hypocrisie flagrante ; toute personne ayant payé sa dette à la société, mérite une seconde chance. Je propose donc qu'après une période de 10 ans ou plus, sans récidive, une grâce présidentielle automatique soit accordée sur les casiers judiciaires de ces personnes. Il est injuste que cette grâce soit sélectivement accordée comme ce fut rapidement pour le fiston de l'ancien Commissaire de police, Dip. Alors que les autres citoyens sont traités autrement, cette injustice doit prendre fin.

Madame la présidente, nous devons aussi intensifier les campagnes de sensibilisation auprès des jeunes en leur expliquant clairement les lourdes conséquences légales liées à l'implication, même indirecte, dans le trafic de drogue. Il est essentiel de faire une distinction claire dans nos lois entre consommateur et trafiquant afin de mieux protéger les consommateurs en leur offrant une aide adaptée plutôt qu'une sanction sévère. Par rapport à la clause 25, concernant la dénonciation anonyme, il est essentiel d'établir un cadre clair et juste. Actuellement, le mécanisme est trop souvent utilisé par les trafiquants pour éliminer leurs rivaux. L'ADSU doit arrêter ce system ou *gro pwason manz ti pwason*. De plus, Madame la présidente, l'ADSU doit être équipé des tests rapides de détection de drogue. Qui

ne se souvient pas de cet artiste arrêté par l'ADSU pour des faits de trafic de drogue qui a passé deux mois et demi en détention pour que finalement le rapport du FSL vienne dire que c'était de la nourriture pour poisson ? Madame la présidente, deux mois et demi en détention exposé à la drogue, au VIH, pour une simple nourriture de poisson, c'est très grave, Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, le lien entre la toxicomanie, la prostitution et la propagation du VIH est aussi très préoccupant. Je suis ravie de voir qu'il y aura au sein de la NADC un VIH and AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division avec l'intégration des programmes spécifiques : réduction des risques. Les mesures et les campagnes permettront à réduire significativement la transmission du VIH parmi les toxicomanes.

Je vais dire ce que le leader de l'opposition n'a pas eu le *guts* pour dire, concernant la clause 27 de ce projet de loi qui propose des amendements au Dangerous Drug Act. Il est aussi crucial d'amender le *First Schedule* afin de retirer le cannabis de la liste des drogues dangereuses, Madame la présidente. Cette recommandation est en parfait cohérence avec la décision historique prise en 2020 par la Commission des stupéfiants des Nations Unies qui a voté en faveur du retrait du cannabis du quatrième Schedule de la Convention de 1961. Reconnaissant ainsi ces usages médicaux, plusieurs pays ont déjà emboité le pas, pourquoi pas Maurice ?

Ces pays ont compris que le cannabis ne présente pas le même niveau de dangerosité que la drogue de synthèse. À Maurice, nous faisons face à des décès liés aux drogues synthétiques alors même qu'aucune donnée ne signale un seul cas de décès par overdose de cannabis.

Il est donc temps de concentrer nos ressources et nos efforts là où l'urgence sanitaire est réelle et de reconsidérer sérieusement de mettre fin à la criminalisation excessive de nos jeunes qui consomment du cannabis.

Madame la présidente, rappelons-nous que la drogue n'est plus seulement un problème isolé mais bien une pandémie qui nous concerne tous directement ou indirectement. Tant que nos infrastructures sportives, nos centres de jeunesse et nos espaces culturels resteront peu fréquentés et sans vie comme les a laissés le gouvernement MSM. Le problème de la drogue continuera à s'aggraver.

Il ne faut pas oublier que nos artistes locaux mènent un combat contre la prolifération de la drogue depuis des décennies et font un gros travail de sensibilisation et de prévention. À

travers leurs chansons, slam, l'art entre autres, il faut leur donner une plate-forme et beaucoup plus de ressources et des moyens pour s'exprimer.

Pour conclure, Madame la présidente, je fais un appel aux honorables membres d'agir ensemble. Seule la volonté, la solidarité parviendront à surmonter ce fléau national.

Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Merci! Hon. Minister, Mr Pentiah!

We try and keep the time, please.

(6.43 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms (Mr L. Pentiah): Yes, I will try very hard and I shall be guided by yourself.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, I am perplexed as to whether I should follow what I have to say or respond to the Leader of the Opposition first but I shall be patient.

Madam Speaker, today marks a watershed moment in our nation's fight against the scourge of drugs that has plagued our society for far too long. As a member of this august Assembly, as the Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms, as a father and a citizen of this country who believes deeply in our nation's potential, I stand before you with profound sorrow but renewed hope.

Our country is facing an unprecedented drug scourge which is destroying the lives of thousands of youngsters who fall prey to these *marchands de la mort*. Such an alarming situation is unparalleled and indeed very bold initiatives are warranted to combat this evil. Therefore, as I make my humble contribution to the debate on the National Agency for Drug Control Bill, I do so with full weight of our government's mandate; a mandate written in the quiet suffering of parents, watching their children disappear into addiction, in the frustrated dedication of police officers whose arrests led to nowhere, in the fading dreams of young people who deserve better protection from this scourge from a more responsible government.

Madam Speaker, this is not an instance of *coup de tête*. We go back to our *Manifeste* itself. If I may, Madam Speaker, refer to page 56 of our *Manifeste* and that, Madam Speaker, was not drawn or written; it was calculated from the sufferings of people we have witnessed and listened to and were very alert. We write, at page 56 –

« Aucun Mauricien ne dira qu'il y a moins de drogue dans le pays depuis l'accession au pouvoir du présent régime. Aujourd'hui la consommation de drogue s'est répandue dans tous les coins et recoins du pays. Cette situation a selon de nombreux observateurs aussi occasionné une recrudescence des vols et autres crimes dans le pays.

Le combat contre le trafic et la consommation des drogues sera une des grandes priorités de notre gouvernement. Il faut absolument mettre fin à la souffrance des familles et de la société en général. Ce combat sans relâche sera accompagné d'une politique d'aide à l'élimination de la dépendance sur les drogues néfastes à la santé de nos jeunes et à leur avenir. »

Madam Speaker, we started there and then, while we started our fight against an irresponsible government taking our youth to the dead end with this evil of drugs. We did not stop there; we go even further. Our Government Programme presented by the President of this country, His Excellency spoke lengthily and he went to page 28, Paragraph 56, where he mentioned in clear lines the following words, Madam Speaker –

“The fight against drug trafficking and use will be one of the major priorities of Government. Additional resources will be provided to the Police to increase its capacity to deal more efficiently with drug trafficking and related issues.

Government will adopt bold measures to end the suffering of families and society in general, as a result of the significant increases in drug trafficking over the last few years and the breakdown in law and order.”

Madam Speaker, therefore, what the hon. Prime Minister has presented to this august Assembly, to the House, is not a surprise in any way. It is something that this government has the solemn duty to answer to the needs of our youth, our future, the suffering families and the people together in this battle, in this fight.

Madam Speaker, the recent electoral landslide victory that drew this government to power was in many ways a referendum on the failure to protect our citizens from the scourge of drugs. While the previous government commissioned enquiries and produced reports including the notable Commission of Enquiry on Drugs, the harsh reality is that most recommendations gathered dust on shelves while our communities, our families, our children continued to suffer.

Madam Speaker, this pattern of neglect, this pattern of inaction, this pattern of a lack of will to do something good for our children, I almost think it is deliberate on the part on those

who were responsible. Had it not been deliberate, then how can we explain, Madam Speaker, the sudden discontinuation of a system which was working as mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition himself – NATReSA?

Overnight, that whole institution was closed down, overnight! There was nowhere for our children, our youth, the people suffering from drug abuse to go. They were left dismayed; they were left without help but, then again, was that also deliberate, in the hands of responsible people because had those people addicted to drug had nowhere to go, who they would turn to? Supply and demand! The higher the demand, the better the supply. Did we not witness this as well? We have heard many a times from hon. Anil Bachoo. We have heard how from Veeren Peroumal to Franklin to *tractopelle*, to *marsan bredsonz* and what so, to mention.

These people in their turn, in their guts, thought they were fighting against drugs. What did they do? At the end of the fight, the people of this nation thought they had some hope when there was the Striking Team, when they had a group of people identified by the then Prime Minister as the group chosen to fight against drugs. But what happened then? There was planting, organised allegations and mistreatment. I have one thing to say to the gentleman – I shall not take his name – who was responsible of that team: ‘my dear friend, you also have hope because this Government is acting responsibly. The child arrested in Montagne Blanche with possession will not be treated as a vulgar offender of the law. He will be given his chance to be rehabilitated through this law. He will be given his chance to be reinserted through this law. He will be given his chance to be reaccepted by the society through this law!’

Madam Speaker, allow me, please, to refer to the experience I have gathered at the bench. I am happy to see comrade Lauthan amongst us. I call him ‘comrade’ because he knows very well that we go a long way. I am so pleased that our hon. Prime Minister and hon. Deputy Prime Minister have chosen you, Sir, to lead us in the right way together with your colleagues. I knocked at his door so many times when I was a magistrate. I begged for his support and his guidance when I was a magistrate. I was amongst the few magistrates, and I can say it loud and clear, Madam Speaker, who sent few people in custody with addiction problems. Most of the times, I knocked at the door of my comrade, Mr Lauthan. I requested him to guide me on how to help these people. Briefly my friend, hon. Anil Bachoo, mentioned how difficult it is for a parent to carry someone who has passed away.

Madam Speaker, there was a homicide at Ruisseau du Pouce a while ago. I was sitting at the bench. A lady came for soliciting for the eighth time. Together with her, there was another young girl and two men. It so happened that the young girl was the daughter of this lady, who was also working on the street. It so happened that the man next to her was her seventh *concubin* who was involved in that homicide, and the other young man was her son. Madam Speaker, all this was related to drugs. I was inclined to find a person soliciting for the eighth time to send her into custodial sentence. But I did not. Instead, I went to visit where she was living. She was living in Karo Kalyptus. I went there wearing a pair of jeans and a cap just to see the conditions she was living in. I came back and I contacted my friend for rehab. I also contacted the church for Community Service Order (CSO). I did not send the person to jail.

Madam speaker, there are so many examples where sufferings prevail. There is this person, Madam Speaker, who stole the rice from the *bal diri qu'on a à la maison quand on fait nos courses*. He took the rice out of the bag and he sold it to buy himself drugs. He replaced it with pebbles and rock sand. Then, he covered that with some of the rice. Imagine the dismay of the mother when she went to cook the rice, and she found that! Worst of all, this person lives in our constituency. The father came to see me and was he crying so much. He wanted to get the son out on bail as he was the only son of the family. He sold his mother's jewellery, which she possessed when she was married to the father. He went to steal next door. He was then forecited for theft.

