



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 02 JULY 2024

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional

Integration and International Trade

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Ashley Ittoo
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 17 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 02 July 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT
PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS – SCOPE & CONTENT – LOCAL
AUTHORITIES

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have a first announcement to make with regard to the scope and content of Parliamentary Questions on issues falling under the purview of local authorities.

It has been observed that there has been a significant number of such questions from both sides of the House on the administrative responsibilities and operational activities of the different local authorities, which often do not comply with Standing Order 21(2), I quote –

“Questions may be asked of Ministers relating to public affairs with which they are officially connected, or any matter of administration for which such Ministers are responsible.”

Hon. Members, the Local Government Act provides for the establishment of Municipalities and District Councils with sufficient autonomy to manage the local affairs, operational activities of their areas as well as providing such services and facilities to the local communities.

It is fair to state that such trivial issues should be dealt with at local level thereby allowing the time of the House to be, otherwise, devoted to questions of national interest.

Moreover, in this regard, hon. Members may stand guided with what obtains at the House of Commons and other Commonwealth jurisdiction. I quote from Erskine May chapter 22.17 –

“It is not in order in a question to ask for action with matters under the control of local or other statutory authorities.”

Hon. Members are therefore advised to raise such questions firstly with the local authorities directly or the Minister personally or in the last resort at adjournment time.

I therefore invite hon. Members to stand guided accordingly.

My second announcement concerns hon. Wochit, who is absent. So, later on, I will deal with that.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):
 - (i) The Water Resources Bill (No. VIII of 2024); and
 - (ii) The Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. IX of 2024).
- (b) The Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.

B. Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Grand Port for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (c) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Savanne for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (d) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Black River for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (e) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Municipal Council of Curepipe for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (f) The District Council of Flacq (Bel Air Market/ Fair) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 109 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Central Water Authority (Dry Season) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 111 of 2024)

D. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

The Financial Services (Consolidated Licensing and Fees) (Amendment) (Amendment) Rules 2024. (Government Notice No. 110 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Library for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Consumer Protection (Control of Manufacture and Sale of Bread) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 112 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
PIPE REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME 2023-2024 – INTERNAL AUDIT
COMPLIANCE REPORT

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Pipe Replacement Programme for Financial Year 2023-2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to –

- (a) if copy of the agreement signed in connection therewith will be tabled;
- (b) if the Compliance Report of the Internal Audit Team dated 09 January 2024 has identified breaches thereon, if any, and, if so, indicate if same have been addressed and table documents related therewith, if any, and
- (c) the number of times the Board of the Authority has met regarding the Compliance Report and the Chief Internal Auditor in connection therewith.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I welcome this PNQ from the Leader of the Opposition that allows me to shed light on a matter that has been in the press lately.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that it has made a wide potable water distribution network serving all sectors of the economy with a total length of 5,246 km.

Out of the 5,246 km pipelines, there are approximately 1,500 km of pipes which are very old, varying from 50 to 80 years old and present high deficiencies in terms of losses, frequent bursts and inadequate carrying capacity. These pipes are in Asbestos Cement, cast iron, galvanised iron, steel and Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), which cannot be easily repaired. They cause disruptions in water supply as well as account for about 50-60% of wastages.

Out of the 1,500 km of very old and defective pipes, the CWA has identified about 500 km of pipes in all the six water supply zones which are critical and need to be replaced most urgently during calendar years 2023 and 2024.

The CWA has adopted a three-pronged strategy in order to fast track the replacement of these 500 km over a period 2 years as follows –

One: In-house replacement. This will concern the replacement of pipelines less than 1 km and will be undertaken by the CWA.

Two: Pipe replacement between 1 km and 3 km, and this will be carried out by small and medium contractors. These pipelines concern mainly the medium lateral roads/unclassified roads all around the island.

Three: Pipe replacement under Capital Projects. This concerns replacement of pipelines exceeding 3 km on classified RDA roads.

It is to be highlighted that the progress of works regarding replacement of pipes has been relatively slow over the years, accounting for more acute inefficiencies in the system. For the years 2010-2014, an amount of Rs1.4 billion has been invested in replacement of 281 km of defective pipes over a period of 5 years.

In Budget 2023-2024, Government has provided funds to the tune of Rs900 m. for Pipe Replacement Programmes to be carried out as follows –

- (1) Rs700 m. for in-house works by the CWA, and
- (2) Rs200 m. for works by small and medium contractors.

I am informed by the CWA that 246 km have been laid in-house in 2023-2024.

In addition, 118 km of pipes have been laid by small and medium contractors across the island in 2023-2024. The budget of an amount of Rs200 m. allocated has been fully utilised and additional funding to the tune of Rs150 m. has been provided for the Financial Year 2024-2025.

I am further informed that during Financial Year 2023-2024, 36 km of pipes have been laid under major contracts allocated by the CWA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a total of about 400 km of pipes has been replaced during the Financial Year 2023-2024 as compared to 281 km from 2010 to 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the purpose of the in-house Pipe Replacement Programme, my Ministry has entered into an “Agreement for Disbursement of Funds for Pipe Replacement Works for Financial Year 2023/2024” with the CWA in September 2023 following Government approval.

The Agreement contained, amongst others, conditions set by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MOFEPD) for allocating funds for this project.

The objectives of the Pipe Replacement Programme set out in the Agreement were to –

- (i) improve water supply with increased pressure and increased hours of distribution to the population;
- (ii) enable the CWA to generate more revenue from the sale of water;
- (iii) contribute to a reduction in Non-Revenue Water, and
- (iv) bring more efficiency in the water sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Agreement provided for modalities for provision of a financial contribution of Rs700 m. by the Ministry to the CWA in Financial Year 2023-2024 in the form of equity participation to finance exclusively the implementation of the in-house Pipe Replacement Programme given that the works will be undertaken by the CWA. It is gathered that the main items of expenditure incurred in in-house works concern procurement of pipes and fittings, labour costs and rental of equipment.

The salient features of the above Agreement are as follows –

1. The first tranche to be disbursed by the Ministry to the CWA will be in the sum of Rs350 m.
2. CWA will keep a separate bank account for the purpose of effective monitoring of funds disbursed in connection with the implementation of the Pipe Replacement Programme, that is, the in-house Pipe Replacement Programme.
3. The first tranche will be disbursed by the Ministry to the CWA upon signature of the Agreement.
4. The second tranche will be disbursed by the Ministry to the CWA, upon submission of a compliance report duly endorsed by the Board of the CWA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling a copy of the Agreement.

Following signature of the Agreement, the first tranche of Rs350 m. was released to the CWA in October 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 04 April 2024, the Ministry received an application from the CWA for the disbursement of the second tranche of Rs350 m., together with a Compliance Report dated 21 March 2024 from the Internal Control Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. The audit was carried out in February and March 2024.

The Compliance Report sought to ascertain that the first tranche had been used for the purpose intended, and its Terms of Reference were to verify –

- a. whether in-house pipe replacement works had been carried out;
- b. whether prevailing rules and procedures, including public procurement legislations, had been followed for the procurement of items, including pipes, fittings and other materials as well as the rental and/or acquisition of equipment for excavations and backfilling and hiring of outside labour;
- c. whether pipes, fittings and other materials and equipment have been received and delivered and used on sites.

Finally, it would make such recommendations to further improve the current process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some of the general findings and recommendations of the Compliance Report from the Ministry of Finance are as follows –

- a. Costs escalations have not been factored in the cost estimates submitted in February 2022 for in-house pipe laying along 200 km with a value of Rs700 m. Such cost estimates do not reflect actual market rates and a revised budget should have been submitted.
- b. Pipe replacement works had already started at the time of disbursement of the first tranche of Rs350 m., such that some Rs194 m. had been paid for procurement of supplies. Several other expenses incurred by the CWA may not have been accounted to the current project.
- c. At several sites, pipes had been laid over the ground, which may have resulted in substantial cost savings when compared to the planned methodology for pipe replacement. However, this is compensated by 189 km of pipes laid in lieu of the budgeted 100 km.

- d. Although a separate bank account was opened with ABSA in January 2024 for the Pipe Replacement Programme, payments were made through a SBM account of CWA which caters for payments in respect of other projects;
- e. On the basis of selected samples for site visits, it would be correct to assert that 189 km of pipes had been laid;
- f. Opportunities for improvement were made such as standard methodology for laying of pipes, standard drawings, commissioning certificates, compaction test, system for approval of variations, etc.
- g. The CWA had awarded 2,993 contracts (including 2,868 informal quotations) for a total value of Rs282.95 million following procurement methods: open advertised bidding, informal quotations, request for quotations and restricted bidding. On the basis of sample checks, the CWA was adhering to the prevailing rules and procedures including the public procurement legislations in its procurement process. However, there are opportunities for improvement such as avoiding repeated purchases of same items within a short span of time albeit for different projects;
- h. Items procured and paid were received and prompt issues were made to the zones as and when requested for the laying of pipes. However, no assurance could be provided that pipes, fittings and other materials delivered on site for the purpose of the in-house Pipe Replacement Programme had been effectively used only for the purpose intended due to absence of recording and accountability. The only check deemed relevant was the comparison of the number of kilometres planned and number of kilometres of pipes laid from records available. Since the actual length of pipes laid exceeded the planned length, the risk of any major malpractice was minimal. Opportunities for improvement were proposed such as dedicated code for materials purchased, issues to be recorded in the computerised system, updates of records at sub stations, return of excess pipes, etc.

A number of recommendations were made to improve the current process and enhance accountability in the implementation of the project such as –

- a. Standard designs/specifications for works should be developed thereby ascertaining essential requirements for safety, serviceability, robustness and durability are met;

- b. Proper procurement planning should be carried out to ascertain value for money is obtained;
- c. Standard guidelines should be devised for recording purposes to ensure accountability in all processes at the level of zones and material reconciliation may be introduced;
- d. Proposed plan of work to be submitted for each site;
- e. A full costing exercise to be undertaken to come up with actual expenditure incurred under the project by properly apportioning the costs involved;
- f. All transactions effected need to be properly coded for financial and operational purposes so as to ensure full accountability and transparency, and
- g. The cost estimate for the project to be revised to cater for value for money and alterations in project design.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry was further informed that the Central Water Board had approved the setting up of two Committees as hereunder for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Compliance Report from the Ministry of Finance –

- One Committee under the Chairmanship of the Ag. Deputy General Manager (Technical) to look into all the technical issues, and
- One Committee under the Chairmanship of the Deputy General Manager (Administration) to look into all the procurement, financial and administrative issues.

In addition, CWA was to seek the assistance of the Internal Audit Team of the Ministry of Finance for the implementation of the recommendations made by the team in respect of the in-house Pipe Replacement Programme.

I am informed that the CWA is in the process of implementing the recommendations of the Compliance Report from Ministry of Finance and the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board was informed of progress made at its last meeting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Compliance Report had recommended positively on all the Terms of Reference, the second tranche was disbursed to the CWA after obtaining necessary clearances in April 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the article that appeared in the press regarding the resignation of the Chief Internal Auditor of the CWA, I have been informed that the Central Water Board held a special Meeting on 13 June 2024 to take stock of the resignation of the Chief Internal Auditor dated 03 June 2024, that is, the resignation letter and the comments made in her letter of resignation.

The Board resolved the following –

1. A Committee of Enquiry be set up to –
 - (a) Investigate and determine whether the allegations to the effect of the Chief Internal Auditor has been subjected to verbal abuse, bullying, harassment, intimidation and acts of retaliation are founded, and
 - (b) To make appropriate recommendations;
2. The Deputy General Manager (Administration) to cause to investigate into the leakage of the contents of the letter of resignation of the Chief Internal Auditor to the press and to submit a report to the Board, and
3. For good governance purpose and in view of the critical importance of the Internal Audit function, an officer from the Internal Audit Division be assigned duties of Chief Internal Auditor/Officer-in-Charge of the Internal Audit Division pending the recruitment of a Chief Internal Auditor on the Establishment of the Authority;
4. The Chairman of the Audit & Risk Committee to hold regular meetings with the new officer who will be assigned duties of the Chief Internal Auditor/Officer-in-Charge of the Internal Audit Division, and
5. The post of Chief Internal Auditor on Establishment of the Authority be advertised forthwith.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (b) of the question, the CWA has not transmitted to my Ministry a copy of the Compliance Report of the Internal Audit Team of the CWA dated 09 January 2024.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the Board has met concerning the Compliance Report of the Internal Audit Section of the CWA on 30 January 2024 and on 28 March 2024, the Board met to consider the Compliance Report from the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Board has not met the Chief Internal Auditor.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope I will be given ample time to put question to the hon. Minister. I asked the Minister to table the agreement for disbursement of funds between the CWA and the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, and he has refused to do so. Can I table the document?

Mr Lesjongard: No, no, no. You have not listened to what I said, hon. Leader of the Opposition. At some point in my reply...

Dr. Boolell: Did you...

Mr Lesjongard: I said I am tabling the agreement.

Dr. Boolell: You are going to table it?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes!

Dr. Boolell: Alright. If you table it, fair enough. That's alright. Can I ask the hon. Minister when was this special account opened, please?

Mr Lesjongard: Which special account are we talking about?

Dr. Boolell: The separate account for the money to be deposited as a result of the agreement which was entered between the Ministry and the CWA, in relation to the two separate tranches.

Mr Lesjongard: I stated that in my reply.

Dr. Boolell: In January, am I right?

Mr Lesjongard: I stated in my reply that at the beginning of the implementation of the Pipe Replacement Programme, they were using the same account and then later on, they opened an account at the Absa Bank. Let me find out when they opened it. The account was opened in January 2024.

Dr. Boolell: Does he agree that there was departure from norms established in relation to money which should have been deposited and money which was not deposited?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, this was there. This is a very minor issue, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell: It is a minor issue?

Mr Lesjongard: As I said, these shortcomings were highlighted and then there were general recommendations made, and that forms part of one of the shortcomings and that was corrected at a later stage because they had started implementing the Pipe Replacement Programme before the funds were disbursed. So, I understand that the agreement was signed in September 2023 and disbursement was done in October 2023, that is, a month later.

Dr. Boolell: A month later...

Mr Lesjongard: So, they had to start.

Dr. Boolell: But is he aware that according to the Compliance Report of the Chief Internal Auditor, the management failed to provide a list of expenses to be incurred? What has the Board done about this? And that is highlighted in the agreement that you intend to submit and in the Compliance Report.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, when I gave my reply, I did mention the shortcomings that were highlighted by the report of the Ministry of Finance and the recommendations also that needed to be implemented, and one of the shortcomings is what the hon. Leader of the Opposition just mentioned, and they have to correct that at the level of the CWA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing that I need to make clear today is that this is for the first time that we are working in this way at the level of the CWA in order that taxpayers' money be well spent, because in the past, we have seen what has happened at the level of the CWA.

Dr. Boolell: Is the Minister telling me that it is precisely because they want tax money to be well spent that the lady was provoked to leave her job; that she was harassed to leave her job? Is that so?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the lady submitting her resignation, I have made it clear. I do not know what has happened, but the Board has taken the decision that needed to be taken. There is an independent enquiry which is ongoing, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell: The management failed to arrange for monthly conduct of an internal audit of its accounts related to the Pipe Replacement Programme in breach of the agreement, which is clearly spelt out in the Compliance Report and the agreement for disbursement of funds. What have the Board and the Minister done about this?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that when the report of the Chief Internal Auditor was submitted to the General Manager, he was not agreeable to that report highlighting himself some shortcomings, and that came to the Board, and the Board took the decision to appoint the Audit Section of the Ministry of Finance to carry out an independent audit. That audit was carried out; they made their recommendations, which came to the Board, and the Board advised the Ministry to disburse the necessary funds so that works could be carried out.

Dr. Boolell: Let me come to the second tranche. Is the Minister aware of a letter dated 17 October 2023 from the General Manager to the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry, and I quote –

“Requesting for an urgent disbursement of the second tranche of Rs350 million.”

Is he aware of that?

Mr Lesjongard: Which letter are you stating? A letter addressed to?

Dr. Boolell: The PS of the Ministry, and I quote –

“Requesting for an urgent disbursement of the second tranche of Rs350 million.”

That letter was addressed by the General Manager and I can table a copy of that letter. Is he aware of this?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, but this is in the normal course of the work being out at the level of the CWA. They wanted the money to be able to move forward with the implementation programme, that is, the implementation of the Pipe Replacement Programme. What is not normal in the letter addressed to the Permanent Secretary?

Dr. Boolell: The General Manager of the CWA...

Mr Lesjongard: No, I am saying tht the request has been made, but the funds have to be disbursed based on the Compliance Report. When we were satisfied with the Compliance Report, then the funds were disbursed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell: It is good for you to hear this. The General Manager of the CWA stated in his letter dated 17 October 2023 to the PS of your Ministry that the CWA had already incurred expenditure for a total sum of Rs612 million and requested the urgent disbursement of the second tranche of Rs350 million. Yet, two months later, the Compliance Report found that there was Rs200 million of cash still available from the first tranche of Rs350 million in the bank account. Is this a blatant alteration of the truth from the General Manager?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition is referring to a letter which I have not seen. I cannot comment on a letter which I have not seen.

