



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY 08 JUNE 2023

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 13 of 2023

Sitting of Thursday 08 June 2023

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**EMMANUEL ANQUETIL BUILDING – PROPOSED DEMOLITION**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed demolition of the Emmanuel Anquetil Building, he will state –

- (a) if he is in presence of any professional feasibility study as to the various options available and, if so, table copy thereof;
- (b) if the occupants will be permanently relocated in a new Government building or in rented offices and, if so, the location thereof;
- (c) the estimated cost of the demolition;
- (d) if he is in presence of the estimated cost for the construction of a new building of similar area of 300,000 square feet, and
- (e) the time frame envisaged.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Emmanuel Anquetil Building (EAB) is a 10-storey building in reinforced concrete, constructed in 1979. The basement area comprises two floors, one dedicated for parking space and a lower basement to house heavy equipment such as Chiller Units of the Central Air Conditioning system and other plant and equipment. The building is vested in the Prime Minister's Office and my Ministry has been entrusted the responsibility of its maintenance, which includes mechanical, electrical and plumbing services. The maintenance is ensured by a team of my Ministry comprising officers from Building section and the Energy Services Division (ESD).

The building is occupied by around 1,130 public officers who are posted in several Ministries and Departments, comprising amongst others, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the Central Information Systems Division (CISD), the Registrar General's Department and the Procurement Policy Office.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that in 2013, my Ministry commissioned a feasibility study for the refurbishment and conversion of the Emmanuel Anquetil Building into an eco-building. The assignment started in 2014 and the final report was submitted in January 2016. Based on visual inspections, the Consultant reported that the structural elements appeared to be in good condition, with few cracks and deformations. However, the Consultant also recommended that a series of destructive and non-destructive structural tests should be carried out to determine the properties of the concrete structures and the steel reinforcement, which would dictate the overall stability and durability of the building.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in its report, the Consultant proposed three possible options as follows –

1. Basic refurbishment;
2. Full refurbishment with eco-friendly features, and
3. Demolition and reconstruction of a new eco-friendly building.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, as the hon. Member is aware, this is a newly announced budget measure, which is still being debated, I am informed that the Prime Minister himself will be chairing an Inter-Ministerial Committee to look into the different options available and decide on the best alternative to implement the proposed demolition of the EAB and the creation of a mini-forest for leisure and recreational activities, as part of our vision for the cultural regeneration of the City of Port Louis. The Committee will also look into the relocation of all the present occupants to ensure that the exercise is undertaken in the best possible conditions. All this will be in line with the environment, economic and social resilience and traffic decongestion programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, the estimated cost of the demolition will be determined by reputed and experienced Consultant/expert in the field of demolition, which may not be available locally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (d) of the question, it would be premature at this stage to come up with any estimate for the construction of a new building. We shall await the deliberations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, which I am sure will take into

consideration all aspects of that matter and the best interest of the present occupants and stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (e) of the question, once again, this will also be determined by the Interministerial Committee to be chaired by the Prime Minister. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his precise and concise answer. It seems to be a bit of a *coup de tête*. This announcement has been made and there seems to be no back up report to justify the demolition. Are you actually telling me that you have, in presence of your Ministry, no report at all which says that the building is structurally unsound because you seem to suggest that? Are you saying that your engineers or some experts from overseas have now found that the building is structurally unsound?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Leader of the Opposition listened to my reply well, I was pretty clear that there was a report that was commissioned and that report suggested measures based on visual assessment. Now, we have to enlist the service of a Consultant for an in-depth analysis of the building. So, this is what this Budget is providing money for and this is what we are going to do.

Mr X. L. Duval: Actually, this announcement seems to be a bit of a *coup de tête* because if you read paragraph 175 of the Budget Speech, it is not a conditional announcement. It is “we will”; we will do this and that by the creation of a mini forest and the pulling down of the Emmanuel Anquetil Building. It does not say ‘considering the pulling down’.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would have thought that if such an announcement was made which has created so much turmoil in Port Louis amongst 1,100 Civil Servants working there that there would have been something more than just words or intentions or if there were intentions, then this announcement should have been on a conditional basis.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition has been a former Minister of Finance himself, I am pretty surprised. In a Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance has announced the vision of the Government and that vision of the Government, what we intend to do is based on representation that he has received from several stakeholders during the budget consultation and that has been taken on board and based on this, the Minister of Finance has provided money to my Ministry to determine the way forward and the way forward is: yes, we will go ahead with a mini forest, we will go ahead with the demolition of the building but how to do it, but not the Minister of Finance who is going to tell them how to do it.

That is my Ministry, my engineers, my officers, with that money; we will enlist a Consultant and as I said in reply, maybe this ability, we do not have it locally. We will have to go on an international tender. So, now the budget is being voted and my officers will start working on it as soon as possible.