In this background, against these calamities, this Government is taking is such a responsibility. Yet, the hon. Leader of the Opposition stands here lecturing what to do and what not to do with the law! I was sitting here, patiently waiting, *kan li pou dir kouma met tiyo CWA!* I was waiting, Madam Speaker, that he would say something about his expertise of being an engineer and explain to us why is there a mess at the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities! Instead, he lectures us on something that he does not even understand! For the past ten years that he has been sitting in government, should he have understood the miseries of the families, of the kids, of the society, he should have opened his mouth to the then Prime Minister and said to him, *tempête dans un verre d'eau*, your Minister is saying *ferm NATReSA!* Your Minister is talking rubbish because he is inclined to send people suffering from drugs to Brown Sequard Hospital, treating them as mad people! He should have said 'let us open a centre better equipped to rehabilitate these people!'

Madam Speaker, you and I come from the same background. We are lawyers. We know that the philosophy/principle of jurisprudence has taught us about retribution from ages ago. We then moved into rehabilitation. Some jurisdictions have gone into restitution already. I pray that our jurisdiction goes further into redemption. These three hours will dictate the future of the young, of our people, of the future of our country, in the capable hands of the competent people who have spent a lifetime fighting against the evil side of drug abuse.

Allow me, Madam Speaker. Mr Lauthan is someone who does not see a person abusing drugs; he saw a son suffering. He did not see a person to be sent into custody; he saw a father in need of help to take care of his family. In his own capacity, within his own means, he carried on a battle together with a team. If I say it is only him, it will not be just. You know I am very sharp, but I am just. Mr Lauthan, you and your team fought for a battle by yourselves.

Madam Speaker: Address me, please!

Mr Pentiah: I am, Madam Speaker, pleased to be part of a Government who is standing united for the welfare of our children, our country, our future, to give support to such competent people, to provide policy decisions, to provide legal framework to ensure that there is a one stop shop somewhere. I do not know which part of the law the hon. Leader of the Opposition read to say that the NADC is going to substitute itself to the Police or the MRA. I do not know which part of the law he misread or if it is because he has the virus of the previous government, he deliberately, once more, misread and misdid everything. Should he have taken the care to read plain English; this is one of the pieces of law, which I said to the AG earlier on, is well drafted, sharp, clean, clear and easy to apply.

This is a good piece of drafting to make law and legal provisions available to those in need. This piece of law is going to be a symbol in itself to provide our country with hope for the future, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in line with our manifest, in line with our programme with at heart the future of our youth, the welfare of our country and our incessant fight against the evil of drug, we stand united and we vouch for this Bill. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. Ms Collet!

(7.00 p.m.)

Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) : Merci beaucoup, Madame la présidente. *A bridge to the future*, que la République de Maurice soit à nouveau la République de Maurice. Nous avons tous ce souhait est *nou pe met serye*.

Madame la présidente, imaginez un futur où chaque citoyen, où des jeunes des quartiers animés aux parents et grands-parents dévoués vivent dans une communauté protégée des désordres et des ravages des drogues avec des autorités publiques, des ONG est une société civile activement engagés à la coordination, de bonne foi, entre eux avec une gouvernance exemplaire. Imaginez ! Un futur où les vies ne sont plus définies par les dépendances mais par des opportunités, de *empowerment, coming clean, staying clean* dans une société saine. Consommons des fruits et des légumes et non les drogues illicites. Ce rêve bien que lointain pour certains, pourrait devenir une réalité grâce à l'introduction du projet de loi sur l'Agence nationale de contrôle des drogues. En version raccourcie, la NADC.

Il est clair que parmi les grandes priorités du gouvernement actuel, comme annoncé dans le Programme gouvernemental de 2025-2029, l'une des priorités majeures de ce gouvernement est la mesure contre ce fléau national qui est le trafic, usage et l'abus de drogue. La drogue, Madame la présidente, est défini dans ce projet de loi comme étant une substance naturelle ou synthétique, licite ou illicite. La lutte contre les drogues à travers la République de Maurice dépasse les simples chiffres et les débats politiques. C'est une lutte pour des vies, pour la sécurité mentale et physique pour les familles ; pour une jeunesse qui mérite mieux qu'un avenir brisé par-dessus des dommages psychologiques.

Partout à travers la République, des parents pleurent leurs enfants, des quartiers voient leurs lumières s'éteindre et des destins prometteurs sont balayés par une dépendance implacable, des hallucinations, des violences, des troubles mentaux, *zanfan vinn zombi avek zombi*. Crystal Meth est le nouveau bijou de la tentation ou Black Mamba, on croirait que c'est une danse, *dance performance* de K-POP, n'est-ce pas ? Pourquoi de tels noms de drogues ? Sûrement pour expliquer leurs effets dans le corps de ceux qui en abusent.

Madame la présidente, la septième Assemblée avec nos prédécesseurs avait commandité un *National Drug Control Master Plan 2019/23*. À la page huit du *National Drug Control Master Plan 2019/23*, si vous me le permettez de reprendre un extrait dans cette Assemblée, Madame la présidente, je cite –

“The Island of Rodrigues, being part of the Republic of Mauritius, is included in this Master Plan. While it is understood that the severity of drug use and trafficking is

limited, relevant necessary actions as defined in the log frame will be undertaken to protect health and combat drug-related crime. According to ADSU reports, cannabis is the main drug used in Rodrigues. It is cultivated and distributed throughout the island. A few cases of use of heroin and synthetic drugs have also been reported.”

Madame la présidente, au moment où ce plan directeur a été développé pour la période 2019-2023, bien que l’on comprît que la gravité de la consommation et du trafic de drogue était limitée, on préconisait que les actions nécessaires définies dans le cadre logique allaient être mises en œuvre pour protéger la santé et lutter contre la criminalité liée aux drogues. Selon les rapports de l’ADSU de l’époque, le cannabis était la principale drogue consommée à Rodrigues. Il était cultivé et distribué à travers l’île. Quelques cas de consommation d’héroïne et de drogue synthétique étaient également signalés.

À la page 15 de ce plan directeur, on voit le tableau cinq affichant « *Arrests for drug offences in Rodrigues in 2017 and 2018* ». En moyenne une soixantaine d’hommes, quatre femmes et de jeunes avaient été arrêtés pour des délits liés aux drogues. Cette Assemblée constaterait, Madame la présidente, que Rodrigues, longtemps vierge préservée, ressent désormais le point d’une autre réalité et chaque jour, la détresse grandit. Les statistiques à ce jour sont alarmants. Nous ne pouvons plus détourner le regard. Plusieurs villages bien fréquentés, des écoles plus précisément deux collèges pour le moment, et plusieurs familles sont touchées par les fléaux de la drogue et les conséquences directes et indirectes. *Les dealers*, les marchands des drogues s’infiltrent. La consommation et l’abus de drogue augmentent. Les autorités publiques, les ONG ont des difficultés de coordination soutenue entre eux pour lutter contre cela efficacement. Certains ONG, telle que Crac Anti-Drogue, figurent comme association engagée activement dans la prévention.

Le soutien des psychiatres, psychologues et éducateurs dans les écoles, je pense reste prépondérant. J’apprécie beaucoup les films d’horreur avec zombi, Madame la présidente, toutefois, moi, et je pense cette Assemblée aussi avec nos collègues, nous ne souhaitons pas avoir des transformations en zombie dans nos îles, nous ne voulons pas de cartel contrôlant les marchés illégaux. Nous ne voulons pas de martin criant ‘*Polico Crapo*’, quand il y a des landings. Nous ne voulons pas des décès dus à des overdoses, nous ne voulons pas des récurrences de ceux ayant déjà été *dan yenn*.

Nous souhaitons protéger notre peuple et garantir la sécurité de nos familles. Le projet de loi sur l’Agence nationale de contrôle de drogue, Madame la présidente, incarne une

réponse, un espoir, une main tendue à ceux qui sombrent dans le silence de la tentation de trafiquer, dans la tentation de consommer les drogues et bien sûr l'addiction. Avec un représentant de Rodrigues, cette loi marque un tournant, un engagement vers une approche qui ne se limite pas à punir, mais cherche plutôt à guérir et à reconstruire, à prévenir, le dit bien ce dicton, « mieux vaut prévenir que guérir ». Et je pense, Madame la présidente, qu'il s'agit d'un signal fort, celui d'une société qui refuse d'abandonner ses citoyens à leur sort.

La NADC, sous la supervision directe du Premier ministre qui est aussi Ministre du Rodrigues et des îles, deviendra le pilier de cette transformation dans notre société Rodriguaise et Mauricienne. Grâce à une stratégie fondée sur la prévention, le traitement et la réhabilitation, elle offrira à chaque personne une chance de reprendre sa vie en main. Car chaque individu mérite bien plus qu'un simple verdict, il mérite de retrouver sa dignité, de renouer avec l'espoir de se reconstruire dans une société qui croit en lui et nous croyons bien sûr en notre peuple ou ce segment du peuple qui est affecté.

Ce projet de loi créant la NADC est nécessaire, Madame la présidente, puisque la NADC sera l'organisme centrale chargée de la prévention et du contrôle de drogue dans la République. La NADC aura des responsabilités élargies, avec des pouvoirs plus vastes que ceux de l'ancienne NATReSA, c'est sûr. Et, la NADC sera gérée par un conseil. La NADC certainement aura peut-être à débattre de mesures pour ou contre la dépénalisation entre autres. Et, je vois qu'avec la création de la NADC, l'accent est mis sur la prévention de la consommation des drogues, la coordination du traitement, de la réhabilitation et de la réintégration sociale et des stratégies de réduction de risques pour limiter les conséquences sanitaires et sociales, y compris la prévention des maladies transmissibles tel le VIH Sida et l'hépatite C.

Toutefois, Madame la présidente, nous ne pouvons pas nous contenter d'une initiative inachevée. Nous devons l'adapter, la renforcer, l'améliorer pour qu'elle puisse réellement changer des vies, malgré les ressources limitées, compte tenu de l'état de notre économie, et bien sûr, peut-être un manque d'expertise et de techniciens formés dans ces domaines. A travers le monde, des programmes similaires ont connu des succès et des échecs. Certains ont permis une meilleure coordination et un accompagnement humain, tandis que d'autres se sont enlisés dans une bureaucratie pesante où on négligeait l'aspect social du combat. La République de Maurice, elle, doit tirer des leçons de ces expériences et veiller à ce que ce projet de loi soit porté par une gouvernance solide, une transparence sans faille et un engagement profond de la société civile. Pour que cette réforme soit véritablement efficace, il

est essentiel de mettre en place des mécanismes de suivi accessibles à tous, de favoriser des partenariats internationaux et d'assurer une formation rigoureuse des professionnels qui y sont impliqués.