Dr. Boolell: I will table it. Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that there have been a lot of omissions; negligent omissions. In the light of these culpable acts and negligent omissions of the General Manager in the scandalous catalogue of errors together with improper disbursement of the second tranche of the Rs350 million, will the Minister ask the Board to revoke the General Manager, at least suspend him pending the holding of an independent inquiry, including a forensic audit and an onsite investigation into the whole affair?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board has taken a decision based on information that they had in their possession. And I said, with regard to the Chief Internal Auditor, there is an independent enquiry which is ongoing. Let us see the outcome of that independent enquiry and then, whatever decision has to be taken will be taken.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/521 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

I now call hon. Doolub for Prime Minister's Question Time.

LINE BARRACKS – DRUGS SEIZURE – VALUE & QUANTITY DESTROYED

(No. B/492) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the recent destruction

of seized drugs at the Line Barracks, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) quantity destroyed;
- (b) value thereof, and
- (c) procedures followed therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as pledged in the Government Programme of 2014-2019 and 2019-2024, my Government has been addressing the drug scourge through a comprehensive and holistic strategy to curb drug supply with appropriate enforcement measures while concurrently reducing its demand through preventive education programmes as well as treatment and rehabilitation.

Furthermore, to tackle this multifaceted global challenge, substantial resources are being mobilised and deployed by my Government in terms of modern security logistics, equipment and infrastructure on both land and sea.

In addition, the Government's multi-pronged strategy encompasses the storage of exhibits of dangerous drugs in secured conditions until they are destroyed in accordance with the legal framework and protocols in place.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that all dangerous drugs secured as exhibits during operations by Police and the Customs Anti-Narcotics Section of the Mauritius Revenue Authority are kept under lock and key at the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) Exhibit Room at the Line Barracks in Port Louis.

The Exhibit Room is manned by dedicated Police Officers posted to the ADSU and they are responsible for the security of all exhibits kept thereat.

The procedures to handle dangerous drugs after seizures are normally as follows –

- i. On the seizure of drugs by the ADSU team, one of them, who secures the drugs and who is known as the Securing Officer, makes an entry on the Crime Occurrence Tracking System in either the relevant Police Station or the nearest sub-unit of ADSU.

- ii. The drugs seized together with the initial wrappings are weighed on a digital scale. Any outer packaging is secured separately, which would be kept in the Exhibit Room together with the exhibits.
- iii. The exhibits are properly wrapped and sealed with wax in the presence of the accused and another officer who witnessed the seizure.
- iv. The sealed exhibits are signed by the Securing Officer, the accused and another officer who witnessed the seizure.
- v. On the same day, the exhibit is taken by the Securing Officer to the Exhibit Room of ADSU at Line Barracks in Port Louis.
- vi. The Officer-in-Charge of the Exhibit Room makes relevant entries in the Exhibit Register. The exhibit is allocated an Exhibit Register Number.
- vii. The Officer-in-Charge of the Exhibit Room takes charge of the exhibit, which is then kept in the room of ADSU pending conveyance to the Forensic Science Laboratory for examination.
- viii. When the exhibit is brought to Forensic Science Laboratory for examination, the Forensic Scientist either keeps all the sealed exhibits or takes a sample or samples thereof depending on the quantity of the drugs seized.
- ix. The Forensic Scientist weighs the exhibits. In case of sampling, the Forensic Scientist seals the remaining exhibit and returns same to the Securing Officer of ADSU for safe custody at the Exhibit Room at Line Barracks.
- x. The Officer-in-Charge of that room makes an entry of the exhibits returned from the Forensic Science Laboratory in the Exhibit Register.
- xi. The exhibit is kept at the room until it is produced in Court during trial. It remains in the custody of the Court, even after trial.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it may be noted that if the accused is unknown or if the accused refuses to participate in the sealing exercise effected at the Police Station or ADSU sub-unit concerned, then the sealing is done in the presence of the two Police Officers dealing with the case and an independent Police Officer from ADSU who had not participated in the seizure operation.

In addition to these established procedures, a tight security mechanism is in place at the ADSU Exhibit Room in terms of an alarm system, CCTV camera and fire detector. In fact, the

ADSU Operations Room, *inter alia*, monitors the Exhibit Room on a 24/7 basis and regular patrols are carried out around the building by the personnel of the Special Support Unit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that destruction of dangerous drugs secured are conducted at the ADSU Headquarters at Line Barracks in the following three instances –

- (i) Drugs cases detected by the Police around the island where after investigation, the accused have remained unknown;
- (ii) Drugs cases where the accused parties have been prosecuted before the Courts and after trial, the drugs are forfeited by Courts. The Court Officers destroy the exhibits in presence of Magistrates with the assistance of Police Officers; and
- (iii) As regards huge seizures of drugs, an amendment was made in 2022 to the Dangerous Drugs Act whereby provision has been made under Section 58A for destruction of such exhibits.

However, in case the accused or his counsel requests for further analysis of the drugs, the exhibits will not be destroyed pending re-examination. As at date, no such application has been received from accused parties for re-examination nor has ADSU made any application before Court for destruction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to ensure compliance with the Dangerous Drugs Act, the Commissioner of Police, has by way of Standing Order 86, laid down the procedures for the destruction of dangerous drugs.

The adopted procedures prior to the destruction of the exhibits are as follows –

- i. The ADSU decides on a date of destruction and circulates a correspondence to all Police Divisions, Branches and Units of the Force to inform them accordingly.
- ii. They are also requested to bring along the relevant case files with the necessary approval for the destruction of drugs kept at ADSU Exhibit Room on the scheduled date. A list of drugs to be destroyed is compiled by ADSU and sent to the Commissioner of Police.

The drugs are destroyed in a gas incinerator at the Line Barracks and the exercise takes place in the presence of the following officers –

- (i) A Superintendent of Police posted to ADSU;
- (ii) A Superintendent of Police posted to Police Headquarters;

- (iii) The Securing Officer for each case; and
- (iv) Forensic Scientists from the Forensic Science Laboratory.

The representatives of the local press are also invited.

After destruction –

- a) the Superintendent of Police from ADSU makes an entry in the Drugs Destruction Register, certifying the completion of the exercise;
- b) a certificate is inserted in the Drugs Destruction Register countersigned by the officers present during the exercise;
- c) an entry is made in the Diary Book of ADSU Exhibit Room; and
- d) a report is sent to the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that for security reasons, CCTV cameras have been installed to cover the area where the incinerator is located.

With regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the last drug destruction exercise was carried out by Police on Monday 24 June 2024 and during that exercise, dangerous drugs of a total street value of around Rs188.4 million were destroyed.

The types and quantities thereof are estimated as follows –

- 24,475 plants of Cannabis;
- 139.847 grams of Cannabis;
- 2027.165 grams and 43 foils of synthetic cannabinoids;
- 2350.736 grams and 20 foils of Heroin;
- 629 sedative/tranquilizers pills;
- 4497.45 grams of Cannabis seeds; and
- 30 ml of Cannabis Oil.

The dangerous drugs destroyed relate to cases –

- i. where the accused parties have remained unknown or passed away;
- ii. where the Director of Public Prosecutions has so advised, or
- iii. where the Court has so ordered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the destruction exercise had been carried out in accordance with the procedures, outlined earlier.

Thank you.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the Prime Minister mentioned that the Exhibit Room and the site of destruction are equipped with CCTV cameras. May we know from the Prime Minister for how long the CCTV footages are kept? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that for both the ADSU Exhibit Room and the site of destruction of drugs, the CCTV footages are stored on the main server for a period of 40 days, after which it is auto deleted due to its limited storage capacity. But I am also informed that those footages are now archived before their automatic deletion, and kept for future reference.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Abbas Mamode!

AGALÉGA ISLAND – CHALETS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

(No. B/493) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Agaléga island, he will state if any project for the construction of some 15 chalets to develop tourism activities was previously envisaged thereat and, if so, indicate where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, soon after hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger assumed office as Prime Minister in September 2003, he had a meeting with Mr T. L., on behalf of Ireland Blyth Ltd, where the Agaléga project, an unsolicited proposal, was discussed.

In fact, the project consisted of securing land leases to construct 15 chalets and marina facilities in Agaléga. Ireland Blyth Ltd had proposed to operate regular commercial flights between mainland Mauritius and Agaléga, using a Beechcraft 1900D acquired by Catovair, owned by Ireland Blyth Ltd Aviation.

I am informed by the then Ministry of Housing and Lands that thereafter, a Letter of Intent dated 27 January 2004 was issued to Ireland Blyth Ltd for –

- (i) an industrial lease over an extent of 25 arpents of State Land for the development of an Agaléga Island Resort Project, with a beach frontage of 400m on the South West Coast of North Island for the development of a hotel comprising of 15 chalets with all amenities, including a fishing centre, a boathouse and a game room, and
- (ii) a lease of an additional 87 arpents of State Land for landscaping purposes with beach frontage of 400m on the North East Coast of North Island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the offer of the aforementioned leases was subject, *inter alia*, to the following conditions –

- (i) a social integration plan being worked out;
- (ii) the payment of a cash deposit of Rs3 million within one month as from the date of the Letter of Intent, and
- (iii) the payment of a survey fee as well as the costs of air trips to and from Agaléga upon submission of a separate claim, at the rate of Rs3,000 per arpent for the survey staff and transportation of survey equipment.

In a letter dated 07 May 2004, Ireland Blyth Ltd informed the then Ministry of Housing and Lands that it was no longer interested in the lease of 87 arpents initially proposed for landscaping purposes and instead, requested for the lease of about one arpent along the South Eastern coastline for the construction of a boathouse, a marina and a jetty for fishing and supply by vessels to be used when prevailing winds hamper operations on the western side of the island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this respect, on 09 July 2004, the then Government took note of the following –

- (i) Ireland Blyth Ltd had not yet confirmed the acceptance of the offer which was made by the then Ministry of Housing and Lands on 27 January 2004, and
- (ii) another portion of land of an extent of one arpent should be offered to the Company.

In view thereof, Ireland Blyth Ltd had requested for an updated version of the Letter of Intent dated 27 January 2004, which would constitute the basis for the agreement. Accordingly, a new Letter of Intent dated 26 October 2004 was issued by the then Ministry of Housing and Lands to the company wherein Ireland Blyth Ltd was given a time limit of two weeks to confirm acceptance of the offer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that both leases were to be granted for an initial period of 20 years, renewable at the option of the lessee for four consecutive periods of 10 years each. At expiry of each and subsequent period of 10 years, the rent would be revised for both leases to reflect the market value at the time of renewal. On 26 October 2004, the then Ministry of Housing and Lands informed Ireland Blyth Ltd that the rental claimed for both sites, namely 25 arpents and the additional one arpent, was as follows –

- (i) Rs260,000 per annum for period 27 January 2004 to 26 January 2006, that is, Rs21,667 monthly;
- (ii) Rs520,000 per annum for period 27 January 2006 to 26 January 2008, that is, Rs43,333 monthly;
- (iii) Rs1,040,000 per annum for period 27 January 2008 to 26 January 2014, that is, Rs86,667 monthly, and
- (iv) Rs1,560,000 per annum for period 27 January 2014 to 26 January 2024, that is, Rs130,000 monthly.

Ireland Blyth Ltd had on 03 November 2004 signified its acceptance to the offer made by the then Ministry of Housing and Lands in its letter dated 26 October 2004. Also, the Company requested that a cut-off start date for the payment of rent in respect of the aforementioned leases be effective as from 01 January 2005. Subsequently, approval was obtained on 22 November 2004 to accede to the said request on the ground that access to the site was very difficult at the time and that only emergency trips were being undertaken by Dornier. The company was informed of same on 29 November 2004.

On 20 June 2005, the deed of lease, in the name of “Agalega Nature and Fishing Lodge Ltd”, was signed by Mr M.J.P.D.V., Director of the company on behalf of the lessee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Members to the comments made by the then Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam to the Private Notice Question dated 23 March 2004 addressed to the then Prime Minister, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger on the proposed lease of land to Ireland Blyth Ltd in Agaléga, and I quote –

“(...) IBL gets the cake and eats it at the same time! The Prime Minister says that no public money is going to be involved. But he confirms that an airstrip is going to be enlarged, so that IBL can put this airplane of 19 seats. That is what is going to happen. The port is going to be developed, the fishing station is going to be given, everything is going to be given to IBL. And the Prime Minister says there is no hidden agenda! There is a hidden agenda! IBL is being given the island, which occupies a geo-strategic position; and they are going to get an island! That is what the problem is.”

Dr. Ramgoolam further added, and I quote –

“The point that we are trying to make is that it seems that preferential treatment is being given to IBL. I will say why and I will ask the Prime Minister to respond to that. First of all, nobody was aware that there was a possibility of a project there and, then, suddenly, IBL comes up with the project (...) Why is it that Government did not consider public auction in that case since we are talking about an island quite far from Mauritius? Why did it not consider that instead of giving a lease to IBL?”

The then Prime Minister, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger replied, and I quote –

“The IBL people are very enterprising (...) They worked out a project and came forward (...) That is what entrepreneurship is about (...) There is no absolutely preferential treatment to whoever (...) the danger right now is that IBL drops the project.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, after the general elections of 2005 and a change in Government, Cabinet agreed, on 14 October 2005, not to proceed further with the offer of lease of State Land at Agaléga to Ireland Blyth Ltd. The then Prime Minister was Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the now cherished partner and self-proclaimed ‘*ti-frer*’ of hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger.

Ms J. Bérenger: *To zalou!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: That's a good mood.

An hon. Member: *Mank dimounn pou zalou !*

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, during the Prime ministership of the Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, a proposal from a South African company, ARCON, to establish a themed and private island estate on the island of Agaléga was presented to a fast-track committee on 18 February 2006 for consideration. The project proposal consisted of the creation of 153 sites to be sub-leased to third parties for the development of residential lodges.

Mr Speaker, Sir, both Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam and hon. Bérenger failed short of ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for the Agalegans. They had neglected the pressing needs of the people in Agaléga and disregarded the harmonious balance between development, human and environmental capital. But, today, a new chapter unfolds – one defined by foresight, responsibility and a steadfast commitment for the sustainable development of Agaléga and the well-being of its people.

Unlike the administrations under these past two Prime Ministers, which overlooked the imperatives of sustainable development, this Government prioritises both progress and sustainability. We understand that development must not come at the cost of our environment, nor should it compromise the livelihoods of our citizens. Therefore, every decision we make is grounded in thorough assessments and comprehensive surveys, ensuring that we proceed with clarity and caution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already stated in this House, the socio-economic development of Agaléga has not been given due consideration, leading to the Agalegans living with the bare minimum for many years. Under my Government, the implementation of the two major infrastructural development projects, namely the new airstrip and the new jetty, has paved the way for better connectivity by sea and air and will in turn enhance the standard of living of the Agalegans as well as broaden their economic opportunities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during my visit to Agaléga in February 2024 for the inauguration of the two major infrastructural development projects, entirely financed by the Government of India, I had the opportunity to interact with the Agalegans who had highlighted some issues and their aspirations for the development of their island.

I wish to point out that upon my return from Agaléga, the socio-economic development of the island remains more than ever, high on my Government's agenda. Accordingly, my Office is in the process of elaborating a Master Plan for Agaléga, in consultation with the relevant Ministries and Departments while taking into consideration the needs of the Agalegans.

The Master Plan will serve as a roadmap for decision-making, embracing the social, economic and environmental factors specific to the island. As such, a Monitoring Committee, which has been set up at the level of my Office to look into the logistics for the operationalisation of the new airstrip and the new jetty, is closely monitoring the formulation of the Master Plan. The Committee will also prioritise the projects to be implemented in the short and long-term, in the light of the recommendations of the Master Plan for Agaléga.

For the short-term, priority will be given to the following sectors –

- (i) improvement of health and education services;
- (ii) better connectivity and communication;
- (iii) development of the fishing sector;
- (iv) exploitation of coconut by-products, and
- (v) provision of recreational and sport amenities for the well-being of the Agalegans.

I have ensured that under the present and future budgets, funds amounting to Rs15 million and Rs25 million have been provided under the Projects Development Fund for the Financial Years 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 respectively, for the implementation of the Master Plan for Agaléga.

Thank you.

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Merci, M. le président.* Can the hon. Prime Minister state whether Ireland Blyth Ltd imposed conditions in the course of discussions with the then Prime Minister for the Agaléga Resort Project?