Mr X. L. Duval: If I understand correctly, Mr Speaker, Sir, you as a Minister, has decided to destroy a building which may be perfectly sound –

- (i) without knowing what is the cost of demolition;
- (ii) without knowing what is the ecological effect in the surroundings;
- (iii) without knowing where to relocate the staff permanently or even temporarily;
- (iv) without knowing the cost of a new building.

Have I succinctly summarised your attitude towards this announcement?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr X. L. Duval: Or you can prove me wrong! You can actually give me the figures now.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, what we know is that 1,130 public officers coming from around the island, from Triolet, from Cottage, from Goodlands are suffering in that building which dates back to 30 years now. There is leakage in that building it has no Fire Certificate. There is pest and pigeon infestation. There is the presence of asbestos in that building. We have been putting money year in, year out to try to renovate and year in, year out, we are putting millions of rupees of public money in that building and still, it is not coming to an acceptable level where this caring Government can put its public servants to work.

So, as a caring Government, *un gouvernement visionnaire, il y a des décisions à prendre!* We refuse to keep on putting public money in a building that will not be to the standard. *Certaines personnes ont quitté le bâtiment du gouvernement et sont parties se réfugier dans le New Newton Tower. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'eux, elles ont besoin d'un certain confort. Non, nos fonctionnaires aussi méritent mieux que ce qu'ils sont en train d'avoir en ce moment.*

An hon. Member: *Zot ava konpran!*

Mr X. L. Duval: I think probably if you are talking about my office moving, you are probably blaming the Speaker and I do not know what he will say to you. I would like to ask the hon...

Mr Speaker: We are together, don't you worry.

Mr X. L. Duval: You know that! You know that very well.

Mr Speaker: You are my good friend!

Mr X. L. Duval: You do. Yes, very good. Very good, you know that.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the asbestos are not in the walls; they are in the panels' partitioning and this partitioning has, for the most part - but a lot of these panels have already been replaced and anyway, if you were to demolish the building - you will know this because you are an expert - you will have to remove the asbestos panels before removing them.

So, are you aware that the asbestos are in the panels, that many of these panels, if not most, have been removed anyway and replaced? Are you aware of that, hon. Minister?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are still asbestos in the building and this concern has been raised repeatedly by the Trade Unionists. They have raised concerns about the health of the employees occupying the building and this is exactly what the Minister of Finance did. He listened to their qualms and has announced appropriate actions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite all necessary precautions that are being taken in that building, currently in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Control regarding asbestos at work, we feel there is still concern for the health of the people in there.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe the Minister of Finance tried to play a bad joke on his colleague but this is not a joke. This building, as you know, is a national landmark. It was designed by one of the best architects in the world Dame Jane Drew, chosen by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam himself after independence. This is not just any building.

So, announcing and shocking Mauritius with this announcement that they are going to destroy the building on a *coup de tête* without any figures, without any plans, it is just a bad joke. Do you agree with that?

Mr Hurreeram: Are you done?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes. Do you agree?

Mr Hurreeram: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not agree. The regeneration programme of Port Louis has already started. We started with the Victoria Urban Terminal. Today, we have a brand new building that makes all of the Mauritians proud and if I am not mistaken, it was the same rhetoric when we engaged into renovating Victoria to make it what is today.

Immigration Urban Terminal is on its way. We have so many landmarks around Port Louis today. The Intercontinental Slavery Museum, the Ministry of Finance

announced the upgrading of Allée Père Laval, Jummah Mosque, Aapravasi Ghat, the China Town and I was also told the fish market. All these are being looked into as a whole.

So, this is not *un coup de tête*. It may seem to them because we know that they are not in power, they do not know the vision of this Government, the way we have been working, the way we are working, the way we are progressing. So, it seems a *coup de tête* to them, no worries, but this is a well-planned action with a series of things that are being done in Port Louis.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not a *coup de tête*. I went there this morning, one firm, Rey & Lenferna Ltd is presently, as we are talking, carrying out a contract of maybe nearly a Rs100 m., completely changing the electrical system, the *wires*, everything inside that building. So, this is not a *coup de tête*, you have a vision. A vision! But you do not see in the vision that you have already spent in your vision Rs100 m., and it is actually in the Estimates. You know the Estimates and they are there. 31112.433, there are Rs100 m. for this year and the forthcoming years. What sort of vision is that? Is it electrical vision?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am really shocked.

An hon. Member: Electrical shock!

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Leader of the Opposition is talking, I do not know if it is demagogy or whatever. He really thinks that those 1,100 employees will leave the building on 01 July? They will have like, I do not know, maybe three financial years before we construct a new building, before we move them out, and then, we do whatever we want to do at this location. Meanwhile, what is he suggesting once again? That we leave those employees in the heat of Port Louis working without air conditioning? Is this what he is suggesting? This may make him laugh, but not me, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am sure you would find a *petit copain*. You could have found a *petit copain* to rent you a building for a while, saving you Rs100 m.