Surtout, nous devons faire de cette lutte un combat collectif, Madame la présidente, car aucune loi aussi bien pensée soit-elle ne peut fonctionner sans l'implication des citoyens, des communautés, des familles ; en gros, du peuple. Nous sommes à un tournant, nous avons l'occasion de prouver que nous sommes capables de nous unir pour offrir à notre peuple un avenir qui ne soit pas marqué par l'angoisse et la souffrance liée directement ou indirectement aux drogues. Ce projet n'est pas seulement une réponse politique, c'est un appel à la solidarité, un cri du cœur pour que nous ne perdions plus personne dans l'oubli. Chaque vie compte, Madame la présidente, chaque individu mérite une seconde chance. Ensemble avec détermination et humanité, le peuple peut et doit être plus fort que ce fléau national, et aujourd'hui, nous avons la responsabilité de faire en sorte que cette promesse devienne une réalité.

Et pour ces raisons, Madame la présidente, au nom du peuple, j'accueille favorablement ce projet de loi. Merci.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie ! M. le ministre, Dr. Boolell !

(7.13 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Madam Speaker, I have listened very intently to all speeches, and of course, I paid particular attention to the speech delivered by the hon. Prime Minister. His speech was poignant and very powerful and he has conveyed a message, loud and clear and the underlying theme of his speech is support that we have to dispense to those who are victims of this scourge but we want to wage an intensive war on those who are drug traffickers. When I listened to the speech delivered by the hon. Prime Minister, the underlying theme and the message that has been conveyed is biopsychosocial problems and we have to address these problems.

This is not only the responsibility of a responsible Government but it is the responsibility of the Nation and the Nation has to arise, be awake and not stop till we defeat those who are killers of our children and we have to stand up, put up a common front and say 'no' to those who are doing harm to our children. We have to make the difference and to

make the difference, the Nation has to come together. There should be no fear, there should be no prejudice but as a Nation, we have to stand up. The message is not only being conveyed here but it has to be heard loud and clear by one and all. I feel sorry that the Leader of the Opposition has chosen to make an exit. I will not say whether it is a dishonourable exit but he has chosen to leave the room and more so, when we are discussing an issue that cut across political differences but of course, what had to be said had to be said.

To a large extent, the previous Government was responsible for the proliferation of this scourge because of the nexus it had with the mafia. Under the previous regime, Mcmafia ruled the waves but we are saying the tide will not rise, it will be low tide and we are going to be forceful. We are going to mobilise all our resources to ward off threats from those who think they can disrupt our social life. There are some people who said that yet, another Bill. No, the Bill before the House is not just another Bill; it is a Bill with broad ideas. It is a Bill which has been prepared after wide discussion at the bar of public opinion. It is a Bill which has taken onboard input from all stakeholders and there are lessons and lessons have been learned and drawn from the experience of the National Agency for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers.

We as a Government, have said it and I will reinforce what we have said. We are resolute and determined to weed out the worst scourge faced by a Nation. And when I look at the provisions of the Bill, notwithstanding clause 4, the Commission will be chaired by the Prime Minister and it is the strong signals which are being conveyed. The Prime Minister is not only first among the equals. Together with the Deputy Prime Minister, decisions will be taken to ward off those threats and to tell those killers, those who are maiming our children that we are going to make the difference and we are warning them to stay away. And we will see to it, and I will come to that at later stage when I will talk on the importance and relevance of the Financial Anti-Money Laundering Act.

So, what is the relevance of this Commission being chaired by the Prime Minister? He will engage with the public through advocacy and awareness campaigns, highlighting the risks of medication misuse and promoting informed healthcare choices. And the keywords have been highlighted by all of us. The keywords are demand reduction and supply reduction and there are provisions made for the setting up of this National Drug Agency Control Commission but I will draw attention to 4(f) that progress will be made, will be monitored by drug departments through the setting up of performance indicators and it reminds us of the relevance and importance of pharmacovigilance.

I will come to section 8(1)(a)(ii) where it is stated unequivocally that for the National Agency for Drug Control to attain its objectives, it shall –

“(ii) coordinate and facilitate efforts at national level towards the implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan, the National Action Plan for HIV and AIDS and any other drug control strategy;”

Yes, a report has been submitted, an action plan has been submitted but if there was seriousness of purpose, if there was willingness on the part of the previous Government to be aggressive, to wage war intensively against the mafia, against the drug traffickers, they would have sent this action plan to the different Ministries.

That plan would have been cloistered. But we have given commitment that there will be implementation of the action plan and the masterplan. Not only are we giving commitment, but we will mobilise our resources to implement the National Drug Control Masterplan. There is seriousness of purpose. The Prime Minister has seen to it that there are provisions in the Bill in relation to the action plan and National Drug Control Masterplan.

Not only are we determined and totally committed, I expect and I hope our Forensic Science Laboratory will not let us down. It has all the reagents and the up-to-date equipment to conduct tests. I hope I do not hear of false positive test or false negative results. The lab is here to serve and it has to deliver specific results. This is the relevance and importance of the Forensic Science Laboratory. We know what happened in the past when dirty fingers manipulated results. Under the previous government, anything went because of the nexus with drug traffickers.

We still have a parallel economy. As I have stated, we have a clear mandate to break the nexus between the drug mafia and those who manipulated power to corrupt. The fight does not ignore the use of technology. We know what is happening and we have to put an end to it. There is payment, and payment is being done with crypto currency to launder money. This is how payment is being effected! This is why, we, as a government, are resolute in our fight to wage war on drug traffickers. We are determined and we have the political will. This is the will of the *l'Alliance du Changement*. As we say, the only factor in life which remains constant is change. There will be fundamental change in relation to the war that we are waging on drug traffickers.

This parallel economy, Madam Speaker, has flourished with the complicity and duplicity of the MSM regime. Why did the former Prime Minister fail to depose before the Commission of Inquiry, chaired former Justice Lam Shang Leen? I deposed as a responsible politician and spoke fearlessly because you have to put the safety of our kids and of our people first. They are our best assets. Findings of the report were damning against the MSM MPs and lawyers close to them. This has been stated and canvassed fully, and I will not come back to it. But let me say, unfortunately, the previous government did not learn any lessons.

I am not going to highlight what my good friend, hon. Bachoo, has stated in relation to the famous rave party during the peak of COVID in a *chassé* in the vicinity of Ganga Talao. This was a scandal of epic proportion. Drugs were freely circulated in the vicinity of Ganga Talao!

Madam Speaker, I mentioned earlier, FIAMLA prevents drugs' money from being rinsed, from being dried and from being spin-dried. But we have to follow the trail and we have to beat the traffickers who are laundering dirty money. As I have stated earlier, are you surprised that payment is made in crypto currency? Can the trail be followed? Yes! Leering to obscure, the origin will fail this time. Sharing of intelligence to uncover hidden connections and unravel the entire money laundering network is inevitable, as I say, because we have the will and we will do it, and because we have reliable friends. We have traditional partners who are willing to be together with us because our fight is their fight. We have to see to it that we deliver on promises made.

Unlike the previous government, we are not looking into the eyes for certificate of merits to be issued. This is over! First, we have to know who the client is and we have to understand the very meaning of diligence. The narco-traffickers, as I have said, are still there, although some are on the run and operate undercover. But there is still, as I have said, an inherent fear. I know of teachers who shake in their boots and turn a blind eye. Yet, they have to put their best endeavour to protect our kids. Today, it is sad when you see and you hear young kids who are drugs pushers, walking with bundles of paper money. I have seen it.

Madam Speaker, as I have said, we are not going to retreat nor surrender whether the war will be fought inland or at sea. The National Parks Conservation Service, the Forestry Division, together with Customs, CCID, ADSU, National Coast Guard and MRA, have to act collectively to wage war on drug barons. We have to be mindful of transshipment at sea. I

have impressed upon Ministers when I attended a meeting in Reunion Island, that we should have a strong regional plan for control and monitoring of transshipment of fish and drugs. Sometimes, drugs are hidden in the bellies of fish.

Monitoring, close surveillance and use of helicopters, drones and AI is becoming a common feature. Copernicus and other satellite agencies can see with precision the location of fish trawlers sometimes involved in drug trafficking, even if control, monitoring and surveillance is switched off. The Canal of Mozambique, Madam Speaker, is known for all illegal transaction, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) transshipment and also of drugs.

Madam Speaker, we have a vast Exclusive Economic Zone. If we compute the total EEZ of Comoros, Mauritius, Madagascar and Seychelles, it is about 10% of the Indian Ocean, that is, 7.3 billion km². It is not easy to exercise proper control, monitoring and surveillance. But with the support of the EU and the French Government, surveillance programme to combat IUU and drug trafficking is becoming effective. Our National Coast Guard has to be reinforced and the QUAD and the French Army based in Reunion certainly are strong allies. India tilts the balance with information that it relays to us.

Madam Speaker, the sentences have to be harsh and the specialised Police Force has to undergo proper training. But the Police has to make sure that those who are on conditional bail do not run drug reigns. Hardcore traffickers are likely to be on conditional bail. However, there are cases of alleged traffickers on bail.

Madam Speaker, let me say a word in relation to whistleblowers. There are provisions in the Bill for whistleblowers to speak without fear and prejudice, to blow the whistle and say where the trafficking is going on. They need confidence. We have to make sure that the information, which is going to be relayed or conveyed or disclosed, has to be disclosed to people who are reliable. As of now, there is still an element of mistrust. Who do I talk to? Can I trust the person? Is he or she reliable? This is the climate that we are going to introduce to dissipate fear, to inculcate values of standing up and to say loud and clear: 'yes, we are not afraid to denounce those who are maiming and killing our children.' We need to muster the courage and say it without fear or prejudice.

As I say, it is a biopsychosocial problem. First and foremost, a societal problem. There should be no alienation and no stigmatisation, no child or any human being should be allowed to drift. It is this problem, as I say, we need to address with firmness and care.

We have talked of psychological support but we need to enlist the services of one and all. In this battle, we all have to put our best endeavour, whether we are sitting in Government House, in Parliament, in a backstreet or in Réduit, we all have to be on board, we have to wage war. The war has to be intensive and there is no retreat when we have to face drug traffickers, Madam Speaker.