The Prime Minister: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the own averments of the then Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, will tell the story. In fact, if we look at his answer to the PNQ of 23 March 2004, hon. Bérenger stated, and I quote –

“IBL has indicated that the whole project is subject to two *sine qua non* conditions –

- (a) access being made available through the enlargement of existing passes on both sides of the Island so as to allow fishing boats to operate whatever the climatic conditions; and
- (b) it would have to purchase a small plane. The operation thereof would not be sustainable if the plane did not operate to Rodrigues, Reunion Island, Madagascar, Comoros and other countries in our sub-region.”

As we can see, conditions were imposed by Ireland Blyth Ltd and hon. Bérenger added in his reply, and I quote –

“(...) I foresee no problem.”

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister state whether the then Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, visited Agaléga and whether there were discussions with IBL for future projects of the Resort Project? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: I have from my record that hon. Bérenger visited Agaléga on 11 January 2004 at the Head of the Delegation comprising also the then Minister of Social Security and National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions, and the Minister of Training, Skills, Development, Productivity and External Communications.

From his answer to the Private Notice Question, again dated 23 March 2004, hon. Bérenger stated, and I quote –

“(...) [the promoters] would wish to have access to both sides of the island and through passes to the open seas. (...) the extent that they have requested for goes to both sides of the island. But allowance is made for the already existing roads which will remain public and for 2 m reserve on both sides which [I emphasise] I made clear, [meaning hon. Bérenger]. If it was successful to start with that number of chalets, I have no doubt that with 25 arpents available, the promoter would develop further (...)”

Clearly, the then Prime Minister had discussed and had privileged information for future developments!

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B494, B/495, B/496, B/498, B/499 and B/502 have been withdrawn.

Time is over!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *To ti minis des Finances! Lesjongard, minis logement ! To pa onte?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, both sides of the House!

Mr Bhagwan: *Kominal !*

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order! I heard hon. Bhagwan saying '*communal*.'

An hon. Member: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: Did you? You said '*communal*'?

Mr Bhagwan: In general because...

Mr Speaker: No, withdraw the word! That will go in Hansard. So, hon. Bhagwan, withdraw the word '*communal*' and apologise to the House.

Mr Bhagwan: I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: And apologise!

Mr Bhagwan: Apologise for what? I withdraw!

Mr Speaker: ‘Communal’ is unparliamentary! This is very serious allegation! So, you apologise!

Mr Bhagwan: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: You apologise. Thank you very much. Question to Ministers!

**ARTISTS SCHEME – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE –
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

(No. B/503) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Financial Assistance to Artists scheme for concerts, he will state the eligibility criteria to benefit therefrom, indicating the –

- a) name/s of the beneficiaries thereof for financial year 2023/2024, and
- b) amount granted to each beneficiary thereof.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to financial assistance to artists, there are several schemes which have been put in place by my Ministry, including the Scheme for Concerts. The Scheme for Concerts is a specific scheme designed to provide financial assistance to individual artists, groups, event organisers and Non-Governmental Organisations to organise and perform in concerts. The scheme is open to everyone and aims at providing artists with the necessary financial resources to showcase their talents, gain exposure and build their talents.

By doing so, my Ministry has ensured that that the art ecosystem is maintained and concerts become accessible to a broader audience. For financial assistance under this scheme, the following eligibility criteria should be satisfied –

- i) The applicant must be a citizen of Mauritius and a resident in the country, and
- ii) The applicant should submit a detailed artistic proposal outlining the concert, including its objectives, target audience, budget and expected outcomes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the quantum of financial assistance under this scheme varies and depends on the magnitude of the concert. It, however, generally varies from Rs20,000 for small concerts to around Rs200,000 for mega concerts where there are several artists participating.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for Financial Year 2023-24, a sum of Rs1.5 m. was allocated in the budget of my Ministry for the implementation the scheme. I am informed that as regards to part (a) and part (b) of the question, 20 requests were received under this scheme and a total of Rs1,182,000 were disbursed to the twenty beneficiaries.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will table the list of beneficiaries and quantum of funds disbursed to them.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. Est-ce qu'on peut savoir le nombre de demandes sous ce *scheme* et le nombre de bénéficiaires?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned, twenty requests were received under the scheme and Rs1,182,000 were disbursed to twenty beneficiaries. So, we have entertained all twenty requests. The list is here; I am tabling it.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Juman!

HIT AND RUN SUB FUND – FUNDS COLLECTED & DISBURSED

(No. B/504) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the Hit and Run Sub Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the amount of funds –

- a) collected, and
- b) disbursed as at date.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 88 of the Insurance Act 2005 provides for the establishment of the Insurance Industry Compensation Fund (IICF) and for the fund to be organised into different sub funds. In this respect, the Hit and Run Sub Fund has been set up under the Insurance Compensation Fund Regulation 2015 with effect from 01 January 2016.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the IICF that as at 27 June 2024, the total amount collected since the introduction of the fund is Rs349,618,175.60.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the total amount disbursed for the payment of claims and expenses is Rs37,434,244.30.

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président. D'après le rapport annuel 2019, pour l'année financière 2018, le montant collecté, M. le ministre, des automobilistes et des motocyclistes s'élève à R 38 947,556. Le montant déboursé aux victimes d'accidents avec délit de fuite est seulement R 65 000, alors que les frais administratifs et du *Managing Committee* s'élèvent à R 2 150 000. L'honorable ministre, pouvez-vous nous donner une explication plausible et rationnelle derrière le faible taux de déboursements par rapport au montant collecté ?

Mr Bholah: Well, you are referring to the Financial Year 2019. I have updated figures. In fact, since inception of this fund, there has been 115 claims of which, 92 have been approved, 12 do not qualify and 11 are in progress. As I said earlier, Rs11,666,999 have been disbursed. In fact, we have asked the Managing Committee to extend or multiply their awareness campaigns. Also, previously, the time limit for any application was 2 years. Now, this has been extended to 5 years. So, anyone who has not been able to file any application for compensation may always come within this 5 years period now.

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair!

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, puisque les automobilistes sont déjà surtaxés et puisque le fond récolté s'élève R 349 millions, compte déboursé R 11 millions, l'honorable ministre, pouvez-vous nous dire si vous allez mettre fin à ce prélèvement qui ne bénéficie qu'au gouvernement au lieu des automobilistes ?

Mr Bholah: No, we do not foresee to stop contribution from the part of insurers. As I said, we are going to extend the campaign and who knows with extension of the time limit from 2 years to 5 years, there will be more and more applicants who are not aware at this moment and may always come and fill in an application for compensation.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – INDISCIPLINE CASES – 2015 TO JULY 2024

(No. B/505) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to indiscipline in private and public primary and secondary

schools since 2015 to 2023 and January 2024 to date, she will state the number of reported cases thereof category wise, on a yearly basis.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry keeps record of reported cases of indiscipline and they are classified under the following categories –

- i) Disruptive and disrespectful behaviour;
- ii) Violence;
- iii) Bullying;
- iv) Vandalism and damage to school property, and
- v) Inappropriate behaviours.

I am tabling the list for the number of cases recorded in each of the above categories since 2015 to date in public and private primary and secondary schools, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, given the seriousness and gravity regarding bullying, violence – I do not know whether sexual offences or consumption of illicit substances are mentioned or not, I have to check the list –, may I ask the hon. Minister if her Ministry has critically gauged the causes for the failure of the measures taken in the past ten years to tackle indiscipline in general in schools in terms of capacity building, proper research, legislation, empowerment of heads of school, and if she may table documents regarding any proper monitoring and rehabilitation of protagonists involved in recurrent and extreme cases of indiscipline.

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, this is a PQ. You see? You have the right for a supplementary question and you are asking a long PQ.

Dr. Gungapersad: It is related to indiscipline.

Mr Speaker: Why don't you come with a PQ on that?

Dr. Gungapersad: It is a PQ!

Mr Speaker: It is a supplementary question! You don't know the difference...

Dr. Gungapersad: It is a PQ!

Mr Speaker: ...now five years over?

Dr. Gungapersad: It is a PQ on indiscipline!

Mr Speaker: What PQ are you talking about? Your PQ is here, Sir! Your PQ is here! This is supplementary question! I do not think the Minister has the reply for a long question.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has got a national counselling service and the teachers are trained. We have put counselling desks in schools and obviously, we do carry out a monitoring. Now, it is totally inadequate to come and state that nothing is working. We know that there has been an increase in the number of cases of indiscipline but this is a reflection of society, isn't it, Mr Speaker, Sir? Do we not see in the National Assembly, the behaviours of some of the Members? It is a reflection. So, we are taking necessary measures and we are making sure that necessary follow-up is done and that support is provided not only to the victims but also to the bullies.

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed. We move to the next question. MP Ramful!

**TRADE AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION PROGRAMME – OVERSEAS MISSIONS –
JULY 2023-2024**

(No. B/506) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Trade and Investment Promotion Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Economic Development Board, information as to the number of overseas missions undertaken in connection therewith since 01 July 2023 to date, indicating in each case the –

- (a) countries visited and the purpose thereof, and
- (b) amount of money spent in terms of air fares and *per diem* allowances.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, l'*Economic Development Board* a la responsabilité de promouvoir Maurice en tant que plateforme d'investissement réputée, zone d'exportation

compétitive et un centre financier international. Les initiatives stratégiques de marketing menées par l'*EDB* au cours des dernières années ont permis de positionner avec succès Maurice comme une destination de premier choix pour les investissements direct étrangers et une plateforme d'exportation marché préférentielle de plus de 5 milliards de consommateurs.

L'*Economic Development Board* m'a informé que l'entité a entrepris 29 missions à l'étranger dans le cadre de la promotion du commerce et de l'investissement depuis le 1^{er} juillet 2023 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Les différentes actions de marketing entreprises par l'*EDB* ont permis à Maurice d'attirer un niveau substantiel d'IDE. En seulement deux ans, c'est-à-dire en 2022 et 2023, l'*EDB* a attiré plus de R 70 milliards d'investissement direct étranger dans les secteurs clefs tels que l'éducation, l'agro-industrie, la biotechnologie, les TIC, l'industrie manufacturière, l'immobilier, l'hôtellerie, et les services financiers.

En termes d'exportation en 2023, Maurice a connu une expansion significative des exportations de biens et de service avec une croissance de 9,8 %. Cette progression fait suite à une hausse de 49,4 % en 2022. Le total des exportations pour 2023 était de R 347 milliards contre R 316 milliards en 2022.

M. le président, les détails concernant les parties (a) et (b) de la question relative aux pays visités, à leurs buts et aux sommes dépensées en terme de billets d'avion et d'indemnité journalière sont déposés.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MRA – CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT – SCANNER VAN – OUT OF SERVICE

(No. B/507) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the scanner van of the Customs Department, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if same is out of service, indicating –

- (a) since when and the reason therefor;
- (b) if spare parts have been ordered therefor and since when, and
- (c) the alternative arrangement made for the scanning of goods for importers.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je souhaite informer l'Assemblée que le van scanner a été gracieusement offert par l'Union européenne en août 2018 et qui est en service depuis. Le van scanner est utilisé pour scanner les marchandises en vrac ciblées de moins de 200 kilos dans les gares de fret en vue de faciliter le dédouanement dans un délai plus court.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, la *MRA* m'a informé que le scanner est hors service depuis le 11 mars 2024. Une étude conjointe a été menée par les ingénieurs et techniciens de *Rey & Lenferna Ltd* qui est le représentant du fournisseur du scanner mobile. A l'issue de cette expertise, ils ont conclu que le générateur de rayons-x avait été endommagé et devait être remplacé.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b), la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* m'a informé que le générateur de rayons-x a été commandé le 16 avril 2024 auprès du fournisseur en Allemagne par *Rey & Lenferna Ltd*. Je suis également informé que l'un des principaux composants du générateur est fabriqué en Ukraine et qu'en raison des conditions de guerre qui prévalent dans cette région, la livraison de l'Ukraine à Maurice via l'Allemagne prend plus de temps que d'habitude.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (c) de la question, à titre d'arrangement provisoire et pour éviter tout retard dans le processus de dédouanement, la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* a mis à disposition son camion gratuitement pour transférer sous contrôle douanier toute cargaison ciblée pour le balayage des stations de fret à l'installation principale de balayage. La grande majorité des stations de fret et l'installation principale de balayage sont situées dans la zone portuaire elle-même. Je suis également informé que pour accélérer par la main levée des envois, certains importateurs ont pris leurs propres dispositions de transfert sous contrôle douanier pour le scannage de leurs marchandises à l'installation principale de scannage.

M. le président, je tiens à rassurer l'Assemblée sur le fait que toutes les activités de scannage sont effectuées sous le contrôle stricte du département des douanes et que les envois sont dédouanés sans retard excessif.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

BOULEVARD VICTORIA, PORT-LOUIS - BRIDGE - RESTORATION

(No. B/508) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed restoration of the bridge at Boulevard Victoria, Port-Louis, he will state the –

- (a) name of the successful contractor therefor;
- (b) cost thereof, and
- (c) extent of the work completed to date.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the Boulevard Victoria Bridge, located on the Boulevard Victoria Road (B136) and crossing La Paix Stream, has a hydraulic capacity of two metres wide and 0.7 metre deep. The bridge comprises four lanes, including a central verge and footpath on both sides. In fact, the bridge is in good structural conditions but has a reduced depth owing to existing services running along the bridge and down-stand beams. Therefore, the hydraulic capacity of the structure is inadequate to cater for the maximum water discharge. In this regard, the Land Drainage Authority has recommended that the bridge structure be upgraded to 6 metres wide and 2 metres deep.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reconstruction of the bridge will be undertaken by the Framework Contractor of the RDA under its new Framework Agreement, which is currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board (CPB). The Works Order will be awarded after the approval of the CPB and the expected duration of the works will be ten months.

Mr Speaker, Sir, parts (a), (b) and (c) of the question do not, therefore, arise.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE – WAGE RELATIVITY ADJUSTMENT

(No. B/509) **Mr R. Utem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in

regard to the wage relativity adjustment for workers following the increase in minimum wage, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Wage Consultative Council Act 2016 provides for an approach to be adopted to address the issue of wage relativity in the private sector.

In 2019, the Employment Relations Act was amended to provide for the determination of wages in the private sector to be made on an occupational basis. The main objective of this reform was to –

- (a) provide for a single rate of remuneration for one occupation;
- (b) align similar occupations with similar level of responsibilities for a fair and equitable remuneration;
- (c) facilitate collective bargaining;
- (d) facilitate labour mobility, and
- (e) review wages every 5 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, proceeding with relativity adjustment following the review of the national minimum wage to Rs16,500 in January 2024 has become an imperative. The increase from Rs11,575 to Rs16,500, which represents an increase of 42.5 % which has produced a major distortion in the wage distribution. There are many cases where workers in different job categories and reckoning different years of service are now drawing a salary of Rs16,500 a month.

For example –

- (a) a labourer and his supervisor;
- (b) a cleaner and a clerk;
- (c) a nurse and a supermarket cashier;
- (d) an electrician grade I, grade II and III;

- (e) a waiter with a year of service and one with four years of service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me draw the attention of the House about the percentage increase that the national minimum wage has been subject to since its introduction –

- (a) from 2019 to 2022, Rs800, that is 9%;
- (b) from 2023 to 2024, Rs4,925, that is 42.5%.

The House may wish to note that when the National Minimum Wage was first reviewed in 2020, the relativity adjustment was based on sector.

However, the circumstances have changed this year. The reviewed National Minimum Wage has brought the wages of different job categories across sectors to the same level. This has resulted in a common wage floor in all sectors of employment. That is why there is a need for a wage relatively adjustment on an occupation basis instead of a sectoral basis.

In view of the complexity of the matter, my Ministry considered it more appropriate to appoint a consultant to carry out this exercise. To that effect, a provision was thus made in 2023 in the new section 91A of the Employment Relations Act. Hence, the services of a consultant were enlisted to work on the wage relativity, in the process of an exercise to shift the determination of wages from an industry basis to an occupational basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the consultant has submitted his Report on Pay and Grading Structure for the Private Sector Jobs in March 2024. The Report revealed that only 119,000 workers out of 366,000, are concerned with this exercise which is targeting those workers who are drawing up to around Rs30,000.

The total estimated cost based on occupations revolved to around Rs2.7 billion yearly. To this end, the estimated relativity adjustment already paid these Rs1.5 billion. As such, the net cost would be Rs1.2 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in so far as the estimated cost based on sector is concerned, the total amount is Rs3.8 billion, out of which, the estimated relativity adjustment already paid is Rs1.5 billion, leaving a net direct cost of Rs2.3 billion.

I wish to highlight that the shift from sector to occupation will reduce the implementation cost by Rs1.1 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that, as has been the practice at the Ministry, worker's organisations representing the private sector employees and the Business Mauritius were consulted.