Mr Hurreeram: That is your way of working.

Mr X. L. Duval: And letting him...

Mr Hurreeram: That is your way of working.

Mr X. L. Duval: ... letting this fellow Rs100 m. in his pocket.

Mr Hurreeram: That is your way of working.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, that is another thing. Now, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, we know therefore that in the Budget Speech, it is completely contradictory to the Estimates, the planned expenditure. There is not only money to refurbish, Rs100 m., which you consider to be adequate, but also, not a single rupee, unless you will show me, for consulting, specialist works and all this that, you say yourself, are necessary before you actually decide on a *coup de tête* or not to crash down this building with all the environment impacts. Where is the money for the demolition and how much did you provide, at least for the consultancy?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, the consultancy has been provided. If you give me two seconds, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will tell you on what page and where it is.

Mr X. L. Duval: You should have it! Table it later. You are going to give him extra...

Mr Hurreeram: No, it is there, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Table it later. You are wasting my time!

Mr Hurreeram: *Ou poz kestion, bizin atann gagn repons!*

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir...

An hon. Member: Attendez! Attendez!

Mr Hurreeram: So, it is at Vote Item 102, you will find that...

Mr X. L. Duval: What 'Vote, Item – 102'! Which Ministry?

Mr Hurreeram: My Ministry, National Infrastructure! Which Ministry will that be?

Mr Balgobin: Ministry of Leader of Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: *Taler to pou eklate ek to komputer!*

Mr Hurreeram: Here it is, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is at page 350, Capital Expenditure, Acquisition of Non-Financial Assets, so there is Refurbishment of Emmanuel Anquetil Building. There is a provision of Rs40 m.

Mr X. L. Duval: For refurbishment...

Mr Hurreeram: Under this vote item.

Mr X. L. Duval: Refurbishment...

Mr Hurreeram: This item will be...

Mr X. L. Duval: ... demolition...

Mr Hurreeram: This is consultancy fee.

Mr X. L. Duval: This PNQ is a demolition!

Mr Hurreeram: This is consultancy fee.

Mr X. L. Duval: This is demolition!

Mr Hurreeram: If you do not want to understand, I cannot do much.

Mr X. L. Duval: There is nothing on demolition.

Mr Hurreeram: If you do not want to understand, I cannot do much.

Mr X. L. Duval: Don't joke on PNQ! Don't joke! There is no money for demolition. You have just proved it, there is only refurbishment.

Mr Hurreeram: You have just said, there is no money for demolition, there is money for consultancy. *To fek dir papao!*

Mr X. L. Duval: I cannot see. Let me go back again, Mr Speaker, Sir, to this 2016 Report, which is quite recent. You may know what the 2016 Report says. It says that in fact the figures will change now, but the percentages probably will remain the same.

Mr Hurreeram: Percentages of what?

Mr X. L. Duval: Percentages! Just bear with me, be patient! The cost of basic renovation is about half to a third of the actual cost of a new building. It depends of course, it tells you whether you want a super comfortable building or you want a basic

building that you can use for a lot of other things. You know that. So, this is why, of course, it begs the question on what basis the Ministry decided to go for demolition and construction somewhere else, whereas the only report - I thought he was going to give me another report - that exists in 2016 gives you the cost of Rs380 m. for basic refurbishment with inflation - it is much more now - and two or three times the cost for reconstruction? Are you aware of that?

Mr Hurreeram: What is the question?

Mr X. L. Duval: What you don't understand?

Mr Hurreeram: You made a statement. I have not got any question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: My question is whether you are aware that it is much more expensive and not recommended at all by the Mauritians and foreigners who came to study the refurbishment, renovation or demolition and reconstruction? Are you aware of that?

Mr Hurreeram: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, once again this report, the consultant said that it is based on, once again, visual inspection only and recommended three options. So, the report does not say whether it is viable or not. The report says, go and hire a structural engineer who will tell you with destructive and non-destructive structural tests to determine. If this has not been done, so how can I reply to what the Leader of the Opposition is saying? It is not me who is saying this, the report is saying this. We are going by the report of a professional.

Mr X. L. Duval: We are several Ministers of Finance in this room; we all know that the budget is approved by Cabinet. It is a Cabinet decision. It is not a game. A budget announcement, a budget speech is not a game, as you know. So, you announced there that you will demolish a building without having done any structural work at all to find out whether the building is sound or not. Okay, I got that and I think the public has also got this point.

I would like to ask you this question. I am sure you have read completely the Report of 2016, and you know, I presume, that the cost of renovation, basic cost, is Rs380 m. in those prices, with that US dollar rate. The cost of reconstruction, including the cost of demolition could rise to Rs1.5 billion. So, it is a big difference, hon. Minister. It is a big

difference, and I think the public is waiting for your reply here. You are not just going to look at me.