Let me end by talking on Pharmacovigilance, the Unit which is run by Mrs Mawlaboccus, Acting Director Pharmaceutical Services. First of all, in relation to methadone, as the hon. Prime Minister has stated, methadone substitution therapy was officially introduced in Mauritius in November 2006 under the Labour Government as part of a broader harm reduction strategy to address the country's high rate of opiate use and HIV transmission among people who inject drugs. After 18 years, there is a call to have a formal study because, whether we like it or not, the merits of this substitute drug, far outweigh any of the demerit. Today, we know that it has a longer shelf life but we have to make sure that it is used judiciously and the person who take the drug has the potency which is relevant to the pharmacological relevance of this drug.

Madam Speaker, we have travelled a long way and today we have a government which has won the heart, the mind and the soul of a nation and we have to live up to their expectation and this is precisely what we are doing. We will not retreat whether we have to take difficult measures or measures which are popular. But we will take measures to redress and address forcefully psycho-social problems. As a nation, we want our people to be on the move and to walk without fear and prejudice. This is a battle which we are going to win and win handsomely.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Third Member for Pamplemousses and Triolet!

(7.33 p.m.)

Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplousses & Triolet): *Madam Speaker,* pour commencer je voudrais dire à cette vieille *chachi* dont je ne dirai pas le nom pour des raisons évidentes qui habite à Maheshwar Nagri, dans ce beau village de ma circonscription qui est Triolet, que nous ne vous avons pas oublié, que vos cris de cœur sont en passe d'être entendus et qu'on va faire ce qu'il faut pour extraire votre fils de 44 ans des griffes de ce démon qu'est la drogue.

Madame la présidente, lorsque j'ai commencé mon combat contre la drogue, il y a deux choses qui se sont produites. La première, j'ai vu une avalanche de messages de soutien mais aussi d'information. Et là, je me suis demandé pourquoi ces braves gens étaient disposés à venir me donner l'information alors qu'il y avait la police. À eux, *I want to tell them*, à partir de maintenant ils auront des structures qui auront les épaules bien plus larges que la mienne pour avancer leurs doléances et je serais continuellement à leurs côtés dans cette bataille contre la drogue. À mes amis qui m'avaient cautionné de ne pas m'aventurer trop vaillamment dans cette bataille contre la drogue, eux aussi ils avaient raison. On le sait tous, aller contre les barons de la drogue peut avoir des conséquences graves pour la personne qui mène le combat et pour sa famille. À eux, je leur dis – si on ne se décide pas à mener ce combat, on finira par perdre nos enfants à ce même problème qu'est la drogue.

Alors, Madam Speaker, for me there is no debate about what drug is doing to this beautiful country of mine. There is no doubt that drugs are being imported and also produced here. C'est évident that political will to curb this problem was non-existent until we came into power. Madam Speaker, we have the political will and we will give ourselves everything that is needed to take our country back from the claws of death. I thank the Prime Minister for coming up with this Bill within six months of taking control of the business of this country.

Dear comrades, what haven't we debated, seen and done in the past? We had the NATReSA that did its job in its time. We have had awareness programmes, we have had a rehabilitation programmes, we have the Methadone Distribution Programme that was brought in to address the HIV and drugs problem. We have drug repression measures. We have realised that drug addicts had to be treated as victims, as sick people in contrast to drug dealers who suck the lives of our families. We have ways and means, maybe not enough for preventing drugs from coming in and going out. Yet, here we are. Some are even coining us the name of Zombi Island. Catastrophe is knocking at our doors and I am not afraid to say that this did not start on 11 November 2024. The beast has been allowed in very long back.

Our people have got very simple questions. Why is it so hard to stop this problem of drugs? We heard that the other day when Mr Sam Lauthan was delivering a talk in Morcellement St André. A gentleman in the audience asked ‘why can’t we apprehend a drug user and ask him where did he buy his drugs from? And then we climb the chain to reach the big boss.’ I must say Mr Lauthan give him a very diplomatic reply. But we all know that had it been so easy to address, to apprehend drug barons, we wouldn’t be sitting here debating this Bill. How many times haven’t we heard about this *refrain* of ‘let’s bring capital punishment for the drug dealers.’ Is it going to be the solution? I don’t know.

We have seen countries that have introduced or maintained capital punishment but haven’t seen a great decrease in the problem of drugs. Yet, there are other countries who have had better success like Singapore. I may not be the right person to dictate what we need to do about this but for sure, I will fight for us to have the right people in our institutions, to make the right recommendations so that we can all legislate on this matter.

The National Agency for Drug Control is the first step of many that will come to create the appropriate structures and legal framework to help us combat the drug issue and other related problems. The issue of drugs is not only a problem of law and order, it is also a social issue which in my opinion is the main issue as it tears down families, it robs our very capable youth of their future and stigmatise them for the rest of their lives. It is also a painful economic problem, it may sound foolish but haven’t we seen bus drivers putting at risk the lives of their passengers, or just being immobilised in the middle of the road while they are in trance under the effect of drugs.

Haven’t we seen people zombified on their motorbikes in broad daylight? It seems that drug is not something that addicts are hiding anymore, but it is in fact about enslavement where they have no choice over what they are doing. Having no choice is not a choice but we have taken the pledge of giving people a choice; be it in terms of our economy, our health or social tissue. That is why, Madam Speaker, it is urgent for us to have an Agency such as the one we have proposed.

We cannot be good in one department of our lives and yet so bad in another department. That is why it has become important for us to have a modern agency that will not sit as a toothless bulldog but will have the relevant powers to look at the problem with a holistic view, to take action in all directions that are required to address the problem. Yes! We have to provide the appropriate treatment to those who have fallen prey to the scourge of

drugs but we also have to lift up families affected by this. We have to give our business community an able working population rather than just giving them as only recourse to import people from Bangladesh, Nepal or Madagascar.

Madam Speaker, this law does not decriminalise any form of drug use or practice; it is not meant for that. It does better. It sets up the appropriate structures to consider this problem. The National Drug Control Commission will be chaired by the Prime Minister and will also be comprised of the Deputy Prime Minister and many other ministers; all of them at the apex of our executive. If this does not show how important we consider our fight against drug in Mauritius, I don't know what will.

This Bill also provides for the setting up of the Drug Control Board and I have no doubt that the most able people will be appointed to lead this organisation. The expectations of the population and all of us sitting in this august Assembly, are very high. The two organisations being set up will have the very difficult task of finding a solution to the new forms of drugs like fentanyl which has crippled the world and is now infecting our society. This is a very serious problem. The more so as these new forms of drugs have immediately crippled us in three ways.

Firstly, they are available at such low prices that even a child attending a primary school can acquire it with his pocket money, let alone a working adult wasting his hard-earned money on a fleeting high.

Secondly, these new drugs also mean that measures like legalising recreational cannabis would be of no use as the users of these synthetic drugs cannot use cannabis as a substitute. The reverse maybe true but the price at which synthetic drugs are available will not serve any purpose if we just legalise cannabis. From consultations I have had, I understand that there are also no synthetic substitutes for the new synthetic drugs and doctors can only treat symptoms. They are treating headaches, nausea and sleep disorders.

Thirdly, the new synthetic drugs can cause sudden death even for a first-time user. Nowadays, synthetic drugs abusers who are administered methadone treatment are doubling up because they are also taking synthetic drugs.

There you are – to the two bodies we are setting up, there lies your problem. The problem is a big one and is dynamic. This conclusion seems to echo that we do not have the solution for drug abusers. Indeed, we do not have a magic wand and there lies the problem.

Mais, on ne va pas rester les bras croisés. S'il y a une chose et qu'une seule qu'on pourrait réaliser jusqu'à la fin de ce mandat, ce serait de redonner le sourire à ces familles perdues à la drogue.

Pour conclure, Madame la président, je sais que cette famille de Pointe-aux-Piments qui, ayant perdu un neveu à la drogue, nous écoute ce soir. Cette famille, unanimement, n'avait qu'une demande à nous formuler ; celle de casser les reins des barons de la drogue. À eux, je voudrais leurs dire, voici le premier pas.

Madame la présidente, j'en ai terminé.

Madam Speaker: Merci beaucoup! Hon. Ms. Babooram!

This will be the last speech before we break.

(8.46 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Ms A. Babooram): Madam Speaker, it is with a deep sense of responsibility but also with great hope that I rise today to contribute to the debate on the National Agency for Drug Control Bill.

This Bill, if implemented with sincerity and seriousness that it deserves, will be remembered as a pivotal moment in our nation's fight against one of the most corrosive plagues of our society – drug abuse and unchecked empire of illicit trafficking.

Allow me first, Madam Speaker, to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for having kept their promises which they made during the elections. The establishment of a National Drug Agency is not just a political achievement; it is a moral and historical necessity. It shows that this government is not content to rule for two days' applause but is determined to leave a legacy, to build a safe and just future for our emerging generations. This is leadership; this is vision!

Madam Speaker, a socialist government worthy of that name must strive for inclusiveness, justice and equity. These are not just ideological pillars; they are the foundation of a healthy society but let us not forget the recent past. The previous government which paraded itself as '*Movement Socialiste Militant*' did the exact opposite. Under its watch, the fabric of society frayed; thousands of our children were marginalised. I think we cannot forget and we cannot forgive them for having introduced the 5-credit, imposed on our children, thus, marginalising thousands of them. They found themselves outside the educational system; a policy that punished the poor, the underprivileged, the voiceless. These

children were denied their basic rights to dream and what happened, Madam Speaker? How do we expect these children, these young souls to earn a living?

They could not even rise up the social ladder. The doors of opportunity were slammed shut in their faces. The cost of living soared and you will see that they created *les circonstances propices pour le trafic de drogue. En fin de compte, ils ont créé une clientèle pour la drogue et la politique de petit copinage, favoritism, nepotism* flourished, while ordinary citizens were struggling to feed their families. Crime rates went up. Our prisons already creaking under pressure became overpopulated and as insecurity gripped our communities, a more insidious danger crept in – synthetic drugs!

Il suffit aujourd'hui d'aller sur les réseaux sociaux pour voir des vidéos où les gens sont comme des zombies, and the zombie-like demeanour of those who fell prey to these poisons is something that we cannot ignore. Instead of showing compassion, many of those who use social media are sharing these videos. Are we to condemn these people or are we to treat them to give them the medical treatment that they need?

Young people stripped of hope, wandering like shadows, victims of a system that failed them while drug barons grew richer, more powerful and more untouchable. Madam Speaker, how can we call this a democracy? How could we call this a democracy? In a democracy, a government is supposed to make law for its people. But they made law, such as the five credits, to impose that on the children so that they could be marginalised and finally become clients for drugs.