My Ministry has examined the Report and is conducting a complementary survey in 22 employment sectors. According to Business Mauritius, around 48% of employers have already proceeded with the wage relativity adjustment. The preliminary findings of the report, being carried out by my Ministry, are revealing the same trend.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is presently looking at the *modus operandi*, in consultation with other institutions, on the implementation of the outcome the consultant's report and the survey.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I know from the hon. Minister the schedule date, the estimated date of the publication of the recommendation and implementation and whether the adjustment will have retrospective effect?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my main reply, the consultation is still ongoing. So, we do not have a set date for the wage relativity announcement but, I can reassure the hon. Member and the population at large that due consideration is being given to the wage relativity adjustment and it will be soon.

Mr Uteem: As the hon. Minister is aware, under the law, the National Wage Consultative Council also has to give its report to the PRB so that there is an alignment. So, in this case, since the recommendations are not being made by the Council but by the consultant, will the report of the consultant also be communicated to the PRB for the adjustment to the public sector?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the consultant has met with the team at the PRB and a joint consultative meeting is being held so that the PRB aligns itself also based on the report.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will be suspending the Sitting for one hour.

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

On resuming at 2.12 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Ms Tour!

GOVERNMENT ANALYST DIVISION – QUALITY STANDARDS

(No. B/510) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Government Analyst Division of the Ministry, he will give details pertaining to the quality standards attributed thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government Analyst Division (GAD) is the Chemistry Laboratory of my Ministry and caters for both public and private entities.

The GAD carries out the following activities –

- Food, alcohol and drinking water analysis;
- Toxicological screening for body fluids to determine poisoning cases;
- Blood cholinesterase level for exposure to pesticides;
- Heavy metals in body fluids for industrial workers;
- Dialysis water quality for Haemodialysis Unit;
- Methadone quality for Harm Reduction Unit;
- Alcoholic strength;
- Sugar content in foods;
- Samples submitted by the Dangerous Chemical Control Board for analysis of chemical content;
- Quality Control of pharmaceuticals,

- Blood zinc and iodine levels.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Government Analyst Division has been awarded the ISO/IEC 17025:2017 in 2022, which demonstrates that the laboratory has an internationally recognised quality management system in place.

The Government Analyst Division is accredited by the Mauritius Accreditation Service for Food and Chemical Testing fields. It has also extended the number of test parameters under accreditation since 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the types of products being accredited range from nut & nuts products, beverages, oil and fats, snacks and biscuits, honey, fish products, milk products and drinking water to ensure food safety and safe drinking water. In addition, it is also accredited for the analysis of ethanol content in blood for toxicological analysis.

In 2024, GAD has extended its accreditation to cover for heavy metals and other contaminants in drinking and dialysis water, lead in blood for paediatric and occupationally exposed individuals.

Government Analyst Division also performs other tests for some 125 different parameters in various types of samples, including food, drinking water, biomedical samples and medicines for the private sector, including private clinics against payment of fees.

I am further informed that GAD has become the first laboratory in Mauritius to be accredited for pharmaceutical products testing. The initial tests to be accredited are for Identification and Assay and will allow my Ministry to detect falsified and substandard medicines.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has developed a system for the analysis of medication for the public sector?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a priority list because this is very important for the analysis of drugs in the public sector. This comprises some 100 molecules purchased through the bidding exercises by the Ministry. As already budgeted in the last budget, the Pharmacovigilance Unit of the Ministry will do a quality control analysis on these 100

molecules. The samples are from a priority list of drugs that will be forwarded to the Government Analysis Division for quality control analysis. They would be in different batches taken randomly from the Central Supply Division of the storage and also from public institutions. Once we get the analysis, this would be forwarded to the National Pharmacovigilance Unit.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please!

Ms Tour: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what happens in the case that a medication does not meet the standards?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, so in case the medication doesn't meet the standards, the Pharmacovigilance Unit and the Director, Pharmaceutical Services will request that all the medicines, the incriminated drugs, especially the batches of this product are quarantined pending further investigation. This unit will notify the local supplier and the bidder. At the same time, the Technical Committee will make necessary arrangements to the National Pharmacovigilance Committee. This committee will then write to the local supplier to ask for the refund for the amount disbursed. It is important to get back the money or to provide fresh new batch of medication. Again, that will be subject to tests by the Government Analyst Division.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

**NATIVE TERRESTRIAL BIODIVERSITY & NATIONAL PARKS ADVISORY
COUNCIL – COMPOSITION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

(No. B/511) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Advisory Council, he will state the –

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

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as provided at Part II of the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity Act 2015, the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Advisory Council which was last reconstituted in December 2022 is composed of –

- i) Dr. Nadeem Nazurally – Associate Professor, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Mauritius as Chairperson.

And the members are –

- ii) Mr K. Govind, Deputy Permanent Secretary of my Ministry;
- iii) Mr K. Ruhomaun, Director, National Parks and Conservation Service;
- iv) Mr P. Khurun, Conservator of Forest;
- v) Mrs B. Z. Bholah-Mookith, Rector, who represents the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology;
- vi) Mr D. Dindyal, Divisional Scientific Officer at the National Environment Laboratory, Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change;
- vii) Mrs I. Mooraby, Assistant Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Tourism;
- viii) Mr M. Chooneea, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Production and Systems, University of Mauritius;
- ix) Dr. Eshan Dulloo, Principal Scientist, Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT;
- x) Dr. (Mrs) Claudia Baider, Ecologist of the Mauritius Herbarium of my Ministry, and
- xi) Mr R. Hurreeram, Company Director who represents the private sector on the Council. He has been appointed under Section (5)(1)(j) of the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act 2015.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Advisory Council is currently being reconstituted.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that from June 2023 to date, the Council has met on 3 occasions. It is to be noted that section 6 of the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act 2015 provides for the Council to meet on a quarterly basis. As for the recommendations made by the Council, same are as follows –

- 1) The setting up of an inclusive National Park for everyone including the *autrement capable*;
- 2) The holding of a sensitisation campaign to address the problem of littering and illegal camping on Islet National Parks;
- 3) Enhance private sector collaboration for conservation activities for provision of a legal framework to regulate commercial activities and services offered to visitors at the National Parks, and
- 4) Restoration of the ecosystem in the National Park.

The House may wish to note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the following actions have already been initiated by my Ministry to implement the recommendations of the Council –

- 1) First the creation of an accessible pathway at the Petrin Visitors' Centre for visitors including those who are physically challenged. The pathway has been inaugurated on the 01 June this Year;
- 2) Regular sensitisation campaigns targeting the public, fishermen and islet visitors on the need to keep our islets neat and tidy and protect their biodiversity are being carried out by the NPCCS. The National Coast Guard and the Fisheries Protection Office conduct regular patrolling to ensure that there is no littering and illegal camping on our islets.
- 3) The collaboration of the private sector has been enhanced in activities related to the preservation of native plants and I wish to inform the House that the Mauritius Commercial Bank is collaborating with National Parks and Conservation Service

for the re-introduction of the critically endangered plant namely, *Cylindrocline lorencei* in the Black River Georges on the 04 July 2024;

- 4) The policy for commercial activities and visitors services in the National Parks including hawkers currently operating at the Black River Georges Viewpoint is being reviewed. Provision for new trails and access to viewpoints are being contemplated with a view to offering additional recreational opportunities to visitors in the National Parks, and
- 5) The restoration of the ecosystem in the National Parks. In this respect, the native *Harungana* species is being used as pioneer plant species.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Ms Anquetil! But I made an announcement this morning. So, hon. Minister you are aware of my announcement, so if you have any reply to give?

VACOAS – MUNICIPAL COMPLEX – DEPLORABLE STATE

(No. B/512) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the operational facilities, maintenance and cleanliness of the common areas of the new Municipal Complex at Swami Sivananda Avenue situated opposite the market in Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to if he has been aware of the deplorable state thereof, indicating the remedial measures taken in relation thereto.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): With your permission, I have got the reply already; I can answer it if you permit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix that the new Municipal Complex at Swami Sivananda Avenue, Vacoas, constructed in the year 2012, is presently fully occupied by certain public bodies and other non-governmental organisations. According to the Lease Agreement signed with the occupiers, minor maintenance works within

the premises are under the responsibility of the occupiers whereas major renovation works rest upon the Council.

As regards the common areas, they fall under the purview of the Council; a series of upgrading works that are required has already been identified. But, due to budgetary constraint – that was in the year 2022 – only some minor repair works were effected, namely, electrical work, lighting, repairs of aluminium opening and windows panes and repairs of water pump. I am also informed that the Council had included its Capital Project Proposal 2023 and 2024 the upgrading of the new Municipal Complex for an estimated amount of Rs20 m. but same was not retained.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the 08 May 2024, the Council has received financial clearance for the amount of Rs2 m. to carry out repainting of the exterior of the building. Tenders will soon be launched and the work will be put on fast track.

As regard the operational facilities at the new Municipal Complex, there is an escalator and a lift. The escalator is in good working condition and is being maintained yearly by a contractor. The lift is presently not functional and the contract for its maintenance which was awarded to a new contractor had to be terminated as the latter was not in a position to carry out the maintenance work due to unavailability of a key. The contract was terminated on the 24 April 2024 and the previous contractor has been contacted to effect the maintenance work to make the lift operational.

A joint site visit had already been effected by the Council and the contractor on 30 May 2024 to identify the defect. It has been found that the lift was defective. The spare parts are not available locally and the contractor has already ordered for same from overseas. The repair works would then start.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as the maintenance and cleanliness are concerned, the Council has yearly contract agreement for the following –

- Maintenance of standby generator;
- Cleaning services including toilet of the building;
- Maintenance of fire alarm, fire extinguisher and air conditioning unit, and

- Watch keeping services.

A complete survey of the building has been conducted by the Council and the following work needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency at an estimated cost of Rs10 m. –

- Waterproofing work;
- Repair of false ceiling;
- Repair of aluminium openings, and
- Painting of the interior of the building.

The Council has submitted a project proposal and same is presently under consideration.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président,...

Mr Speaker: I move to the next question. If you have further question concerning...

Ms Anquetil: I have further questions!

Mr Speaker: Please, I am talking! If you have other question to ask, you may raise it personally with the Minister or to the Municipal Council or during adjournment time.

Ms Anquetil: Come on!

Mr Speaker: Not come on. I already made an announcement on that. Meet me in my Office and you can take cognizance of the announcement.

Ms Anquetil: Non, mais je n'ai pas le droit aux questions supplémentaires?

Mr Speaker: I do not have to discuss with you! So, I move to the next question. Hon. Ittoo!

CUREPIPE – AREA HEALTH CENTRE – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/513) **Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the construction of the Area Health Centre of Curepipe, he will state where matters stand, indicating the expected completion date thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the old Area Health Centre at Curepipe required improvement as there was not sufficient space for proper service delivery, no appropriate storage facility, there leakage and dampness problem at the pharmacy and landscaping works were required.

During the Budget Vote for Financial Year 2020-2021, the project was included under the Public Sector Investment Programme for Projects under preparation by my Ministry.

After facing a two years' delay in project preparation and design due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in October 2022, the MNICD provided the final design, bidding documents, Bill of Quantities and cost estimates for the project. On 31 January 2023, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development confirmed funds to implement the said project. Further to an open advertised bidding, the letter of award for the project was issued to Canakiah Associates Co. Ltd on 09 November 2023 for the sum of Rs117,579,220 and the provisional Sum of Rs800,000 excluding VAT.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the handing over of site to Canakiah Associates Co. Ltd was made on 08 February 2024 and works started on 22 February 2024. The progress of works is 15% and the duration of the project is over a period of 730 calendar days, that is, some two years. Thank you.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to what services will provided in this Area Health Centre of Curepipe? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, all the services that have been provided in past, that is, general consultation, antenatal care, vaccination, the NCD clinics and in addition, the services of specialists will be provided at the new centre because there will be more consultation rooms to provide these services.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

VACOAS MARKET FAIR - NEW PARKING - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/514) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the construction of a new parking area behind the market fair of Vacoas, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, following your announcement earlier, should I reply to this question or we can take it afterwards?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: For this time...

(Interruptions)

For this time, you can answer the question but with a short answer because I have already given an announcement.

Dr. Husnoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to apprise the House that presently there is no specific project pertaining to the construction of a new parking area behind the existing market fair at Vacoas and same will be integrated in the new Modern Urban Terminal project.

Mr Speaker: Since we are not in a Municipal Council right now, there is no supplementary question.

Mr Assirvaden: Mr Speaker, Sir, *j'ai une question!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, no, no, you do not have...

(Interruptions)

No, no, no!

Mr Assirvaden: Mais le ministre est *accountable*...

Ms Anquetil: ...des finances...

Mr Speaker: No, no, no! I am not allowing any supplementary question.

Mr Assirvaden: Mais le ministre est *accountable*...

Mr Speaker: This is a matter concerning Municipal...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Local Government *c'est qui?*

Ms Anquetil: ...des finances...

Mr Speaker: Can you walk out from here?

An hon. Member: *Koumanse la.*

Mr Speaker: Can you please walk out from here? You are obstructing me from doing my work.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: You are obstructing us!

Mr Assirvaden: On a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Let me first reply. I made an announcement this morning. Anybody who has not understood this announcement should come to my office and I will explain this announcement. For now, the Minister has already replied to this question. I am not allowing any supplementary question. This is my final ruling. I move to the next question!

Mr Assirvaden: On a point of order, *M. le président!*

Mr Speaker: There is no point of order!

An hon. Member: Incroyable!

Mr Assirvaden: Mais le ministre est *accountable!*

Mr Speaker: There is no point of order! My final ruling is not questioned by any point of order! It is only by way of Motion, if you know the Standing Orders!

Mr Assirvaden: I know!

Mr Speaker: You know and then you say anything! Next question, please!

BIO-FARMING – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS – ENCOURAGEMENT MEASURES

(No. B/515) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to bio-farming, he will state the quantity of agricultural products derived therefrom out of the total local agricultural production since 2019 to date, indicating the measures being taken to encourage same.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, bio-farming encompasses a range of sustainable agricultural systems such as organic farming, permaculture and natural farming. As a production system, bio-farming requires plantation in soil that has not been at all contaminated by agro-chemicals neither from their use nor from drifts from surrounding plots. Bio-farming culture also requires the use of seeds that have not been treated with chemicals. Moreover, the use of agro-chemicals is not authorised during production.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as everybody is aware, in Mauritius, most of our arable lands are under sugarcane cultivation, which is highly dependent on agro-chemicals. Being small, our fields are located near – if not next – to each other. In addition, our country being situated in a tropical region, faces a very high pest and diseases load whose management requires an integrated approach. These factors severely impact upon production under bio-farming system and this explains why bio-farming culture is progressing at a steady pace.

With regard to the quantity of agricultural produce derived from bio-farming, I am informed that in the year 2019, an estimated 3,800 tonnes of chemical-free vegetables and fruits such as carrots, beetroot, cabbage, beans, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, moringa, breadfruit and jackfruit amongst others were produced. This represented around 4.05% of the total agricultural production for that year. In 2023, approximately 5,400 tonnes were produced. We are optimistic that this figure will gradually increase year after year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the constraints I mentioned earlier, we remain committed towards securing a healthier tomorrow for all Mauritian citizens. In this respect, a panoply of incentives

has been introduced since 2017 onwards to encourage the shift from conventional to bio-farming production. These include –

- (i) Sensitisation campaigns through talks and video clips which are being held continually on the need to adopt and to adapt sustainable and safer practices such as MauriGap, permaculture, zero budget natural farming and organic farming to produce healthy and safer food for the population. Currently, 72 planters are registered under the MauriGap certification.
- (ii) A bio-farming unit has been set up at the level of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) to guide farmers, planters, and facilitate their shift to organic farming.
- (iii) The FAREI's research station at Pamplémousses and its model farm at Flacq, Rivière des Anguilles, and Mapou have been converted into organic and zero budget stations to showcase organic culture.
- (iv) Planters are being trained in zero budget natural farming, organic farming and agro-ecology. Three inputs, namely, cow dung and urine are also being distributed to planters for the preparation of such fertilisers commonly known as *Jeevamrutham*. I am informed that 121 planters have been trained on the preparation of the fertiliser and that there are currently four producers including the FAREI and 80 users of the fertiliser.
- (v) A dedicated bio-farming zone has been set up over an extent of 66 arpents at Britannia. Organic vegetables, fruits and species such as Chinese cabbages, turnips, greens, banana, cassava, guava, jackfruit, avocado and turmeric are being produced thereat.

According to the FAREI, the production for the year 2023 was 12 tonnes at Britannia and from January to June this year, around three tonnes of bananas have been produced as the infrastructure has been damaged following the passage of cyclone Belal. In this regard, the House will be aware that an amount of Rs10 million has

been made available in the current financial year for the upgrading of the infrastructure at the Britannia organic zone.

- (vi) Several schools, NGOs, households and even officers from the Mauritius Prison Services have been trained in organic production principles. Support has also been given to establish community organic gardens at five locations, namely Ferney, Cité La Cure, St Jean, Pavillion and Robinson.