Mr Hurreeram: Once again, yes, this is what the report says, but we are not there yet. Let the structural engineers tell us what to do and how to do, and then, the Government will take the decision that needs to be taken.

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not know what to say. I am lost, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Hurreeram: *Pena kestion!*

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I am lost because I never expected so much amateurism. Really, I did not expect!

Mr Speaker: No! Hon. Leader of the Opposition...

Mr X. L. Duval: It is not a good word?

Mr Hurreeram: *Enn rapor lor Lee Kwan Yew ki li pa inn mem kompran, li pe poz kestion!*

Mr Speaker: It is not a parliamentary word. Please, remove.

Mr X. L. Duval: Amateurism, we can't say?

Mr Speaker: Don't discuss with the Chair. The Chair is not your enemy. The Government is your enemy. Yes, the Government is your enemy. You see? So, withdraw that word 'amateurism' or whatever. You cannot say that to a Minister. You can't say that!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think and I maintain that it is not serious. If the Speaker thinks otherwise, good for him.

Mr Speaker: No, it is not a question...

Mr X. L. Duval: If you think otherwise, good for you. What can I say?

Mr Speaker: You don't comment upon my ruling.

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay!

Mr Speaker: My ruling is clear.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is clear, okay.

Mr Speaker: There are words that can be used in Parliament; there are words that can't be used in Parliament. Whether it pleases you or not, you have to obey the rule of the Speaker.

Mr X. L. Duval: It seems it does not please you, but anyway, I will ask this question now. There has been a decision now to have a mini forest. Do you know what a mini forest looks like? It's a real mess. Go and have a look at the mini forest at the Cathedral. It's not a pleasant sight a mini forest, it really is *enn la forêt à brousse*. That's what it is. A mini forest is rewilding. When you are returning a piece of land to the wild, it's not usually a pleasant sight; it's like any terrain *en brousse* that you will find in Quatre Bornes or elsewhere.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, he knows full well that Cathedral gardens are not even a minute walk from Emmanuel Anquetil and *Jardin de la Compagnie* is not far either and Champ de Mars is becoming a dump, so much wild and uncontrolled construction...

Mr Speaker: Now, you are making a speech about Champ de Mars. Listen, let me remind you of your own question: whether in regard to the proposed demolition of Emmanuel Anquetil Building, he will state x, y, z. Now, you read Champ de Mars being a dump. What are you talking about? Time is almost over. I am reminding you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Don't get excited, it is not good for your health.

Mr Speaker: I am not excited.

Mr X. L. Duval: Don't get excited!

Mr Speaker: Put your question properly!

Mr X. L. Duval: The question is: these three sites being next to each other and in very small distance from the mini forest that you are planning at huge cost, don't you think it would be better for everyone of you to invest in *Jardin de la Compagnie*, help with Cathedral gardens and Champ de Mars, make all these into wonderful places where we can all go on an afternoon and sit in the shade? Is that alright?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the only thing that comes to my mind is human beings are resistant to change and so is the Leader of the Opposition. So, what we are trying to do in Mauritius, in Port Louis exists in all big cities around the world where maybe they have gone a step further by preventing vehicles from coming in, from making it pedestrian - there are tourist attractions coming in with the harbour a few metres away and those *croisières* coming in will provide places for the Mauritian public to go for a walk and have fresh air. Today, when we are talking about carbon footprint; today when

we are talking about climate change, I think the more we have, the merrier it's going to be, which, I think, is hard to understand for some.

Mr X. L. Duval: Finished? You said nearly over. Is it not over yet?

An hon. Member: Two minutes left.

Mr Speaker: Are you putting questions to me now?

Mr X. L. Duval: Nearly over!

Mr Speaker: I told you I am not your enemy. The Government is your enemy, shadow Prime Minister!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: Shadow Prime Minister, you are in a haste!

Mr X. L. Duval: You may be our opponent, the Government is also our opponent and we have no enemies, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am sorry to disappoint you.

Mr Speaker: I couldn't understand what you said.

Mr X. L. Duval: Never mind, it's okay. Mr Speaker, Sir, so my last question is this: given that they had been announced on a *coup de tête*, given that the Minister has not been able to produce even half a paragraph to justify what he has announced, whether he will rectify the situation. He talked yesterday and I don't think he mentioned anything on this issue. He said he will rectify and let the people know that this was announced as if *un peu d'une façon désinvolte* and that he will now do all this and come with a final decision after the project plans, committee etc. have looked at it. That's my question.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think for this Government, the welfare of our *fonctionnaires* is equally important. We are also looking into their wellbeing. They also deserve decent working place. This is what the Inter-Ministerial Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, will look into and this will allow us to liberate some space in Port Louis *et faire Port Louis respirer encore une fois. Merci.*

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