A democracy is meant to be for the people, not for the profiteers. I must also raise a point that I have raised repeatedly in the past: our prison system. I cannot forget how our prisons became a *passoire* for drug lords. I say this with great concern, not as a mere political rhetoric. I have said it before the press in the past; I have said it before the Commission of Enquiry on Drugs, and I saw it myself when I visited prisons while I was at the National Preventive Mechanism Division of the Human Rights Commission. Yet, nothing changed!

The same *livreur de poissons* seen in prisons was also seen on the Wakashio which, let us not forget, sank in deeply suspicious circumstances. Are we to keep ignoring such coincidences? What about the tragic and unexplained death of a Police Constable arrested with drugs at the airport and found dead at the Moka Detention Centre? I would like to, at this stage, quote late Mr Lassemillante, who was the Deputy Chairperson of the National

Preventive Mechanism Division, in his report, on 31 October 2016. The extracts are as follows –

“The detainee was posted in Cell No. 14 where the CCTV camera did not work. During my visit, it was reported that the detainee hanged himself by using a towel attached to a tap situated at 3ft above ground level. This death is suspect. It is difficult for a man of medium height to hang himself with an object situated at merely 3ft from ground level. We noted that in some cells of the detention centre, the CCTV camera system was working. Yet, the accused, in an important drugs importation case, is detained in one of the cells which cannot be supervised by the CCTV camera.”

This is not just suspicious; this is outrageous! How many more lives must be lost? How many more parents must watch helplessly as their children fall into addiction while those profiting from it dine in luxury. This is why, Madam Speaker, this Bill is more than just a legal framework. It is a moral reckoning. I truly trust that the National Agency for Drug Control will be the institution we need to attack this scourge from its roots. We cannot afford to leave the future of our youth in the hands of mafias, cartels or corrupt networks. Let us empower this agency to act independently without fear or favour.

Let it operate free from political interference. Let it have the resources and the mandate to break down the criminal empires that have long held this country hostage. Today, Madam Speaker, we have something rare and powerful. We have hope. Hope for a society where no child is left behind. Hope for a future where prisons are not schools of crime, but institutions of reform. Hope for a nation where drug dealers are in jail, and not in government contracts. Hope for a Mauritius that belongs to its people again.

Let us not squander this opportunity. Let us pass this Bill with a seriousness and the unity it deserves. Let history record that we stood on the right side, that when the tides turned, we chose justice, we chose life and we chose our children. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour!

At 7.58 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.05 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Mr Baboolall!

(9.06 p.m.)

Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The National Agency for Drug Control Bill, as already stated by the hon. Prime Minister, will be of utmost importance to Mauritius and the generations to come.

Madam Speaker, the Government Programme made it clear that the fight against drug trafficking and use will be one of the major priorities, and that the Government will set up the National Drug Policy Monitoring and Coordination Agency that will bring together various public bodies that will combat drug trafficking, provide rehabilitation and support families of victims of drug abuse.

Madam Speaker, it was also mentioned that the legal provisions in respect of trafficking, consumption and treatment of drug addicts will be reviewed to cater *inter alia* for differentiated treatment of traffickers and consumers. Madam Speaker, if we have the NADC before this august Assembly today, it means that this Government means business. Under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister and hon. Deputy Prime Minister, the whole population can see today that the reconstruction of our nation is underway. They are working tirelessly for Mauritius to be Mauritius again.

Madam Speaker, 2014 to 2024 will always be remembered by generations to come that Mauritius had a fake government. It was a dark period where we have seen the drug proliferation. How can we forget the famous *tractopelle*? How can we forget the gas cylinders full of drugs? How can we forget the Wakashio saga and the presence of *marsan pwason* on it? How can we forget the rave party and *minis serf*? How can we forget the record recovery of drugs at Pointe aux Canonnières?

Madam Speaker, the previous government has not been a responsible government when it came to drug control and money laundering. Instead, what can be seen today is that Mauritius has been heavily affected. A lot of families are suffering and the victims are left to themselves. It is very sad when we see how the youngsters have been victims of synthetic drugs and no measures were taken by the *Pinokio*'s government.

Madam Speaker, even the previous government set up the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking in 2018, what was the outcome? To the nation's astonishment, members close to the MSM party were mentioned in the report. Even *Pinokio*'s name was mentioned! The pragmatic recommendations were never adopted nor any laws were amended to stop the proliferation of drugs nor anything was done for the victims.

Madam Speaker, the previous government also did a National Drug Control Masterplan 2019-2023. But again, nothing was done! Why? Because they have always been antipatriotic. They have never cared for the children and citizens of this country. The only objective for them was to steal the wealth of this country. If we see the whole picture, it can be said that instead of condoning the drug business, they had an invisible hand supporting it to destroy the new generations to come because for them, it was money and power at all cost.

Pinokio thought of himself as undefeatable as money can buy everything. Their Striking Team was ready to terrify anyone raising their voice against the then government. But, Madam Speaker, he forgot, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, *lepep admirab* was watching. The people knew what they had to do to get rid of *Pinokio*'s fake government on 10 November 2024.

Madam Speaker, the NADC will be the apex body for addressing drug use prevention and drug control issues in Mauritius. It contains 28 sections and englobes almost everything that Mauritius needs to be able to look forward and leave a legacy for the generations to come.

Madam Speaker, the NADC will be administered and managed by the Drug Control Board comprising of a chairperson and at least 20 members including representatives from different ministries, the Commissioner of Police, the Commissioner of Prisons, Secretary-General of the National Social Inclusion Foundation and members from the civil society having the responsibility to make policy decisions.

Madam Speaker, the Board may set up such committees as it deems necessary to assist it in the discharge of its function in the fight against drug abuse. There will be a committee for each division such as Policy, Research and Strategy Division, Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division, Prevention and Public Awareness Division, and HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division and a Supply Reduction Coordination Division. There will also be a Chief Executive Officer who will be the head of NADC and will be responsible for the control and management of the day-to-day business and operation of the NADC.

Madam Speaker, this inclusive approach where all stakeholders will join hands together, will no doubt fulfil the very purpose of the NADC. It will be a golden opportunity and a unique chance to rethink the drug policy and repair the damages caused by the previous government. Madam Speaker, the NADC will no doubt find solutions for the victim of

substance abuse. They should not be looked at as only victims but they should be considered as patients suffering from a form of sickness and whose places are not certainly in prison but in rehabilitation centres and have to be taken care by health specialists.

Madam Speaker, the dispensing of methadone at local police stations as per the methadone programme has to be revisited. Many of the victims are often left by themselves, abandoned by the family and do not receive psychosocial help and support to get out of the drug web. I have no doubt that the NADC will come with the appropriate solutions for the victims.

Madam Speaker, every board member will have to take oath before assuming, functioning according to section 23 and they have to maintain confidentiality on any matter, according to section 24. Section 25 also gives protection to whistleblowers and there are severe penalties if there are victimisation or retaliation. All safeguards are present for the NADC to work perfectly. Madam Speaker, section 27 amends the Dangerous Drugs Act and gives the NADC powers to rehabilitate victims where the offender is willing to undergo therapy, to overcome his addictive behaviours to drug. This as well will enable the NADC to play it a pivotal role in the fight against drug abuse.

Madam Speaker, the war on drug abuse will not be easy. Once the NADC has been set up, being at the apex and deciding on policy decisions, we are sure that representation will be made to evaluate the debate in relation to cannabis. Madam Speaker, it will be for the NADC to decide whether to prevent the deadly uncontrollable proliferation of synthetic drug, cannabis use will be seen the way forward or not. There has always been a raging debate between legalisation versus decriminalisation, recreational and its use for medical purposes. Madam Speaker, the NADC, we hope, will be able to draw the line and come with the right policy decision. The NADC will have to refer to the best practices in various countries and come up with the best solution in our fight against drug abuse.

Madam Speaker, everyone should join forces together in pursuit of the common purpose to have a healthier society with less crimes linked to drug abuse and protection of the vulnerable.

A healthy society rests on the three fundamental pillars; the Government, the private sector and the civil society where each has a distinct role to play. It is also crucial to ensure that there is a healthy population, capable of contributing to the sustainable economic

development and growth of the country. This will be possible through education, poverty alleviation, the bonding of family values and a change in the perception of the people.

Madam Speaker, the NADC will no doubt be the laying foundations where the collaborations of the public and all the stakeholders including the law enforcement agencies will enable the nation to move forward with a clear collaborative goal for the nation's future. I thank you again the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for bringing in this Bill. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you for keeping the time, Mr Baboolall.

Mr Quirin!

(9.15 p.m.)

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Madame la présidente, nous débattons en ce moment d'un projet de loi crucial, le National Agency for Drug Control Bill. Un texte de loi tant attendu car le pays est actuellement en état d'urgence sur le sujet de la drogue. Au risque de me répéter la situation dans le pays aujourd'hui est telle que les bonnes intentions contenues dans le projet de loi ne suffisent pas. La société devrait aussi avoir son mot à dire, des nombreuses ONG militent pour que Maurice emboîte le pas à des pays développés qui ont assoupli leurs lois sur la consommation du cannabis.

Une question que je me pose, Madame la présidente, est-ce qu'un projet en faveur de la dépénalisation du cannabis aidera à combattre la dangereuse montée des drogues de synthèse et anéantir ses effets désastreux sur notre société ? De nombreux experts en sont convaincus, certains parlent même de légaliser le cannabis. À un moment où nous sommes en train de repenser nos manières de lutter contre la drogue et de faire plus d'efforts pour la prévention et la réhabilitation, il ne faut pas laisser nos réflexes passésistes nous empêcher de prendre des décisions courageuses. Qu'en pense le Gouvernement ?

Madame la présidente, je réitère ma demande au Gouvernement pour lancer un débat national et d'organiser, si besoin est, un référendum sur la dépénalisation du cannabis. Je suis d'avis, Madame la présidente, que le National Agency for Drug Control Bill devrait faire provision pour la décriminalisation des drogues ou, s'il y a consensus, la dépénalisation du cannabis. Ce projet de loi met uniquement l'accent sur la réduction de la demande, la prévention, la réhabilitation et la réduction des risques. L'absence de mention de la décriminalisation ou de la dépénalisation peut être interprétée comme une volonté de maintenir une approche répressive malgré les débats internationaux sur les bienfaits des

politiques plus progressistes – comme celles, par exemple, du Portugal ou de certains états américains.

Certains experts estiment qu'appliquer une politique répressive sur les consommateurs de drogue peut entraver leurs accès aux soins et à la réinsertion sociale. Il faut aussi, Madame la président, revoir le programme de la distribution de la méthadone qui de toute évidence n'apporte pas les résultats voulus. La méthadone qui est la base d'un produit de substitution pour les toxicomanes, est devenue un produit d'addiction.