1,110 persons have been sensitised and trained in organic farming with a view to encouraging backyard production. They were also provided with starter garden kits free of charge;

- (vii) under the Bio-Farming Subsidy Scheme, a subsidy of up to 60% is provided to registered small planters on the purchase price of bio pesticides and bio fertilisers. This subsidy aims at rendering the prices of organic inputs accessible and affordable to planters and thus facilitating the shift to organic farming.

I am informed that as at date, 908 planters have benefited from this scheme, representing a total subsidy amount of Rs12.4 m. for a total of 1,173 arpents under foodcrop production. The scheme has been recently enlarged to also provide subsidies on integrated pest management solutions like base for fruit flies with a view to further reducing the utilisation of chemical pesticides, and

- (viii) the Locally Produced Fertiliser Scheme aims to assist planters in adopting and using locally produced fertilisers, including organic fertilisers to reduce dependency on imported fertilisers.

In this respect, a 75% subsidy is provided to small planters on the purchase of locally produced fertilisers. As at date, an amount Rs12.6 m. has been disbursed as subsidy to 988 planters who have availed of seaweeds and compost under the scheme for around 2,303 arpents under foodcrop production.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Roadmap and Strategic Plan for the Crop and Livestock sectors, which was developed by my Ministry earlier this year, following extensive consultations with

stakeholders, including farmers, further recommendations have been made for the promotion of bio-farming as a means of production. These include –

- (i) the introduction of an Organic Agriculture Bill which will regulate the production, handling, processing and labelling of organic products amongst others, and
- (ii) the amendment of the Chemical Fertilisers Control Act to also cater for organic and bio fertilisers and provide strict standards on the safety, quality and labelling requirements for all fertilisers at all stages from production, import, packaging and storage to final disposal.

I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that my Ministry is doing its utmost to enable and facilitate the shift to bio-farming production, not only to improve our soil's health, our production and productivity, but also to ensure that our population has access to healthy and safer foods.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Ce gouvernement, durant le mandat précédent, a échoué à son objectif d'atteindre au moins...

(Interruptions)

Eh bien, un objectif ! Je peux continuer?

Il y avait un objectif d'atteindre au moins la moitié de la production locale selon les normes bio d'ici 2020. 4%, c'est bien loin des 50% comme objectif. Donc, peut-on savoir de l'honorable ministre, si des leçons ont été tirées de cet échec, si les stratégies ont changé et si un nouvel objectif a été fixé ?

Mr Seeruttun: M. le président, se tourner vers ce que l'on appelle l'*organic farming*, l'agriculture organique, c'est quelque chose qui prend du temps. D'abord, si on veut vraiment aller vers ce qu'on appelle purement l'agriculture organique, il faut qu'il y ait un vide sanitaire de notre terre. Je l'ai dit dans ma réponse que Maurice a utilisé extensivement, de manière intensive, les pesticides dans le passé. Et comme nous le savons tous, la canne à sucre a été cultivée à travers le pays et, bien sûr, c'est une culture qui utilise beaucoup de produits chimiques. De ce fait, pour pouvoir faire ce vide sanitaire, il y a un minimum de trois ans qu'il faut respecter.

Entre autres, il y a aussi un problème aujourd'hui. Nous sommes une île tropicale avec une superficie restreinte. Il y a des terres agricoles qui sont à côté de nos routes, ce qu'on appelle des *drifts*. On peut avoir un planteur qui veut aller dans le système organique, mais si son voisin, lui, continue à opérer d'une manière conventionnelle, l'utilisation de ces produits chimiques peut venir contaminer les produits de son voisin. Tout comme le planteur qui se trouve au bas d'un terrain et que le planteur d'en haut, lui, utilise des produits chimiques, avec l'eau qui descend, cela emmène avec les produits. Donc, tout compte fait, il y a pas mal de difficultés à mettre en place un système pareil dans notre petite île.

Néanmoins, avec tous les efforts du gouvernement, avec les mesures annoncées que je viens d'énumérer, on ne baisse pas les bras. Il faut continuer à persévérer. Il faut continuer à sensibiliser. Il faut continuer à éduquer pour qu'on puisse sortir du système conventionnel pour passer à un système beaucoup plus, ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui, raisonné, après, éventuellement, organique.

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed. I move to the next question. Before reaching there, as announced, I have an announcement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. R. WOCHIT – *L'EXPRESS* ARTICLE – DISALLOWED PQ

Hon. Members, my attention has been drawn to an article of the daily *l'Express* of today in which the hon. Wochit is referring to his question for today's Sitting which has been disallowed.

I wish to remind the House that at the last Sitting, I made an announcement along that line in regard to a question put by hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger and which had been disallowed. I must state that following that announcement, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger and hon. Osman Mahomed did solicit me for an appointment in regard to questions for today's Sitting and which have been disallowed.

However, for reasons personal to them, they could not attend and did inform my Office accordingly.

Now, in the course of today's press article, hon. Woochit, in trying to explain why his question has been disallowed, he stated the following –

« Cela n'en vaut pas la peine. Le public sait maintenant quel genre de Speaker préside l'Assemblée nationale. »

Je ne dis pas quel genre de membre qui siège. Il a dit « quel genre de Speaker qui préside l'Assemblée nationale. »

« Si la situation était différente, j'aurais certainement pris rendez-vous avec lui pour comprendre. »

Instead of coming to see me privately in my Office to make representations, the hon. Member has chosen to go to the press and in so doing, the hon. Member has cast aspersions on the Speaker and offended the dignity of the House.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Ha, ha, ha!

Mr Speaker: I will come to you in a minute!

Hon. Members, in the light of the above, I am therefore requesting hon. Woochit to present his unconditional apologies to the House, failing which I will have no alternative than to request the hon. Member to withdraw from the Chamber for today's Sitting.

Also, I seize the opportunity of announcing both sides of the House that this is a final warning.

So, hon. Woochit, you apologise.

Mr Woochit: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: Unconditionally.

Mr Woochit: Unconditionally.

Mr Speaker: Now, I come to hon. Osman Mahomed. I would ask you to apologise unconditionally for the gesture of laughing when I was making my announcement...

Hon. Members: Ha, ha, ha!

Mr Speaker: ... of laughing and stating whatever! You apologise?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Under which section of the Standing Orders, please?

Mr Speaker: You apologise.

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, under which section of the Standing Orders should I apologise to you for laughing?

Mr Speaker: You apologise or not?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Apologise for laughing!

Mr Speaker: Not okay! Unconditionally! Do you apologise or not?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes!

Mr Speaker: You apologise, okay!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Apologise for laughing!

Mr Speaker: That goes in Hansard: ‘hon. Osman Mahomed apologised for laughing at the announcement of the Speaker!’

An hon. Member: Laughing *aussi* withdraw?

Hon. Members: Ha, ha, ha!

An hon. Member: Laughing!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Ey, enn komik li !*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes?

Mr Speaker: Can you apologise to the House?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: For what?

Mr Bérenger: *Aret badine do!*

An hon. Member: *Li ridicule la !*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: For what?

Mr Speaker: For your remarks!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Which one?

Mr Speaker: I am not here to discuss with you! Either you apologise or you walk out, you withdraw from the House!

Mr Bérenger: *Ki walk out?*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Which one? Which remark?

Mr Speaker: Either you apologise or you withdraw from the House!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Which remark did I make?

Mr Speaker: You know!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: No, I don't know!

Mr Bérenger: You don't know!

An hon. Member: *C'est ridicule!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: You don't know!

Mr Speaker: You see what you have to do: either you apologise or you withdraw from the House!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: But for what?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: For saying '*komik*'!

An hon. Member: Yes!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Did you hear that?

An hon. Member: *Li pakone li !*

Mr Speaker: I am suspending the House! When I come back, you will know! I am suspending the Sitting!

An hon. Member: *Ridicule!*

At 2.48 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.59 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to, with your permission, to raise a point of order. Prior to the suspension of the Sitting, I heard hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie utter the words '*to enn komik*' à votre rencontre, *M. le président*.

Mr Speaker: I will come to your point of order at a later stage. For now, hon. Members, before suspending the Sitting, I had requested hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie to present her apologies for unwarranted remarks and arguing with the Chair and disregarding the authority of the Chair whilst I was calling hon. Osman Mahomed to order. I am therefore naming hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie.

An hon. Member: *Sa injuste sa!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *C'est très injuste ! Dominer!*

An hon. Member: *Dominer wi.*

Mr Speaker: The next question hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

COMPOST BINS – DISTRIBUTION

(No. B/516) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to compost bins, he will state the dates and the place the distributions thereof were effected by his Ministry since September 2019 to date, giving details, in each case, as to the number thereof –

- (a) allotted, and
- (b) returned to the Ministry.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, in our strategy to divert waste from the Mare Chicose Landfill, a number of actions is being initiated. One of which is a supply of households with composters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, approximately 60% of the waste generated at households' level are of organic nature representing a suitable feedstock for the composting process. In that context, home composting is currently being encouraged through a household compost project, with a main objective being the generation of soil improver and fertiliser for the garden and household levels, reduction of the amount of bins collected and the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases from waste collection vehicles.

It is to be recalled that this Scheme was initiated in 2015-2016. Previously, these compost bins were sold to the public. It was observed that this resulted in low demand of the compost bins from the public as noted in the National Audit Report of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. My Ministry then took the policy decision that this compost bin should be allotted free of charge. Since this decision, we have observed that there has been a huge increase in the request from various quarters for these compost bins and we have done our best to respond to these requests after duly examining same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will like also here to add that in the endeavour to compost green waste, my Ministry with the assistance of the *Agence française de développement*, developed in the year 2021, a Solid Waste Strategy and Action Plan which focuses on recycling and resource recovery in the short and medium term while tapping the energy potential of waste in the long term. In line with this strategy, civic amenities centres also known as *déchèterie* have been constructed in

three transfer stations to encourage sorting of waste and recycling of certain dry components of waste such as paper, metal, plastic amongst others. As at date, there are around 50 registered recyclers and exporters of different waste categories registered with my Ministry.

As regards the organic part of the waste, resource recovery is being encouraged through composting at two levels –

- At household level, composting is being encouraged using the least technical method through simple compost bins. Moreover, at a larger scale, the composting of green waste from parks and gardens is being promoted through small scale composting units, using anaerobic digestion process. Two such units of 225 m² each with a capacity of processing three to four tons of green waste on a monthly basis have been constructed at the SMF premises in Vacoas and the forestry compound in Bras d'Eau.
- At national level, my Ministry initiated action in year 2021 for the setting up of two regional integrated waste processing facilities, each of which comprises a composting unit and a sorting unit of industrial scale. These two facilities are expected to receive around 200,000 to 260,000 tons of waste, representing about 40% to 50% of solid waste presently landfilled that will be diverted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the part (a) of the question, I am informed that since September 2019 to date, a total of 14,252 compost bins have been allotted to organisations and individuals around the island upon request. The organisations include NGOs, Schools, Socio-cultural Organisations, Cooperative Societies, Environment Clubs, Welfare Associations as well as Government bodies such as National Women Council, Social Welfare Centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on only one occasion, my Ministry proceeded with distribution of compost bins and that was during the inauguration of a small scale composting unit of green waste at the SMF premises in Vacoas held on 13 November 2023. Individuals residing in the surrounding regions and who made request to the Ministry were invited to come and collect the compost bins and as I have mentioned, we are planning also to inaugurate a second compost plant at Bras d'Eau.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that no compost bin has been returned to my Ministry. I would also like, Mr Speaker, Sir, to give some details. During the periods –

- 01 September 2019 to 30 June 2020: 3,145 bins have been provided;
- 01 July 2020 to 30 June 2021: 7,981 bins provided;
- 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2022: 813 bins provided;
- 01 July 2022 to 30 June 2023: 19, and
- 01 July 2023 to 30 June 2024: 2,294 bins have been provided.

This makes a total of 14,252 bins.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these bins have been provided island-wide and mainly to schools and educational institutions such as University of Mauritius, Lycée La Bourdonnais and some Primary Schools, to NGOs registered with the Ministry and NGOs engaged in the protection of the environment such as Fondation Ressources et Nature, FALCON, Friends of the Environment, Association des Consommateurs de L'île Maurice and also Caritas île Maurice; Also to socio-cultural organisations: Paroisse Saint Thomas, Mont-Roches Murugan Malai Kovil Sangam, Mauritius Telugu Maha Sabha and also, in the context of festivals, including Cavadee, Maha Shivratri, Easter, Ramadan, Venkateswara and Ganesh Chaturthi.

M. le président, je tiens à souligner ici c'est suivant la campagne que nous avons fait pour pouvoir produire les compostes, nous avons mis à la disposition de pas mal d'organisations socio-culturelles, des *composts bins* pour qu'ils puissent faire leur propre composte parce qu'ils génèrent pas mal de *green wastes* pendant les activités sociaux religieuses.

Also, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have distributed compost bins to Ministries, Departments, District Councils, and Parastatal bodies such as Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management, Ministry of Industrial Development, SME's and Cooperatives, Police Department, the District Council of Moka, Food and Agricultural Research Extension Unit and also to cooperative societies engaged in agricultural activities such as Le Pré de L'Aube Mixed Farming

Co-operative Society Ltd. and Laudatosi Mixed Farming Co-operative Society Ltd, *la Commission de l'environnement of Rodrigues* and members of the public upon request during cleaning campaigns.

Ms J. Bérenger: J'ai entendu le ministre dire qu'une seule distribution de poubelles à composte a été faite par son ministère en novembre 2023. Peut-il donc dire la Chambre qui est à l'initiative des distributions de poubelles faites en février 2024 et juin 2024 à Bassin et Palma, plus précisément dans sa circonscription ? Si ce n'est pas le ministère, qui est à l'initiative de ces distributions faites où la photo du ministre a été circulée?

Mr Ramano: Merci, M. le président. Cela permet de répondre à la question et aussi de dissiper tous doutes que certains journalistes souhaitent venir de l'avant avec des fausses informations. M. le président, comme je l'ai mentionné, le ministère de l'Environnement reçoit de nombreuses invitations et aussi de demande de diverses ONG, d'organisations socioculturelles, d'écoles, d'associations de bienveillances, d'organismes gouvernementaux, non gouvernementaux aussi et en tant que ministre de l'Environnement, très souvent je suis invité en tant que ministre à honorer l'événement et aussi à venir expliquer la politique du gouvernement en termes de protection de l'environnement. Et, pendant tous ces événements, nous procédons à la distribution des plantes, expliquer la politique du gouvernement, procéder aussi à la distribution des différents *composts bins*.

Bien sûr, M. le président, cela peut s'avérer dans ma circonscription, cela peut s'avérer dans d'autres circonscriptions mais, la distribution de bin se fait sur l'initiative de ces différentes organisations.

Ms J. Bérenger: Sauf que le ministre n'a pas précisé si les distributions ont été faites autres part que dans sa circonscription. Peut-il dire si les poubelles distribuées, qui sont ici des biens de l'État, seront dans le cadre des élections qui arrivent, incluses dans sa déclaration des dépenses électorales, surtout...

Mr Speaker: No, no...

Mr Ramano: M. le président...

Ms J. Bérenger: ... à l'heure où on parle du *financing*....

Mr Speaker: I disallow this question! This is not a supplementary question!

Mr Ramano: *Manz bondie kaka diab!*

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Malpropre!*

Mr Bodha: B/517, please!

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order - Standing Order 41. I heard the hon. Member saying “*malpropre*” towards my colleague the Minister of Environment.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, who?

Mr Toussaint: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger.

Mr Speaker: So, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, if you are really an honourable Member, withdraw those words and apologise to the House!

Ms J. Bérenger: I withdraw and apologise.

Mr Speaker: Don't do that next time! It is not worth!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, *on a point of order*. Dans la même lignée que le ministre, la section 21 du *Standing Order*, j'ai entendu l'honorable ministre Ramano dire à l'adresse de l'honorable Joanna Bérenger, « *manz bondie kaka diab* ». Il peut retirer ?

Mr Speaker: If there is anything of this sort, you...

Mr Ramano: Si l'honorable membre se sent blessée, ce n'est pas trop tard, M. le président.

Mr Assirvaden: Non, il n'a pas retiré ! Il n'a pas le droit de passer des remarques !

Mr Speaker: No, he has...

Mr Ramano: *Bien sûr*, I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: And apologise.

(Interruptions)

Order!

An hon. Member: Apologise!

Ms J. Bérenger: Part-time Minister!

Mr Speaker: What is this crosstalking? You have the bad habit of crosstalking. This is Parliament! You are not in a village Council!

An hon. Member: *Pas insilter village council do!*

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already said B/517.

**SME SUPPORT SCHEME – MINIMUM SALARY PAYMENT –
BENEFICIARIES**

(No. B/517) **Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the support extended to Small and Medium Enterprises for the payment of minimum salary, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of –

- a) enterprises concerned therewith, and
- b) workers thereof who will benefit therefrom.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, le salaire minimum national payable à un employé à temps plein a été augmenté à R 16 500 par mois. Ce montant comprend la compensation salariale de R 1500 par mois accordée à partir de janvier 2024 et le gouvernement fournit une aide financière aux employeurs de secteurs spécifiques qui rencontrent des difficultés pour maintenir leur capacité de production en particulier, les PME. Cette aide accordée pour l'année civile 2024 pour tous les employés à temps plein qui reçoivent un salaire de base mensuelle ne dépassant pas R 50 000.