Actuellement, l'honorable ministre de la Santé, lui-même, l'a affirmé récemment environ 8000 personnes sont sous traitement de la méthadone. Certains patients dénoncent des conditions de distribution difficiles, notamment dans les postes de police et plaident pour une décentralisation vers des centres de santé. D'autres estiment que le traitement ne fonctionne pas comme prévu et qu'il faudrait revoir le protocole. De plus avec plus de 65 000 consommateurs de drogues injectables et non injectables recensés ; seul 8000 bénéficient de la méthadone, ce qui met en lumière un manque de ressources pour répondre aux besoins. Le programme aide certains à stabiliser leur consommation mais son efficacité est entravée par des problèmes logistiques et sociaux à tel point que les patients sont toujours sous traitement après plusieurs années, voire 10 ans ou plus. Je souhaite donc, Madame la présidente, que l'Agence de contrôle et le ministère de la Santé se pencheront sur le problème et prendront en considération des alternatives, si besoin est, à la méthadone comme la buprenorphine et la naltrexone.

La buprénorphine réduit les symptômes de manque et a un risque de dépendance plus faible, alors que la naltrexone empêche toute sensation d'euphorie en cas de rechute. Je note également que même si le projet de loi prend en considération la corrélation entre drogues et le VIH/Sida dans le but de minimiser la transmission du VIH et de l'hépatite C, il reste néanmoins centré sur la répression et le contrôle du trafic. Il faudra donc une approche de réduction des risques inspirée des modèles comme celui, encore une fois je le cite, du Portugal. L'absence de mention explicite de la décriminalisation ou de la dépénalisation pourrait limiter l'accès aux soins pour les consommateurs de drogues, freinant ainsi les efforts de prévention du VIH/Sida.

Madame la présidente, je me pose également la question de savoir quel sera désormais le rôle du *National Drug Secretariat* et du *National Aids Secretariat* avec l'entrée en vigueur

de la *National Agency for Drug Control Act*. Ce serait bien si le Premier ministre puisse nous en dire davantage lors de son *summing up*.

Madame la présidente, pour revenir au *National Agency for Drug Control Bill*, je relève des points d'attention que le gouvernement ne doit pas ignorer. Donner trop de pouvoirs à une seule agence sans mécanisme de contrôle fort, peut mener à des dérives bureaucratiques ou à des lenteurs administratives. Il en est de même sur les moyens réels dont disposera l'agence. Aura-t-elle les moyens humains, financiers, et techniques pour remplir sa mission ? Le projet de loi ne donne pas de détails concrets sur le budget – ce qui est compréhensible probablement – ni sur la formation du personnel, ou les outils de suivis. Plusieurs aspects, à mon avis, doivent être améliorés pour rendre ce projet de loi plus complet et plus conforme aux attentes modernes. Comme l'ambiguïté sur les mesures de réduction des risques dans les sections 6(f) et 6(g) du projet de loi, ces clauses ne définissent pas clairement les pratiques de réduction de risques acceptables comme l'échange de seringues ou les sites de consommation supervisés. Cela pourrait entraîner une mise en œuvre incohérente à travers le pays.

De même, Madame la présidente, le projet ne mentionne pas explicitement les droits fondamentaux des personnes qui consomment des drogues, tel que le droit à la santé, la non-discrimination, et la protection de la vie privée. Il est donc crucial d'inclure ces protections pour garantir que les services soient éthiques et respectueux des droits des usagers. Si on s'arrête aussi à la section 8, bien que la société civile soit représentée dans le conseil d'administration, le projet ne précise pas comment ces représentants seront choisis, seront sélectionnés, ni leur influence réelle sur les décisions de l'agence. Par ailleurs, la section 16 du projet de loi établit un fond de contrôle des drogues mais il manque, à mon avis, des détails sur les sources de financement, les critères d'allocation, et les mécanismes de surveillance de ce fond.

Il faut également faire attention, Madame la présidente, que certaines ONG très actives sur le terrain depuis des années, ne soient pas marginalisées. Je propose donc, Madame la présidente, un renforcement de la prévention dans écoles et les quartiers sensibles. Il faut tout un programme éducatif dès le primaire sur les risques liés aux drogues, adapté à l'âge. Les collègues devraient être dotés de clubs anti-drogue encadrés par des jeunes leaders formés. Les ONG et éducateurs devront animer des ateliers réguliers dans les zones à risques. Des centres devront être accessibles dans chaque région de l'île avec un accompagnement médical, psychologique et social. Il est donc important de déstigmatiser l'utilisateur, former la police, les juges, les médias et dans la foulée une formation obligatoire pour la police sur les nouvelles

approches centrées sur l'accompagnement plutôt que la répression, mais également, encourager les juges à recourir à des peines alternatives comme les thérapies et les travaux d'intérêt général pour les consommateurs. Mais, pas de pitié pour les trafiquants !

Ce projet, Madame la présidente, suscite de l'espoir, mais aussi des interrogations. Autant que j'accueille favorablement, autant je vais répéter ce que j'avais annoncé lors de mon intervention sur le Discours Programme. Il nous faut des moyens illimités en termes de ressources humaines, de technologies modernes, et de l'approche à adopter pour mener à bien la lutte contre les trafiquants qui pullulent le pays et tuent notre jeunesse avec leur poison synthétique en faisant preuve d'ingéniosité et sans doute, avec la complicité malheureusement, de certaines brebis galeuses au sein de la force policière.

Madame la présidente, les discours et les mises en garde ne servent malheureusement pas comme effet dissuasif. Nous voyons tous les jours des chauffeurs sous l'effet de drogue, inconscients dans leurs véhicules qui causent des accidents. Un jeune a été trouvé en possession de drogue dans une école primaire. Des jeunes collégiens ont été surpris en train de sniffer – d'autres avant moi l'ont dit – du déodorant et d'autres produits et j'en passe.

Le Premier ministre a révélé récemment à la Chambre que la quantité de drogues saisies de novembre 2024 à mars de cette année s'élève à plus d'un milliard de roupies. Ce chiffre, Madame la présidente, peut paraître énorme, mais il indique aussi que les trafiquants ne reculent devant rien. Ils font même davantage appel à des ressortissants étrangers, surtout d'Europe, pour faire entrer de la drogue dans le pays. Et dans tout cela, Madame la présidente, il y a l'épineux problème des drogues synthétiques. On en fabrique dans les laboratoires clandestins, on en trouve sous toutes ses formes, facilement accessible aux petits comme aux grands et plus prisé, car à prix abordable pour toutes les bourses. Nous sommes témoins au quotidien de la zombification de nos jeunes, des dégâts causés à la santé mentale des jeunes consommateurs et avec une recrudescence des cas de violence physiques et sexuelles. Et cela, s'est répandu dans villes et villages, n'épargnant aucune couche sociale.

En somme, Madame la présidente, je soutiens ce projet de loi, mais pas de façon aveugle. Je le soutiens avec exigence car la lutte contre la drogue mérite mieux que des intentions, elle mérite des résultats. Donc, approuvons ce texte. Je termine, mais veillons à l'accompagner, à le surveiller, à l'ajuster pour qu'il ne devienne pas une énième réforme qui meurt sur papier mais bien un levier de transformation réelle pour notre jeunesse, nos familles et notre pays.

Je vous remercie.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Member, you mentioned a referendum. I stand under the correction of the Attorney General, of course, we do not yet have a method of referendum even if the word exists in our Constitution. Do you agree, hon. Attorney General?

Mr Glover: Yes, I agree.

Madam Speaker: But it is a good thing to bear this in mind. Now, I have hon. Narsinghen!

(9.29 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr H. Narsinghen): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. Drug trafficking and drug addiction are among the most serious scourges affecting our society.

Madam Speaker, it is very unfortunate that at a time, when we are discussing about this important Bill, we see that the two Members of the Opposition are not present and this is really very unfortunate. We criticised in the Opposition for nearly ten years and we also made it very clear in our Government Programme that we will tackle this scourge of society in the most frontal and steadfast manner.

The present Bill, Madam Speaker, is a testimony of our commitment to crack down on drugs. We do not brag; rather we act. Our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister mean business, unlike others in the previous regime. The Bill marks a radical departure from previous practices. I will highlight the marked differences between NATReSA and the present National Agency for Drug Control.

The previous regime was the champion of rhetoric. They were saying ‘*mo pou kass lerin mafia ladrog.*’ They mentioned that a couple of times. Instead, we have seen an unprecedented surge of drug trafficking and drug consumption during the reign of MSM. The series of unsolved scandals are still vivid in our mind. A number of speakers before me mentioned *tractopelle*, gas cylinders in nature, Wakashio, and Navind Kistnah who was on the run, *en cavale*.

It is true that we cannot track down completely on drug. Let us not be demagogical. In my own constituency, we are witnessing the damage being done by this pernicious scourge. But it is a legacy of the previous regime. I listened carefully to what the Leader of the

Opposition has been saying. We have seen the death of two young by overdose in my own constituency. Madam Speaker, *il ne faut pas se voiler la face*.

It is also apposite, Madam Speaker, to analyse the status of drugs in two leading reports. Let us not forget the famous Rault Report and the Lam Shang Leen Report. One was in 1987 and the other one was in 2018. Around 1987, heroin and brown sugar were the fashionable drugs and a craze at that time. Also, at that point in time, we witnessed the slow creeping of Subutex whereas, today, it is synthetic drug. Even more dangerous! Now, the drug traffickers are targeting the poor more and more, as we have seen in the surge of prices in cannabis.

Both reports, at that point in time, pointed out the involvement of some politicians and the close circles of politicians. Both reports put on record the corruption at the level of the Police, especially those who were supposedly to be trustees and guardians of the system. Justice Lam Shang Leen mentioned about the need to dismantle or to restructure ADSU. Have we done it up to now? Today, we have a very competent and dedicated Commissioner of Police, but we must also address this recommendation regarding the restructuring of ADSU. I have to confess – I still have very bad echoes regarding the functioning of ADSU. Therefore, it must not be mere restructuring, but also, a careful selection of competent officers.

More importantly, we need men of integrity. Integrity is of essence. Unfortunately, integrity is becoming more and more a rare commodity in our country. The Rault Report explained the importance of strong political will. Yesterday, we did not have it. But today, we have this strong political will. This is the marked difference.

Madam Speaker, resolving the drug scourge is not only a question of tracking down and inflicting punishment. It is also important to address the issue of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, and coordination and research. Decisions on such an important issue cannot be capricious according to the whims and fancies of a Maximo leader as we had, as it used to be. Strategic decisions must also be backed on data, figures and scientific information.

Now, for the first time, we are witnessing such high-level engagement. The new legislation, by virtue of section 3, sets up a National Drug Control Commission. Who are the protagonists? No more than the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister along with the Minister of Health, the Attorney General and other Ministers. It is sad to note that the Leader

of Opposition was criticising such sort of nomination. It seems that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand the basic principle of separation of powers.

This is part of the Executive. In all institutions, we have the political dimension and the administrative dimension. So, it is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition has not understood the basics. It may also include, and this is a very good point, the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues. We have not forgotten Rodrigues. We know the commitment of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, and also, the commitment of the Minister of Health, Mr Anil Bachoo, and the commitment of the Attorney General. We have no doubt that the political will is now a reality.

It is, in fact, the NDC Commission which will set national objectives and goals. In fact, it is very important to have a vision because we cannot afford to run without a sense of direction. Overall coordination at the highest level is critical and this will be ensured by the Commission. There will be also, Madam Speaker, a Real Time Monitoring System (RTM) and publication of an analytic bulletin on a quarterly basis. Really impressive!

Now, coming to the National Agency for Drug Control, it is important at this juncture to compare the defunct NATReSA with the new National Agency for Drug Control. As you know, NATReSA was focused on treatment and rehabilitation whereas the new National Agency for Drug Control adopts – this is important to put on record – a holistic and integrated approach, which did not exist under NATReSA. Its mandate goes beyond treatment to include – very important to note – prevention, control, enforcement, policy coordination and data management. Such approach aligns itself with international best practices. It is a more balanced approach between public health, law enforcement, unlike NATReSA, which operated under the Ministry of Health. The new institution will be more autonomous. It is very important for it to be autonomous. At the same time, it will be a better coordinated agency.

It is very important to note that now, there is also clear inter-ministerial cooperation. It now ropes in the PMO, DPMO, the Ministry of Health, Justice and Education. So, what we are doing is a multi-sectoral approach to tackle the drug scourge. This inter-agency model reflects the framework of the UNODC, (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). It lays a lot of emphasis on human rights also and on public health. I consider it to be a paradigm shift. It moves away from a purely punitive model to a more holistic one.

Now, the Bill includes explicit policies on harm reduction strategies and access to evidence-based treatment. It also caters for vulnerable groups, such as women, children and people with mental problems. There is more emphasis on voluntary treatment and to reduce criminalisation and drugs usually for small consumers.

Madam Speaker, NATReSA was a single agency. It could be sensed that the agency was overstressed at times and it could not deliver whereas the new agency will now comprise multiple divisions. One is harped on policy, another one on research and strategy, another on treatment and rehabilitation, yet another one on prevention and public awareness, especially addressing HIV and AIDS. So, each unit will be spearheaded by a Coordinator and coordination and cross-fertilisation of knowledge will be of essence.

I will now focus on the important role of the Research Unit. As a researcher and an academic myself, I know the importance of research. Robust research data is fundamental to develop an evidence-based drug policy. In fact, research can provide critical insights into the complex dynamics of drug abuse. Madam Speaker, decisions cannot be capricious and subjective. Regular surveys are important, especially school-based surveys. Treatment based on data is essential, for example, to know the types of drugs being used, demographics of clients and reasons for seeking help.

Socio-economic impact data is also critical, Madam Speaker. Cost associated with drug use versus costs and benefits of different intervention must be made. Social impacts studies are critical to formulate informed decisions, both qualitative and quantitative research can show the consequences on drug use on families, communities and public health. We also know the impact of drug on marginalised communities or regions. The Research Unit must be capable to evaluate programmes; rigorous evaluation is required.

Madam Speaker, we are today having an important Bill. We know that this Government means business. We know that the Prime Minister means business. We know that the Deputy Prime Minister means business. We know that all Members of this Parliament possibly except the two, we mean business, we want to crack down on drug and we are going to do it, we must do it. Because the future generation will not excuse us if we cannot tackle this very important scourge is in our society.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, very much.

Mr Etwareea, keep an eye on the time if you can, please!

(9.41 p.m.)

Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): I will.

Madame la présidente, je suis particulièrement heureux qu'aucun des orateurs avant moi n'a affirmé que le problème de la drogue est une fatalité et que nous devons vivre avec. Ce soir, je suis heureux de faire partie de ce gouvernement qui après cinq mois aux affaires, présente un projet ambitieux – la lutte contre le poison qui a déjà fait des milliers de morts et ruiné autant de familles.

Je remercie le Premier ministre, son enthousiasme et sa fermeté qu'on a vu ce matin, sont tout à fait contagieux. Je remercie aussi le DPM. Je ne veux pas révéler la teneur des discussions que nous avons chaque semaine lors de nos réunions de bureau politique au MMM mais je peux dire que le DPM nous a, semaine après semaine, témoigné d'une certaine impatience mais beaucoup de volonté et la sincérité du gouvernement de foncer avec la National Agency for Drug Control Bill. Beaucoup a déjà été dit depuis tout à l'heure, il ne me reste pas grand-chose à ajouter.

Toutefois, Madame la présidente, je vais pour ma part tenter de décortiquer l'aspect socio-économique de la consommation de la drogue. Ce phénomène concerne selon des spécialistes entre 20,000 et 30,000 personnes de toutes âges et toutes les religions et de toutes les régions. Je m'empresse d'ajouter que ce fléau – et je viens à mon point essentiel – est la pure conséquence et la manifestation de notre société qui roule à deux vitesses. Il n'appartient pas à ce projet de loi ou à la loi ou l'institution qui sera créée au bout de régler les problèmes d'une société à deux vitesses mais je le fais comme une pique de rappel pour dire que aussi longtemps que le problème de la pauvreté ne sera pas vaincu d'une certaine manière, d'une certaine hauteur, les problèmes de la drogue risquent de perdurer. Oui, malheureusement la drogue c'est une affaire de riche et de pauvre, de toutes les façons. Je ne vais pas parler des trafiquants qui font d'immense fortune sur le dos des consommateurs, des malheureux passeurs, des mules, ou des petits revendeurs qui se font exploiter par les grands trafiquants ou encore des états mal ou sous-équipés qui ne font pas le poids face au moyen gigantesque des trafiquants.

Dès lors, il est évident que c'est la population à bas revenue vivant dans des quartiers défavorisés qui sont les premières victimes. Des études avancent que 95% des

consommateurs de drogue viennent des quartiers défavorisés. La came frappe là où les infrastructures sociales sont absente, où les jeunes sont délaissés à eux-mêmes et où l'horizon paraît bouché. Il y a une corrélation directe entre le niveau économique des gens, des consommateurs et la consommation de la drogue. Diverses études à Maurice mais aussi à l'étranger concluent que les enfants des familles démunies sont vingt fois plus susceptibles de se droguer que les gosses des familles aisés et de niveau éducatif plus élevé. La drogue est certes consommée de plus en plus par des personnes aisées mais la drogue est plus dangereuse pour les personnes en situation de précarité. Ces problèmes nous ramènent aussi à des difficultés d'accès aux soins et à la prévention. Les pauvres meurent plus que les riches d'intoxication. Ils entrent dans un cycle infernal qui les mène au désarroi, à la violence et à la prostitution.

Toute la population défavorisée ne se shoot pas au synthétique mais sa précarité la rend vulnérable. Cette population pauvre a recours aux drogues synthétiques, moins chère, facilement accessible, très addictive et dangereuse. Les riches sniffent de la cocaïne à R 3,000 la ligne dans le confort et l'intimité de leurs salons. La bonne nouvelle par rapport à ce projet de loi qui fait débat ici, est qu'il fait une grande place à la prévention. La prévention ici dans ce projet de loi constitue un axe fort contre la consommation. Il s'agit de réduire la demande par le biais des campagnes d'information, de sensibilisation de ce que représentent les dangers. Mais, attention la sensibilisation qui doit bien sûr commencer à la maison, à l'école ne suffit pas à elle seule. Je souhaite que la future National Agency for Drug Control mette en place un mécanisme pour détecter les victimes de façons précoces avant qu'il ne soit trop tard. J'avance l'idée, Madame la présidente, de former une armée de travailleurs sociaux de proximité. On a déjà parlé de la police des proximités, je parle d'une armée de travailleurs sociaux de proximité qui pourront prévenir la descente aux enfers.

Le fossé entre riche et pauvre est aussi manifeste en matière de réhabilitation qui est l'autre axe fort de ces projets de loi. Ce n'est pas donné à tout le monde de se payer une cure d'intoxication. Des riches, gosses ou adultes, s'en vont discrètement en Inde, en Suisse, dans des cliniques spécialisées et se paient des traitements coûteux quid de la population défavorisée. Où va-t-elle se soigner pour autant qu'elle a été convaincue de le faire ? À l'heure actuel, l'état ne peut prendre en charge que quelques 200 personnes au Brown Sequard, à Montagne Longue ou encore à Mahebourg. Les organisations non-gouvernemental, l'église en particulier, font un travail immense mais tout cela n'est pas suffisant vu l'ampleur du mal.

Madame la présidente, c'est réjouissant de noter que le père fondateur de la National Agency for Drug Control accorde une place prépondérante à la réhabilitation de ceux qui sont tombés dans le piège de la drogue. Avec plus de moyen, avec un encadrement mieux fourni et plus engagé, la nouvelle institution viendra aussi combler le fossé entre les nantis et les moins nantis en matière de réhabilitation. Je ne vais pas rentrer dans le sujet du trafic de la drogue qui est largement commenté ici.

Je vais conclure, Madame la présidente. Nous pouvons et nous devons déclarer la guerre à la drogue. Cette institution est un instrument à le faire. Nous gagnerons cette guerre contre la drogue seulement si nous remportons la guerre contre la pauvreté, contre les manques de perspective pour nos jeunes et nos moins jeunes mais surtout dans les milieux défavorisés.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie.

L'honorable Seeburn !

(9.50 p.m.)

Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have reached a critical situation with the drug problem in Mauritius which the previous Government has failed to tackle.

Madam Speaker, the introduction of the National Agency for Drug Control Bill is a concrete step for fight against illegal drugs and it is in the right direction to restore the trust of the nation. We have an obligation to protect our children, to protect our youth and the people of Mauritius from the risk and harm of drugs. This government was elected on a promise of change to pledge and deliver in creating a new Mauritius in the 21st century where we now see changes happening, step by step, with a view to make Mauritius a better place to live.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that this Bil lays down strong foundations to tackle drug problem together with a fresh and long-term approach, not only with the establishment of the National Agency for Drug Control under Section 5 of the Bill as the apex body but also, with the establishment of the National Drug Control Commission where, Madam Speaker, we see the voluntariness of this government going that extra mile and where the Prime Minister himself, standing as the Chairperson of the Commission and the Deputy

Prime Minister as the Vice-Chairperson. This shows the seriousness of the drug problem and the firm commitment of both leaders to deal with the issues.