M. le président, la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* a été chargée de verser cette aide financière à ces employeurs. Pour bénéficier de cette aide financière, un employeur éligible doit en faire la demande auprès de la *Mauritius Revenue Authority*. L'aide financière mensuelle accordée aux PME par employés percevant le salaire minimum national est décomposée de la façon suivante –

- Pour une PME qui est une entreprise orientée vers l'exportation, ce montant est de R 3500;
- Pour une PME qui est une entreprise manufacturier approvisionnant le marché local, le montant est de R 3500 si sa rentabilité est réduite de plus de 50 % ou R 1750 si sa rentabilité est réduite de plus de 10 % mais de moins de 50 %, et enfin

- Pour les autres, ce montant est de R 2500 si sa rentabilité est réduite de plus de 50 % ou R 1250 si sa rentabilité est réduite de plus de 10 % mais de moins de 50 %.

M. le président, en outre, pour les trois mois d'avril à juin 2024, le gouvernement, par l'intermédiaire de la MRA, verse aux PME du textile et d'habillement orientés vers l'exportation une aide financière mensuelle supplémentaire de R 2500 pour chaque employé à temps plein qui perçoit le salaire minimum.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne partie (a) de la question, je suis informé par la MRA qu'une aide financière a été versée à 3407 PME.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, l'aide financière a été versée pour 22 339 employés percevant le salaire minimum national. M. le président, en outre la MRA a jusqu'à présent, déboursé un total de R 358 millions à titre d'assistance financière aux PME pour un total de 32 361 employés. Merci

Mr Bodha: Concernant la durée de ce *scheme*, l'honorable ministre a parlé de l'année civile 2024. Est-ce que je peux savoir si le *scheme* va continuer au-delà de 2024?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en général nous faisons cette aide par un période de six mois. À la fin de l'année, il y aura les tripartites pour revoir un peu les compensations et toute autre aide qu'on va apporter aux secteurs spécifiques. Si besoin est, on va continuer bien sûr les mesures d'aides aux entreprises.

Mr Bodha: Can I have a second question, Mr Speaker, Sir? Is the Minister aware that many SMEs still have outstanding loans at the DBM which they cannot repay when it comes to wage assistance which was supposed to be given during the COVID period?

Dr. Padayachy: Oui, M. le président, nous sommes au courant de certaines difficultés que rencontrent les PME et nous travaillons dessus pour voir comment on va pouvoir les aider pour continuer à travailler et à produire. Merci.

Mr Speaker: MP Wochit!

**AGRICULTURAL SECTOR – PLANTERS/FARMERS – SUPPORT & RELIEF
MEASURES**

(No. B/518) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the agricultural sector, he will state the additional targeted support and relief measures extended to planters/farmers with a view to ensuring the continued productivity and sustainability thereof.

Mr Seeruttun: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would ask to bear with me, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is an open question, so it is going to be an open answer, quite lengthy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Mauritius is a net food importer not only for staple food, that is, rice and wheat which are not economically feasible to produce locally but also for temperate fruits, canned and processed products and pulses among others. Efforts of my Ministry are therefore geared primarily towards the improvement of food security level for commodities that are produced locally.

In this regard, various schemes have been introduced at the level of my Ministry to improve both production and productivity. These schemes which are implemented by the different institutions falling under my Ministry namely, the Agricultural Services, the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) , the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) and the Small Farmers Welfare Fund not only to provide the necessary incentives and support to planters and farmers through whom continued production and sustainability will be achieved but also build the resilience of our agricultural sector to challenges such as climate change and the unpredictability of global markets as a result of external shocks such the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical in situations in various regions worldwide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a copy of all the existing incentives being provided to the agricultural sector.

With regard to the additional targeted support and relief measures extended to planters, as requested by the hon. Member and which I suppose he is referring to the new incentives to be provided as from the current financial year, these are as follows for the production of food crops

- (i) a grant of Rs1 m. and concessionary leasing facilities would be provided to support planters for the purchase of fully equipped container farming facilities. This new measure will allow all year round production as well as increase the production per surface area. The measure is also expected to alleviate challenges faced by planters, such as limited land availability, climate-related disruptions and resource constraints, thereby fostering a more resilient and innovative agricultural sector in Mauritius;
- (ii) a grower would now benefit grant for two sheltered units up to Rs 1 m. instead of one unit for Rs500,000;
- (iii) to alleviate the burden of farmers, the grant comprising 50% of the cost of procuring farm equipment and irrigation system up to a maximum of Rs250,000 per applicant has been maintained. The mechanisation of farming activities would help to alleviate the acute shortage and the use of innovative irrigation system to improve water use efficiency;
- (iv) to cater for the increase in volume of fruits and vegetables transiting at the National Wholesale Market, an amount of Rs50 m. would be provided for a cold room facility thereat, to enable better storage and longer shelf life of produce;
- (v) with a view to reducing thefts of agri-produce at farm level, a new scheme has been introduced whereby a grant of up to Rs250,000 is offered per applicant to fence their farms and acquire security equipment;
- (vi) to tap into the potential of the apiculture sector and reduce our imports, the one-off grant for fencing purpose under the Bee Keeping Scheme would be increased from Rs150,000 to Rs200,000 and a subsidy of Rs500 per bee queen would also be provided to beekeepers, for up to a maximum of 10 queens;
- (vii) to alleviate the burden of labour shortage which is a major limiting factor for the optimum performance of farms, the procedures for importation of foreign labour would be made less stringent. Consultations are being made so as to come up with appropriate guidelines for such employment;

- (viii) a grant of up to Rs225,000 would be provided per farmer for the importation of cows, goats, pigs and sheep under the Livestock Development Scheme to address the lack of breeding animals on the local market;
- (ix) to support the operational efficiency and resilience of farmers at the Britannia Organic Zone, an amount of Rs10 m. has been allocated for critical infrastructure upgrades. This measure aims to stabilise production, improve accessibility and promote sustainable agricultural practices within the Britannia Organic Zone, particularly following damages caused after the heavy rains and the passage of cyclone Belal earlier this year, and
- (x) planters who are affected by adverse weather conditions would henceforth also be able to benefit from a cash compensation of Rs3,000 per arpent for a second crop cycle annually. Such an additional support from the Government will assist food crop growers to mitigate losses incurred due to non-manageable risks, especially in the context of climate change which accentuate the frequency and intensity of natural calamities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the sugar sector, among the additional relief measures to be provided for –

- (i) the minimum guaranteed revenue of sugar for planters producing up to 60 T sugar has been increased from Rs27,500/T of sugar for financial year 2023/24 to Rs30,000/T of sugar in the current financial year. This represents a 20% increase over two years;
- (ii) the Cane Replantation Revolving Fund Scheme at the level of the DBM Ltd, will make arrangement to provide loans to planters for the renewal of cane plantation for their old, low productive ratoons at an annual preferential interest rate of 2.5 percent. Provision is made for a sum Rs500 m. at the level of the DBM Ltd. for the replantation of some 7,000 arpents of cane fields with old ratoon cane as was the case for the Financial Year 2023/24;

- (iii) an amount of Rs75 m. has been earmarked under the Cane Replantation Scheme for individual sugar cane planters. The grant element has been increased from Rs50,000 to Rs60,000 per arpent for the replantation of small/medium planters cane fields. An estimated extent of 1,250 arpents will be covered under this scheme for the current financial year;
- (iv) the Fertilisers Subsidy Scheme, which is estimated to cost some Rs125 m. and involves some 7,000 beneficiary planters, would be implemented. The scheme provides for eligible planters to purchase recommended fertilisers for application to their respective cane fields after the harvest for which 100% disbursement of fund will be incurred by Government upfront through the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority. Only 50% of this amount will be refunded by planters from their sugar proceeds of the forthcoming harvest through the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate. The purpose of this Scheme is to ensure that planters are able to apply the required fertilisers on time and thus maintain or increase their productivity and ensure a continuous supply of cane to the mills, and
- (v) a provision of Rs1.140 billion has been made under the National Resilience Fund to remunerate planters for bagasse, trash and woody biomass sources and implement the Biomass Framework. This measure will encourage the producers to maximise on the use of bagasse, cane trash and cultivate other woody biomass on slopping and difficult areas to maximise the production of green renewable energy and contribute to the national effort to attain the objective of the country to reach its renewable energy mix of 60% and the policy to phase out the use of coal by the timeline of 2030.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to the tea sector, the additional relief measures to be provided include –

- (i) a provision of an amount of Rs6 m. to continue the Road Mending Scheme for tea cooperatives;
- (ii) furthermore, tea growers who occupy a minimum of 1 arpent of land will now be able to benefit from duty free facilities on the purchase of a double cab, and

- (iii) the winter allowance for tea growers would also be increased from Rs2.50 per kg to Rs4.50 per kg, which represents an increase by 80 percent.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: So, this question has sufficiently been canvassed, and you will go to the press.

Mr Woochit: A simple question!

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed. I am not giving you!

Hon. Osman Mahomed!

NON-REVENUE WATER PROJECT – NORTH & EAST ZONE – ASSESSMENT

(No. B/519) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the project for the detailed assessment of Non-Revenue Water in the water supply zone north and east by the experts enlisted from the Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry had approached the UK authorities, in February 2022, on the possibility of providing assistance to Mauritius in the water services sector, following high level discussions between the two Governments.

The British High Commission has subsequently mobilised the appropriate key international resources to provide short, medium and long-term solutions to address water intermittency in a sustainable manner, keeping in view the adverse impacts of climate change, the unique challenges faced by Small Island States, increasing water demands and the water network efficiency among others.

Thus, in March 2022, two experts in water resource management and infrastructure, from the Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility (CRIDF), an official SADC programme supported by the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), were identified to conduct a scoping mission in Mauritius. The Climate

Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility is a demand-driven programme that works to deliver sustainable small-scale infrastructure across 12 SADC countries. It focuses on water services, water resource management, and water for livelihoods, fostering sustainable development of the region's water resources and addressing the water, food, and energy nexus.

The Scoping Report resulted in the development of a 5-year Water Supply and Distribution Improvement Programme to be implemented in a phased manner subject to availability of fund. This Programme outlined steps for Mauritius to build a comprehensive, equitable and sustainable water infrastructure needs assessment, including project planning preparation for infrastructure rehabilitation and an implementation programme. This Programme would be important to enhance the island's long term climate resilience, water security and quality of life of the residents.

Phase 1 comprised the foundational studies that were undertaken from January to March 2023. These studies involved an assessment of surface and groundwater resources; and an assessment of the adequacy of primary water distribution infrastructure to service domestic consumer demands. The surface water resources assessment was undertaken using the rainfall run-off and yield modelling approach adopted by SADC utilising data from gauging stations across the island. The groundwater assessment was based on water level monitoring dataset.

At the end of the Foundational Phase, the Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility recommended the conduct of a full and proper groundwater assessment, a full audit of the surface and ground water and assessments of water distribution network on a zone-wise basis including the non-revenue water component.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the above recommendations of the foundational Phase 1, after consultation with stakeholders and based on funding availability, the British authorities have supported my Ministry with the implementation of Phase 2 of the study, in two distinct Stages, namely –

- (i) Stage One: a detailed data collection and analysis and pre-feasibility study report to identify and scope projects that will be taken to full feasibility studies, and

- (ii) Stage Two: preparation of a detailed bankable Feasibility Study Report, including associated preliminary designs of the network assessment, groundwater, bulk water metering and water demand.

Phase 2 started in July 2023 and Water Supply Zones North and East were selected as priority zones for the studies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the course of Phase 2 of the Study, the team from Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility has carried out the following activities in Water Supply Zones North and East –

1. Network analyses and feasibility studies for the bulk trunk distribution network;
2. Detailed water demand assessments;
3. Assessment of disaggregated non-revenue water;
4. Development of a groundwater management strategy, and
5. Identification of raw water augmentation infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question put by the hon. Member, I have been informed that the first stage of Phase 2 of the Study has identified that several meters were broken or unreliable and as such, data required to undertake a water balance of flows within the system, in selected trunk mains and service reservoirs, to identify location and levels of losses, are inadequate. The Report could not make an accurate assessment of the split between commercial and physical losses.

Insufficient bulk meter information necessitated the carrying out of field flow and pressure measurement in February 2024 in order to get a clearer picture of physical losses in the bulk distribution system. The team had thus performed meter verification tests of selected bulk meters. Field pipe flow measurements to assess actual non-revenue water and the relative distribution of losses, as well as pipe hydraulic properties for input into refined network modelling, formed part of Stage 2 of Phase 2 of the Study. Clamp-on ultrasonic flow meters were installed to test existing meters and assess the losses on the bulk mains between service

reservoirs. Visual inspections, observation, and measurement of overflows were carried out on each reservoir, where these occur. Measurements of minimum night flows, including zone pressures, were done. An analysis of select consumer metering and billing was also done. The conclusions pointed to the need for urgent metering and for further investigations across the whole network.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility has recommended some additional works in the Water Supply Zone (North) for a better assessment of its Non-Revenue Water. Some critical defective bulk meters will have to be replaced by the CWA. In addition, the Consultants have proposed the fixing of strategic meters which will enable the assessment of total consumption, flow patterns and night demand. Following the above, a detailed investigation of the distribution system will have to be carried out to determine the flows in the network and therefore the Non-Revenue Water. Action is being taken accordingly by CWA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the studies have brought to light the need for further detailed field work to fully map out the as-built network in the Water Supply Zone (North) and to enable calibration of the analytical model. Based on projected future demands, recommendations of potential network upgrades were presented and about 35 km of CWA's network has been proposed to be upgraded to meet the projected water demand of 2050. These, however, still require further verification and analysis. My Ministry is liaising with the British High Commission for support in the next phases of implementation of the Study.

In parallel, Government is pursuing its investment in pipe replacement programmes for an improved efficiency of the water supply network. Moreover, with the support of AFD funding in the context of a budgetary loan support to the tune of Euros 200 million, Government will be financing, during Financial Year 2024-2025, installation of a telemetry system and the replacement of some 300 bulk meters. Following the studies carried out by the climate resilient infrastructure development facility, it is proposed that my Ministry would carry out detailed assessments of the network and the water balance in the remaining water supply zones in order to elaborate a national water supply distribution and improvement plan across the island with a view to addressing water intermittency in a sustainable manner.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I note from the answer of the hon. Minister that the foreign consultants have singled out broken bulb meters as a main issue in assessment of non-revenue water. Can I, therefore, ask him how is the CWA doing for its in-house Pipe Replacement Programme which runs into billions of rupees when in fact, it is not possible to detect accurately non-revenue water, meaning water losses in the pipes?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the situation is not everywhere on the network. Like I said, they have identified in two different zones, that is, in the northern and the eastern zone that we have problems with regard to metering. So, that's why they have recommended that we change those meters and replace them. This is not the case everywhere. So, there are places where we are doing pipe replacement works where we can assess the situation with regard to losses because we have meters which are functioning but there are places where we have this problem of meters not working. So, we are trying at the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we are acting on a lot of fronts with regard to the water sector. Wherever we have to replace meters so that we get valuable information with regard to losses on the network, we will do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Question sufficiently canvassed. I now move to hon. Doolub!

UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC SERVICE DAY – REASONS FOR CELEBRATION

(No. B/520) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the United Nations Public Service Day, he will state –

- (a) when same was decreed by the United Nations General Assembly, indicating how it was previously celebrated in Mauritius, and
- (b) the reasons for the celebration thereof on such a scale this year, giving details thereof.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to thank the thousands of public officers who turned up on a Sunday to celebrate the United Nation Public Service Day on 23 June 2024 at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre.

As a matter of fact, over 7,000 public officers from Ministries, Departments, Parastatal Bodies and Local Authorities responded to our invitation. I also wish to place on record my appreciation for the presence of the representatives of trade unions and federations. I avail myself of this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to express my gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister for his distinguished presence at the National Function as Chief Guest. I would also like to thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, to have graced the event by your esteem presence. My heartfelt thanks goes to the UN President Coordinator, my colleague Ministers, MPs and other distinguished guests who attended the event.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that in recognition to the instrumental role played by the Public Officers in all sphere of our lives, be it social, economic and cultural, the United Nations General Assembly designated 23 June as Public Service Day by adopting Resolutions 57, 200, 77 on 20 December 2002. In the past, the UN Public Service Day was celebrated every year through the organisation or workshops where a limited number of public officers were invited. As per record available at my Ministry, for the period 2005 to 2014, the event was celebrated in a manner which unfortunately hardly portrayed the role and importance of the public service and that of the public officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the UN Public Service Day 2024, Government has taken the bold decision to organise a national function in a grand manner to pay tribute to more than 90,000 public officers for their hard work and dedication and which commensurate with the key role that they play in shaping brighter future for our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that all the items of the programme of the day were performed exclusively by the Public Officers, namely from –

- my Ministry;
- the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage;
- the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, and
- Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

Hence it was a programme for the Public Officers by the Public Officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to what is being insinuated by the Opposition and some section of the press, I can assure the House that there is nothing sinister behind the celebration of the UN Public Service Day and there is absolutely no political agenda as it was an event meant exclusively for our Public Officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the resounding success and positive feedbacks received from the Public Officers, Trade Unions, Federations and Associations as well as other public and private stakeholders, my Ministry has decided that henceforth, the UN Public Service Day celebration will now become a recurrent feature. In recognition to the invaluable contribution of the Public Officers to our people's welfare and well-being as well as a nation building, I can assure the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the celebration for next year's event and beyond will be organised with the same scale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that this year, my Ministry organised a national function on Sunday 23 June 2024 at Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre, Pailles, that the theme of this year is 'Fostering Innovation amid Global Challenges: A Public Sector Perspective'. Since I took Office as Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms, I cherish the idea to organise this year's United Nations Public Service Day in a grand scale as I had the opportunity to have the privilege to witness the instrumental role our public officers play in providing with selfless dedication, citizen-centric services to the population. This event will, as from next year, be a recurrent feature in recognition to the invaluable contribution of our dedicated public officers to the welfare and well-being of the society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the resounding success of this event is testimony to the consideration that this caring Government has under the able leadership of our Prime Minister for the well-being and advancement of our Public Officers in their personal and professional life. As a matter of fact, our Public Officers were extremely pleased and expressed their deep gratitude to our Prime Minister as he spent no less than four hours amongst us at the event on Sunday 23 June 2024 where he made it a point to meet with them and visited each and every booth where Ministries

and Departments had the opportunity to showcase projects and initiatives that would contribute to progress and well-being of our people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I therefore call upon everyone not to give in to portray a political connotation to this event as it would be an insult to the thousands of dedicated and honest Public Officers serving tirelessly round the clock.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

**TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIONS – PUBLIC OFFICERS – MENTAL
HEALTH & WELLNESS – MEASURES**

(No. B/522) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to Public Officers, he will state if he has received representations from the trade union as to the promotion of mental health and wellness thereof and, if so, indicate the measures, if any, his Ministry is implementing to cater for same in the Public Service.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, the health and well-being of Public Officers are critical factors in ensuring that they provide citizen-centric services to the population.

However, in the face of a challenging and unpredictable environment, several obstacles such as stress at the workplace and alcoholism and other HR related issues affect public officers, thus, impacting on their performance in the delivery of a quality service to the public.

In this context, my Ministry is dedicated to give the highest consideration for the production and promotion of welfare and wellbeing of the public officers. Since I took office as Minister of Public Service, I have made it a point to listen to the grievances of public officers in general, either individually or through their representatives. During those meetings, the Trade Union drew my attention to the need for the promotion mental health and wellbeing of public officers. Accordingly, I had a meeting with officers of my Ministry on 14 November 2023 to discuss on measures to be implemented to address this issue.

Following discussions, it was decided to develop a dedicated mobile application which will provide relevant information and services for the benefit of these officers across the public

service. On 08 January 2024, I had another meeting with representative of relevant Ministries to finalise the project proposal for the development of the mobile application for our public officers.

The mobile application will support public officers in maintaining good health, mental wellbeing and addressing alcohol dependence to ensure a safe and sound workplace. The application's aim is to offer various features *inter alia* focus on mental health education, alcohol addiction seminars and workshops, online and automated booking self-care and access to professional support services, thus contributing to the wellbeing and resilience of our public officers.

The mobile application will also enable public officers to file a work related complaint as well as to the avail of special discount from commercial entities. The Terms of References and specification for the projects have been finalised and my Ministry is in the process of launching bid for the retention of a service provider to develop the application. Mr Speaker, Sir, the mobile application will also enable employees to share concern about their mental health and alcoholism issues allowing HR teams to address such issues proactively. Public officers can also use the mobile application to seamlessly submit work related complaints via a customised citizen support portal.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

CONSTITUENCY NO.1 – NATIONAL HERITAGE SITES – REFURBISHMENT & RESTORATION WORKS

(No. B/523) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the national heritage sites in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will state the total amount disbursed for the refurbishment and restoration thereof since 2019 to date, giving details of the works effected.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the National Heritage Sites in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, I am informed by the National Heritage Fund that since 2019 to date, a sum of Rs8.7 m. has been disbursed for the restoration and refurbishment of La Tour Koeing building located in Pointe aux Sables.

La Tour Koeing building was designated as a National Heritage Site under section 12 of the National Heritage Fund Act 2003 on 01 June 1985. The building was in a derelict state and from December 2019 to May 2021, the National Heritage Fund carried out a series of rehabilitation and restoration works thereat.

The works carried out included, *inter alia*, reinforcement of a ring beam, roof slab, establishment of water evacuation mechanisms, supply and fixing of wooden openings and floorings and embellishment works. Following the restoration works, the building has been converted into an art space where art exhibitions are regularly being organised by the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture.

In addition to the above, cleaning and minor conservation works will shortly be carried out at Donjon St Louis located on a hill at Grand River North West. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that there are 38 other designated National Heritage thereat, including one private cemetery, 21 tombs of imminent personalities dating back to the French period, one pagoda, six monuments, one aqueduct, one bridge, one statue and six buildings.

Most of the above mentioned designated National Heritages are either government owned, privately owned or are *du domaine public*. The responsibility for the maintenance thereof rests with their owners while those which are vested in my Ministry are restored by the National Heritage Fund subject, of course, to availability of funds. Moreover, as announced in the Budget Speech 2024-25 by my colleague, hon. Dr. Padayachy, the Canal Dayot Aqueduct in Constituency No.1 will be restored and rehabilitated in this Financial Year.

I am informed that the National Drainage Authority is currently carrying out a survey on soil erosion and flooding thereat. Thereafter, work will start. Funds for the rehabilitation will be provided under the Lotto Fund.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Dr. Aumeer!

COTE D'OR – WAREHOUSE CONSTRUCTION – PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS

(No. B/524) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a Modern Warehouse pharmaceuticals products at Côte d'Or, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the construction of a modern warehouse on a public-private partnership modality for pharmaceutical projects was announced by Government as part of the Health Hub at Côte d’Or. In this connection, my Ministry entered into a lease agreement with Landscape Ltd which includes 10 acres of land for the warehouse project.

In compliance with the BOT Projects Act on 08 April 2022, Government approved to the enlistment of a Transaction Advisor for three Build-Operate- Transfer projects, including for the construction of a modern warehouse. KPDC Project Development Consultants Ltd is allocated for the design, finance, build, operation and maintenance of modern warehouse at Côte d’Or.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the deliverables from the Transaction Advisor were a period of 20 weeks comprised of –

- submission a report on the examination of KPDC’s project structuring report;
- Marketing and submission of draft request for proposal document;
- Submission of final request for proposal document;
- Evaluation, negotiations and signature of BOT agreement, and
- Development of a Bot agreement management plan case study and close out report.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. This project was approved way back in 2021. It has taken so much time for it to materialise. May I know from the hon. Minister what are the specific reasons that have caused so much delay whereby hundreds of millions of rupees have been paid as rental and demurrage fees to cater for pharmaceutical products?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the request for proposal was issued on 11 May 2022. Kukuza Project Development Company was appointed as Transaction Advisor on 16 September 2022. On 28 February 2023, KPDC provided my Ministry with an inception report and a draft project structuring report. In its project structuring report, around 30,000 metres square space was recommended. However, KPDC winded up and provided my Ministry with a notice of termination of contract in May 2023. This is the reason why there is a delay.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. May I know from the hon. Minister, the initial cost of the project and with so much delay, has the cost gone up and by how much?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, an amount of Rs13,205,000 excluding VAT is provided for this one. For the other one, I can table the information. I have no problem in tabling the information.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Dr. Gungapersad is not here.

Hon. Ms Tour!

CANCER TREATMENT – RADIOTHERAPY MACHINE – REPLACEMENT

(No. B/526) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to cancer treatment, he will state where matters stand as to the replacement of the over 20-year-old radiotherapy machine by a new one in view of the increase in the number of patients suffering from cancer.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker Sir, at present, 59 patients are undergoing radiotherapy with Cobalt 60 and Cobalt 60 (Equinox) while 31 are on the waiting list at Victoria hospital.

Furthermore, I am informed that three patients are receiving Brachytherapy treatment weekly. The old radiotherapy at victoria hospital referred to is a linear accelerator.

In response to the increasing number of cancer patients and the need for advanced treatment, state-of-the-art machines have been introduced at the Radiotherapy Department of the National Cancer Centre namely, one HDR Brachytherapy and one CT simulator. Above and beyond, two linear accelerators three-dimensional which can each cater for 30 patients daily have been procured.

I am informed that physicists at the National Cancer Centre will submit a safety assessment report to the Radiation Safety and Nuclear Security Authority which will deliver the necessary license to operate the two linear accelerators within one week.

These modern machines will replace the out-dated equipment and offer several significant advantages. For example, the two new linear accelerators will –

- (i) deliver higher doses of radiotherapy more than three times faster than previous machines;
- (ii) minimise exposure to healthy tissue using multi-leaf collimators with leaf speeds more than twice as fast as other systems, and
- (iii) enable a new generation of patient-specific treatments.

I am further informed that the CT simulator is already functional at New Cancer Hospital and the two new linear accelerators will be functional by end of July 2024. As for the HDR Brachytherapy machine, same will be installed within two months as per the contract.

Thank you.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from radiotherapy treatment, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many patients are undergoing chemotherapy at the NCC?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am informed that 50 to 70 patients undergo chemotherapy daily at National Cancer Centre, that is, an average of 300 patients weekly. In addition, there are different types of cancer treatment in the different hospitals as well and surgeries are also offered in all the regional hospitals.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/527, B/531, B/536, B/537, B/539, B/541, B/543, B/544, B/546, B/550, B/551 have been withdrawn.

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.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

(4.00 p.m.)

**CASTING OF ROOF SLABS & PURCHASE OF BUILDING MATERIALS GRANT
SCHEME – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA – BENEFICIARIES**

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a Statement to the House with respect to the Casting of Roof Slabs and Purchase of Building Materials Grant Scheme as this issue was raised during the Committee of Supply held on 18 June 2024.

The Casting of Roof Slabs and Purchase of Building Materials Grant Scheme is meant to assist families who already own a plot of land, to build their housing unit. The maximum grant payable is as follows –

- (i) Rs130,000 for households earning up to Rs15,000 monthly;
- (ii) a grant of Rs100,000 for households earning between Rs15,001 to Rs20,000 monthly, and
- (iii) a grant of Rs75,000 for households earning between Rs20,001 up to Rs30,000 monthly.

Since November 2019 to date, 5,500 families have benefitted from this Scheme for a total amount of Rs435.18 million. It is to be noted that in the Budget Speech 2024-2025, my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, has announced the increase in the monthly income ceiling to be eligible from Rs30,000 monthly to Rs40,000 monthly.

I am informed by the National Housing Development Company Ltd (NHDC) that, in respect of Financial Year 2023-2024 as at 18 June 2024, 1,012 applications had been received of which, 860 had been favourably considered and an amount of Rs86.88 million disbursed. 84 applications, out of 1,012, were rejected as they did not meet the eligibility criteria. The remaining 68 applications are being processed and disbursement will be effected shortly to the

eligible applicants. An amount of Rs100 million has been provided in Budget Estimates 2024-2025 for the Casting of Roof Slabs and Purchase of Building Materials Grant Scheme.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

- (a) *The Water Resources Bill (No. VIII of 2024).*
- (b) *The Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. IX of 2024).*

Second Reading

THE CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. V OF 2024)

&

THE POLITICAL FINANCING BILL (NO. VI OF 2024)

Order for second reading read.

(4.04 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Constitution (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2024) and the Political Financing Bill (No. VI of 2024) be read together a second time, as they relate to the same subject matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a deep sense of satisfaction that I am presenting today these two historic Bills through which the Government is fulfilling yet another of its major commitments which it took vis-à-vis the nation in 2019. These two Bills aim at introducing the much needed and long awaited transparency and accountability in political financing in our country. The presentation of these two Bills today is also another unequivocal testimony of the Government's

willingness and commitment to safeguard and enhance public confidence in our democratic system and consolidate the health of our democracy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that, during our first mandate, we had made a pledge to the nation to regulate political financing. That pledge was duly reflected in the Government Programme 2015-2019. And in fulfillment of that commitment, we did come up, in 2019, after much efforts and wide consultations, with two Bills, namely the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill (No. XIII of 2019) and the Political Financing Bill (No. XIV of 2019). The aim of those Bills was precisely to plug the transparency and accountability gap in political financing in our country. It was, in fact, the first concrete attempt in our political history to regulate political financing in our country, although the issue had been on the political agenda for nearly two decades.

However, as the House is also aware, the Bills were regrettably not supported by the then Opposition, much to the disappointment of the people of this country, who had been impatiently awaiting appropriate political financing legislation to enhance public confidence in our political system. Instead of supporting the laudable initiative of the Government to promote a culture of transparency and integrity in the political arena, the then Opposition chose to play petty politics and came up with all sorts of lame excuses to justify their untenable stand on those Bills. In fact, they did not have a single valid argument not to vote for the Bills. Most of their interventions were only empty rhetoric.

Mr Speaker, Sir, had those Bills been voted at that time, we would have, by now, gone a long way in addressing the lingering suspicion and public concerns about unregulated political finance in our country, which I must say, was reinforced in the aftermath of the infamous “coffers saga”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to regulate political financing is long overdue, and as far as we, on this side of the House, are concerned, we reckon that the absence of an appropriate regulatory regime for political financing remains an important gap in our anti-corruption framework. This is the reason why, in our electoral manifesto of 2019 we maintained our pledge to introduce a new Bill on the financing of political parties and that pledge was faithfully reflected in the Government Programme 2020-2024.

In order to fulfill that commitment, the Government set up a Ministerial Committee in November 2022, under my chair, with a view to making recommendations on, *inter alia*, the regulation of the financing of political parties. The Committee examined the different aspects and issues surrounding political finance regulations, including its essential building blocks and core principles, namely the –

- (i) oversight and enforcement mechanism;
- (ii) prohibited donations;
- (iii) spending limits;
- (iv) accounting and record keeping;
- (v) reporting and disclosure;
- (vi) registration of political parties, and
- (vii) sanctions, amongst others.

The Committee also examined the views expressed and counter proposals made by Members of the National Assembly during the debates on the Political Financing Bill 2019, including those from the Opposition side.

A first draft of the Political Financing Bill and the Constitution (Amendment) Bill was prepared by the Attorney General's Office, based on the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee. After further discussions and fine tuning, the draft Bills were widely circulated on 29 April 2024 for consultation purposes. In fact, copies of the Bills were sent to –

- (i) each and every Member of the National Assembly;
- (ii) the Electoral Supervisory Commission;
- (iii) the Electoral Commissioner;
- (iv) the Financial Services Commission;
- (v) Business Mauritius, and

- (vi) the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

A copy each of the two Bills was also posted on the website of the Prime Minister's Office and members of the public were also invited to submit their views, comments and/or counterproposals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the consultation exercise, my Office received comments and counterproposals from the following institutions and persons –

- (i) the Electoral Supervisory Commission;
- (ii) the Electoral Commissioner;
- (iii) the Financial Crimes Commission;
- (iv) Business Mauritius;
- (v) Transparency Mauritius;
- (vi) International IDEA, and
- (vii) two Parliamentary Private Secretaries, namely hon. J. F. Francois and hon. S. K. Nuckcheddy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all the observations made and counterproposals received, following the consultation exercise, have been duly considered by the Ministerial Committee and the draft Political Financing Bill has been reviewed to accommodate certain observations and counterproposals made.

I must say that the proposals contained in the two Bills have been welcomed by the Electoral Supervisory Commission, the Electoral Commissioner, the International IDEA, and Transparency Mauritius.

In fact, the Electoral Supervisory Commission considers that the Political Financing Bill is in the national interest, ensures fairness and aims at reducing improper influence and

corruption by making provision for accountability and transparency with regard to the electoral process.

The Electoral Commissioner, on his part, sees the proposals for regulating political financing embodied in the Bill as being robust, well-structured and comprehensive, and containing clearly defined provisions aimed at promoting transparency, accountability and integrity in political financing.

International IDEA, on its part, considers that, overall, the draft Bill quite sufficiently covers a wide range of political finance issues and is mostly in line with global regulatory trends. It has also drawn attention to some emerging issues that may be worth considering in the future.