Madam Speaker, this Bill empowers the Commission to set national objectives in the fight for the scourge of drugs and further empowers the Commission, independently, to oversee all drug control activities in Mauritius and evaluate the implementation of the National Drug Control Masterplan. The main objectives of the National Agency for Drug Control shall be to emphasise on the demand reduction of the drugs through the prevention treatment and rehabilitation of persons who use drugs and their social integration in the society and, at the same time, minimising the negative health and social consequences.

Madam Speaker, Amnesty International says that criminalising drug does not decrease their use or supply. Instead, it drives the trade underground, increases the harm in using drugs and fuels organised crimes, corruptions and violence. Evidence from several regions around the world shows that the war on drugs fails to decrease the use and availability of drug despite severe law enforcement with death penalty for drug offences in Malaysia, China and Singapore, mass incarceration on the United States of America and torture in Mexico for drug offense, unless tackled otherwise.

This is how we see the former President of the United States, Barack Obama, adopted a different approach and announced in a press conference in Atlanta to tackle drug problem with a demand reduction where he said –

“The most important thing to do is to reduce demand and the only way to do that, is to provide treatment.”

And, he went on to say, Madam Speaker –

“It is to be seen mainly as a public health problem.”

And hence, proposed during his mandate, a Drug Control Budget where he tried to walk on the steps of the former United States’ President, Jimmy Carter, who had previously pledged to spend more on treatment and prevention than law enforcement.

However, Madam Speaker, the White House officials adopted a balancing exercise to split the financial budget of that year for public health side and law enforcement side to a 50/50 approach to combat the drug problem. Perhaps a similar approach could be exercised with more efficiency for Mauritius with better results.

Madam Speaker, the Bill empowers the National Agency for Drug Control under Section 8 of the Act, to facilitate the implementation of the National Drug Control Masterplan and operate in accordance with the international standards and guidelines of the United Nations' office on drugs and crimes and further conduct research to determine the magnitude of the social and economic impact of the drug use in Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, the Bill further makes provision through the Treatment and Rehabilitation Service Division of the National Agency for Drug Control to work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the NGOs and mobilise resources locally with the private sector for vocational training and work placement programmes for persons recovering from drug disorders.

The Bill further empowers the agency through its Prevention and Public Awareness Division to lead national campaigns, sensitise people at large and conduct local awareness through workshops, community events and promote awareness of the risks involved in consuming drugs.

The Bill also provides the Agency to work along with the Ministry of Education to implement drug use prevention curriculum, if possible, in all educational institutions by emphasising in promoting sports and life skills training programmes to keep youth engaged in activities.

Madam Speaker, the Bill makes provisions for the National Agency for Drug Control through its Supply Reduction Coordination Division to emphasise on enforcement of drug control laws and facilitate cooperation with the police, with the customs and with the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

As rightly emphasised in our Government Programme, we shall work to enhance the regional maritime security to combat illegal drugs on the high seas and at the same time, increase our surveillance capacity with the help of regional member states.

The Bill rightly makes provisions for a confidential hotline access for individuals and families seeking help, for reporting drug use and trafficking problems.

Madam Speaker, this Bill introduces the most independent institution to tackle the vicious cycle of drugs in our society that has wrecked several lives, broken families and threatened several communities.

Madam Speaker, we have pledged to protect our community and ensure that decent opportunities are available and we cannot conclusively achieve this if we do not take control of the fight against drugs. We shall aim to continue tackling inequalities through the largest programme to get more people at work and bring reforms for a better welfare state with a better education system, health services, justice and for a better economy. We have inherited dire economic situations from the previous government. Hence, we need to improve the efficiency and coordination to achieve better results. There is a need to ensure that this strategy is translated into concrete actions as there is a real chance of reducing drug problems and creating a healthier society.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, one should know that the drug problem is not in isolation. It is often tied up with other social and family problems. It is a serious threat to health. Today, illegal drugs are widely available than ever, exposing a serious threat to our children, to the community and people at large which may lead to drug related crimes. Thus, the fight for drug is not just a matter for the government. It is also a matter for the teachers at school, for the parents at home, for the NGOs in the community at large and for everyone who cares for the future of our society.

Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing fight. We owe it to our children; we owe it to our family and friends and we owe it to our motherland. The Bill comes from a truly imaginative solution where the compliance and implementation will have positive impact to overcome the current drug problem in Mauritius and save lives of our people. We have a duty to stand together with a unified approach to face drug problems as stated by the Prime Minister earlier.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Attorney General for coming forward with this legislation and his team for working on this Bill with clarity and further convey my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for their unwavering commitment to join hands together and do whatever it takes to combat the current drug problem and once again, make Mauritius a better place to live.

Madam Speaker, with these words, I support the Bill.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Edouard, you are the last speaker, I think.

(9.59 p.m.)

Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Keep an eye on the time!

Mr Edouard: I will be very brief, I suppose.

This is a wonderful piece of legislation from a government with a clear vision to address the drug problem in the Republic of Mauritius. This Bill is most welcome.

This Bill translates a will and a promise because on the campaign trail, we promised to take care of our fellow citizens. With this Bill, the hon. Prime Minister is telling us, it is time for action. As you know, actions speak louder than words. This Bill toils the start of a fight in a relentless battle to overcome this issue of drugs in the republic. For my part, I will emphasise on Rodrigues and on section 2 (b) of this Bill, that is, disrupting the entry, production and availability of drugs.

C'est malheureux quand même qu'à Rodrigues, il y a une polémique malvenue et stérile sur la nécessité de porter une attention spéciale à ce problème de drogue. La croyance, c'est qu'à Rodrigues, le problème n'est pas aussi alarmant qu'à Maurice. C'est vrai que nous avons un problème avec les drogues douces comme l'alcool et la cigarette qui nécessitent aussi une attention spéciale. Mais avec votre permission, Madame la présidente, je vais citer *les findings of a survey from 2022. These findings are important –*

- “12.4% (95% C.I, 11.0% – 13.8%) of people aged 15-64 years, residing in Rodrigues, had ever used drugs (19.9% among males, against 3.8% among females).
- 2.3% (95% C.I, 1.8% – 3.0%) of residents of Rodrigues, aged 15-64 years, were currently using drugs (3.9% among males, against 0.6% among females).
- 19.0% of young people of Rodrigues aged 20-24 years had ever used drugs, against 2.7% who were currently consuming drugs.
- Among all young people aged 15-19 years in the Island of Rodrigues, 4.6% had ever used drugs and 2.2% were currently on drugs.
- 6.6% of students 15-24 years had ever used drugs, while 1.3% of them were currently consuming drugs.
- Approximately 100-300 adults had ever used heroin, just around 50 -150 had ever used cough syrup, about one hundred had ever used multiple drugs,

comprising combinations of two or more drugs such as cough syrup, cannabis, heroin, psychotropic tablets and new psychoactive substance (synthetic drugs).”

Among the current users, I think is very important for us to pay a special attention to –

- Among current users of drugs, 30.8% admitted it was easy or very easy to get access to drugs for consumption purpose.
- Almost all residents in Rodrigues, 97.9%, reported cannabis herb was available in Rodrigues, while 26.5% believed heroin was also available and 28.8% that new psychoactive substances were also a trendy drug in Rodrigues.
- Among residents of Rodrigues who had ever used drugs, 34.1% had consumed their first drugs in the main Island of Mauritius, while 62.7% had the first drug experience in Rodrigues itself.

So, for me, the situation of drugs is alarming because though it is only one gram, its one gram *de trop*. We must fight to disrupt the entry of drugs, especially synthetic drugs in Rodrigues. Some also say that there is also production of synthetic drugs in Rodrigues.

We are happy that section 9 (2)(o) makes provision for Rodrigues to be represented on the Drug Control Board. But under section 3 (3), again, as I said the other time, the Chief Commissioner may attend meetings of the National Drug Control Commission. We have had a bad experience with this ‘may attend.’ We have had a bad experience in the Rodrigues Regional Act where it is said the Chief Commissioner ‘may attend Cabinet meetings.’ It never happened!

We ask ourselves why, as Head of Rodrigues, the Chief Commissioner is not a member of the National Drug Control Commission. I most humbly beg the hon. Prime Minister to include the Chief Commissioner in section 3 (2) so that he becomes a member of the National Drug Control Commission.

Now, I come to the visualisation of control of drugs in Rodrigues. I imagine a handful of Police Officers in Rodrigues who have to look after the port, the airport and cruising vessels who come very near the reefs of Rodrigues. I heard before, other colleagues were talking about Wakashio and what may have happened. We were also asking ourselves in Rodrigues why do these large vessels cruise so near to Rodrigues. Why do they cruise so nearby? So, we have to pay attention to this as well.

In the endeavour to control drugs in Rodrigues, we must think that Rodrigues is not a district as the other districts in Mauritius. Rodrigues is an island. That is why I am saying a handful of Police Officers is not sufficient to address this drug control problem. We know that the Lam Shang Leen Report on drugs has pertinent recommendations for Rodrigues. There is a need to invest in equipment in Rodrigues necessary for the control of the entry of drugs in Rodrigues.

There is a need in Rodrigues to have systematic scanning of all containers reaching Rodrigues because now, as it is, containers are leaving the port area unchecked. So, there is a need to have systematic scanning of all containers leaving the port area. This is the wish of the Police Officers who are responsible for the control of drugs in Rodrigues. Also at the airport, there must be systematic scanning of all luggage in the airport.

So, we see that it is not that alarming. I can see, but we must pay special attention to disrupt the entry, the protection and the availability of drugs in Rodrigues. I recall my late godfather who, very often, used the term 'cunning like a fox.' We know that the dealers are cunning like a fox. There are many ways to get away with trafficking. We must also pay attention in Rodrigues as we all see and know that there is money laundering. We must see what is happening in the different cultural and leisure activities where it may be an opportunity for money laundering.

This is a wonderful piece of legislation. I thank the hon. Prime Minister for this. He is calling us for action, and I am happy to support this Bill.

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with your permission, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debates.

Mr Bhagwan rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 22 April 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Thank you everybody. Thank you for having stayed for almost 11 hours. Thanks to the staff from everywhere who have been with us from this morning.

At 10.12 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 22 April 2025 at 11.30 a.m.