Transparency Mauritius has, on its part, expressed its gratitude for the Government's efforts and commended the initiatives taken and it also made certain suggestions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before delving into the content of the two Bills, I would like to briefly explain the stand of the Government on the issue of public funding of political parties. This issue was carefully examined by the Ministerial Committee, which took note of, *inter alia*, the recommendations made in previous reports on this particular issue, namely the Report of the Sachs Commission of 2001 and the Leung Shing Report of 2004 and also international practice in this regard.

Admittedly, public funding of political parties is a common feature in many foreign jurisdictions. However, its form and objectives vary considerably from one country to another. The main argument in favour of public funding is that it can contribute to ensure, to a certain extent, a level playing field in a political contest.

However, it remains questionable whether public funding can actually help create a level playing field among political parties. It is arguable that, on the contrary, public funding could well accentuate the disparity between major parties and emerging ones, given that a threshold would inevitably have to be imposed for a party to qualify for public funding. Even with fair eligibility and allocation criteria, we may end up with a polarisation of the political arena, given that only major political parties would ultimately benefit from public funding and smaller parties would run the risk of being driven out. It can also be argued that public funding may lead to an

over-reliance of political parties on such funding and gradually disconnect the party from its grass root.

The Ministerial Committee felt that, although public funding may have certain advantages, public opinion in Mauritius is still, in general, not in favour of the idea of financing political parties from taxpayers' money. The Ministerial Committee also considers that the objectives of the Political Financing Bill, as enunciated in its Explanatory Memorandum, can be achieved without necessarily introducing the element of public funding.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must underline the fact that, through these Bills, we are also fulfilling one of our important international and regional obligations in relation to political financing, namely, under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.

As a matter of fact, the UNCAC, which Mauritius signed in 2003 and ratified in 2004, provides as follows, in Article 7(3) of the Convention, and I quote –

“Each State Party shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures, consistent with the objectives of this Convention and in accordance with the fundamental principles of its domestic law, to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties.”

Moreover, Article 10 of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which Mauritius signed in 2003, but ratified only in 2018, enjoins State Parties to, *inter alia*, and I quote –

“adopt legislative and other measures to:

- (a) proscribe the use of funds acquired through illegal and corrupt practices to finance political parties; and
- (b) incorporate the principle of transparency into funding of political parties.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the framework for the regulation of political finance, which we are proposing in the new Political Financing Bill, is very much in line with the philosophy enunciated in Articles 7 and 10 of the UNCAC and the AU Convention, respectively. It should also be highlighted that neither of these Conventions imposes any obligation on State Parties to introduce public funding of political parties or candidates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the preparation of these two Bills has been a complex task, involving evaluation of different options and prioritising competing objectives. Although we have drawn inspirations from best practices in foreign jurisdictions, the proposed framework for regulating political finance is largely home-grown and is crafted in a manner that takes into account the specificity of our electoral system and our social and political context and realities. We have also taken particular care not to impose unnecessary burden on political parties, candidates, campaigners and citizens whilst ensuring that the legislative objectives are met. We have therefore opted for a political finance regulation framework that is simple, effective and enforceable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now highlight the salient features of the two Bills. I shall first take the Constitution (Amendment) Bill which seeks to amend the Constitution in order to extend the powers and functions of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner to cover matters relating to political funding.

Section 41(1) of the Constitution presently empowers the Electoral Supervisory Commission to have general responsibility for, and to supervise, the registration of electors for the election of Members of the National Assembly. The powers and functions of the Electoral Commissioner are, pursuant to section 41(2) of the Constitution also presently limited to registration of electors and conduct of elections. Clause 2 of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill is accordingly amending subsections (1), (2) and (3) of section 41 of the Constitution with a view to vesting additional powers and functions upon the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner in matters relating to political financing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I, now, come to the Political Financing Bill. As mentioned in the Explanatory Memorandum, the object of this Bill is to provide for accountability and

transparency in political financing with a view to promoting a level playing field, ensuring fair competition and preventing improper influence and corruption.

Clause 2 of the Bill provides, *inter alia*, for a clear definition of the terms political donation, monetary donation and donation in kind, as follows –

‘Political donation’ means a monetary donation and a donation in kind.

‘Monetary donation’ means –

- (a) donation in cash; and
- (b) with respect to a registered political party –
 - (i) includes any money lent to that party which has been written off by the lender; but
 - (ii) does not include a membership fee paid to that party.

‘Donation in kind’ –

- (a) means any of the following sponsorship or services provided to a recipient –
 - (i) publicity in the media and on billboards;
 - (ii) elections paraphernalia, including banners, flags, buntings or posters;
 - (iii) campaign promotion shirts, t-shirts, polo shirts and caps;
 - (iv) advertising materials, such as sample ballot papers, pamphlets or stationery;
 - (v) transport facilities;
 - (vi) public address system;
 - (vii) equipment, goods or facilities, including marquees and halls; but
- (b) does not include –
 - (i) sponsorship or services, excluding those referred to in paragraph (a), rendered personally by a volunteer; or
 - (ii) free air-time for political broadcast.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have opted for a definition of donation in kind that is wide enough to capture most of the costly items which a party may receive as donation in kind, especially during an election period, and which should be accounted for. I wish to point out that the proposed definition of donation in kind now includes items such as transport, *marquise* and public address system as these constitute high cost components in an election campaign. However, for the sake of enforceability, petty items, and services provided by volunteers and free air time for political broadcast have been excluded from the definition. Moreover, monetary donation will include any loan granted to a party which has been written off by the lender.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides that the Act will apply to any political party, a Member of the National Assembly, a candidate and election agent that receives political donations.

Part II of the Bill, which includes Clauses 4 to 10, lays down the rules on political donations and covers, *inter alia*, issue such as –

- who can accept political donations?;
- what are the permissible sources of political donations?; and
- the rules governing such donations by private entities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Political Financing Bill of 2019 required all political donations to be channelled through the treasurer. It was argued that that requirement would lead to bottlenecks and impose undue burden on the treasurer. This issue has been addressed in Clause 4 of the present Bill which accordingly provides that a political party registered with the Electoral Supervisory Commission, a member of the National Assembly and a candidate and his election agent can accept a political donation.

Clause 5 of the Bill imposes an obligation on any person receiving a cash donation on behalf of a political party, to remit such donation to the party leader or the treasurer of the party, within seven days of receipt with all necessary information for proper recording and reporting.

Similarly, information on any donation in-kind, received by a person on behalf of a party, should be communicated to the party leader or treasurer of the party, within seven days of receipt for recording and reporting.

Clause 6 of the Bill pertains to political donations received on behalf of a candidate by his election agent. This Clause imposes an obligation on the election agent receiving cash

donations on behalf of a candidate to remit same to the candidate within seven days, with all required information for proper recording and reporting. There is a similar obligation on the election agent to communicate to the candidate information pertaining to donation in-kind received by him on behalf of the candidate.

Clause 7 of the Bill lays down the rules governing political donations by private entities. Clause 7 provides that –

- (i) a private entity cannot make a political donation until and unless there is a written resolution of its governing body authorising it to do so;
- (ii) such political donations should be disclosed in its financial statements indicating the amount of cash donations and monetary value of donation in-kind made, and
- (iii) a political donation by a private entity must be made only by cheques or electronic means.

I should point out that the definition of private entity now includes an association, a foundation, a limited liability partnership, a partnership, a trust or such other private entity as may be prescribed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 8 of the Bill imposes a duty on the leader or treasurer of a political party to deposit any unutilised cash donations received on behalf of the party into the bank account of the party. Moreover, any unreturned party candidate must, after the election, remit any unutilised cash donation to the leader or the treasurer of his party.

A Member of the National Assembly will be required to deposit any unutilised cash donation in a separate bank account, to be opened by him, and no other money should be deposited into that same account. Clause 8 further provides that in case a party member passes away, any available balance of donation deposited into the bank account, shall be deemed to belong to his party.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 9 of the Bill proscribes the acceptance of political donations from the following sources –

- (a) an anonymous person;
- (b) a State-owned enterprise;

- (c) a statutory corporation;
- (d) a religious body;
- (e) a non-governmental organisation which is in receipt of subsidy or grant from the Government;
- (f) a CSR Fund set up under section 50L of the Income Tax Act;
- (g) a non-resident citizen;
- (h) a non-citizen;
- (i) a foreign Government or foreign entity, or
- (j) such other bodies as may be prescribed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these prohibited sources of political donations are generally in line with international practice. In regard to donations from foreign sources, I would like to point out that, according to the database of the International IDEA, out of 180 countries, 126 have placed some form of ban on donations from foreign governments or foreign individuals. Such countries include the UK, the United States of America, Japan, Norway, Canada, Brazil and France.

I would like to highlight the fact that the 2019 Political Financing Bill did not include non-resident citizens as a prohibited source of political donation. However, this time, the Ministerial Committee considered that allowing non-resident citizens to make political donations would constitute a loophole in the legislation as it could be used to circumvent the law and allow the channeling of donations from other prohibited sources.

It is also to be noted that a 'non-resident citizen' has been defined in the Bill as being a citizen whose permanent residence is outside Mauritius and who is not registered as an elector for the purpose of a general election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 10 of the Bill prohibits a recipient from accepting a donation which he suspects to originate from the proceeds of a crime and imposes a duty on him to report such cases to the Financial Crimes Commission. A similar duty has been imposed on the Electoral Commissioner to report any suspicious transaction to the Financial Crimes Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part III of the Bill, which comprises Clauses 11 to 16, provides for another important pillar of an effective political finance regulation and that is the “Recording and Accounting” of political donations.

In fact, Clause 11 of the Bill requires all recipients of political donations to keep a register, to be known as a register of political donations. The register shall contain the following information –

- (a) the amount of monetary donations received, whether in cash, by cheque or by electronic means;
- (b) the nature and the monetary value of donations in kind received;
- (c) the date the political donations were received;
- (d) the names and addresses of the donors, and
- (e) such other particulars as may be prescribed.

Moreover, a Member of the National Assembly, an unreturned candidate and an election agent will be required to keep his respective register of donation for a period of five years.

Clause 12 of the Bill requires all unreturned party candidates to submit, within 7 days of the proclamation of the election results, a report to his treasurer or to his party leader. Such reports must contain the following information –

- (a) the amount of monetary donations received, whether in cash, by cheque or by electronic means;
- (b) the amount of any unutilised monetary donation;
- (c) the nature and monetary value of donations in kind received;
- (d) the date on which the political donations were received, and
- (e) the names and addresses of the donors, including their contact details.

On the other hand, a returned candidate will be required to submit a similar report within seven days after the elections and thereafter, he will have to submit such report to his leader or treasurer on a quarterly basis.

This obligation on a candidate to submit reports on political donations to his party leader will give the latter a “*droit de regard*”, and will act as an additional safeguard, against any risk of illicit money polluting the political process.

Clause 13 of the Bill imposes a duty on the treasurer of a party to keep all accounting records of the party’s transactions in terms of donations received and payments made so as to enable him to prepare the statement of accounts required to be submitted under this law and to keep same for a period of at least five years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the 2019 Political Financing Bill required a political party whose gross income or total expenditure in any financial year exceeded one million rupees, to get its accounts audited by a qualified auditor, before submission to the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

In order to reduce the burden on political parties, Clause 14 of the present Bill enjoins the treasurer of every political party only to prepare and submit the party’s audited statement of accounts to the Electoral Commissioner not later than 60 days after the end of every financial year. There would be no need to have the accounts audited by a qualified auditor. However, Clause 14 also empowers the Electoral Commissioner to appoint a qualified auditor to audit any unaudited statement of accounts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I should also highlight the fact that all such statement of accounts submitted to the Electoral Commissioner shall be open for consultations by the public.

It is of note that there will be no legal obligation on a Member of the National Assembly to submit an annual statement of accounts. However, a party candidate and an independent candidate will be required to submit their usual election returns under the Representation of the People Act. A similar obligation to submit election returns is being imposed on a political party, through a consequential amendment to the Representation of the People Act, which is being brought by Clause 28(d) of the Bill.

Clause 16 of the Bill requires the Electoral Commissioner to prepare and submit a report based on the statement of accounts of all registered parties to the National Assembly not later than 120 days after the end of every financial year. In the 2019 Bill, there was no mention of the

information that such report should contain. The present Bill provides that this report to the National Assembly should contain the following information –

- (a) any amount received by each party in respect of –
 - (i) subscription and membership fees from its members;
 - (ii) interests;
 - (iii) monetary donations, and
 - (iv) any other activity;
- (b) the monetary value of donations in kind received;
- (c) any expenditure incurred and the reason for such expenditure;
- (d) any asset, including any amount of cash in hand and cash at bank, together with the name of the bank where the money is deposited, and
- (e) any liability.

It goes without saying that any donations in kind received should be valued at its market rate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, part IV of the Bill lays down the role and powers of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner with regard to supervision and monitoring of political financing. The Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Office of the Electoral Commissioner have been chosen as the oversight body for the monitoring of political financing as they are two independent constitutional bodies of high repute, both regionally and internationally, and are best suited for such role. Besides, globally as well, the most common approach is to entrust the oversight role for political financing to election management bodies.

Clause 17 of the Bill accordingly vests the Electoral Supervisory Commission with general responsibility for the supervision of all matters relating to political financing.

Clauses 18 to 20 of the Bill vest the Electoral Commissioner with powers of investigation as well as wide powers of entry and search in order to enable him to discharge his new functions in an effective manner, under the supervision of the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

Clause 19 of the Bill empowers the Electoral Commissioner to order any person to appear before him and to produce any book, document, record or information which he may require in the course of his investigation. He may also order a person to furnish a statement in writing under oath. Failure to comply with an order issued by the Electoral Commissioner shall constitute an offence under this Act.

Clause 20 of the Bill provides that a Magistrate may, on sworn information, issue a warrant to an Officer designated by the Electoral Commissioner authorising him to enter and search any premises, at all reasonable times, where there is reasonable ground to believe that there is, on such premises, evidence which may assist the Electoral Commissioner in an investigation. However, such searches should be carried out in presence of the owner of the premises or his duly authorised agent, who should, prior to the search, be provided with a copy of the warrant.

Clause 20(5) of the Bill further provides that any information obtained by the Electoral Commissioner in the course of his investigation from any book, document, record, and so on, shall be admissible in Court.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is also noteworthy that the Electoral Commissioner is being empowered, under Clause 21 of the Bill, to issue “Directives” to a person to take remedial actions for having breached any provision of the Act or to take measures to prevent any contravention of the Act, within a specified time period. Where such a directive is issued to a political party, it will be incumbent upon the treasurer of that party or the leader of that Party or any other person concerned with the management of the party, to comply with such directives. I should point out that non-compliance with such directives shall constitute a separate offence for each day of non-compliance, punishable by a fine of Rs5,000 per day, up to a maximum of Rs5 million. Provision has nevertheless been made, under Clause 21(3) of the Bill, for a person to whom such a directive has been issued to have the opportunity to make representations to the Electoral Commissioner, within such timeframe as may be prescribed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part V of the Bill deals with the procedures and requirements for the registration of Political Parties for the purpose of accepting political donations.

Clause 22 of the Bill enjoins any political party wishing to accept political donations to be registered with the Electoral Supervisory Commission. An application for such registration may

be made at any time to the Commission and the applicant should provide the following information to the Commission –

- (a) the names, address and symbol of identification of the political party;
- (b) the names, signature and residential address of the leader, president, secretary, treasurer and other office-bearers of the political party;
- (c) whether the political party is represented by any member in the National Assembly;
- (d) evidence that the political party holds a bank account, and
- (e) such other information or document as the Commission may determine.

A political party that does not hold a bank account at the time of application may be registered by the Commission provided that the party shall, within one month of its registration, open a bank account, failing which its registration will lapse.

Clause 22(3) of the Bill further provides that no application for registration will be entertained by the Commission during the period starting five days after the day on which writs for a general election have been issued and ending on the day the election results are proclaimed.

Moreover, where the Commission decides to register a party, it shall give notice of such registration in the Government Gazette. Where the Commission decides to reject an application, it will have to give the reasons therefor.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the debate on the 2019 Political Financing Bill, few Members had suggested that the Bill should have provided for a right of appeal in case the ESC decided to reject an application for registration.

Clause 22(7) of the present Bill accordingly provides that any party aggrieved by the decision of the Commission not to register it, may appeal to the Supreme Court and such appeal shall be determined by a Judge within 14 days. In case the Commission decides to reject an application made not later than five days after the day on which writs for general elections have been issued, an appeal against that decision should be made within 24 hours of the decision and

the appeal should be heard and determined not later than two days before Nomination Day. Moreover, the determination of the Judge shall not be subject to appeal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, proportionate and dissuasive sanction is an essential element in ensuring the effectiveness of any political financing legislation. Honourable Members will have noted that, in different clauses of the Bill, provisions have been made for sanctions in the form of financial penalties only. A general provision is made in Clause 25 of the Bill to the effect that any person who otherwise contravenes the Act shall commit an offence and on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs5 million. The proposed fine of up to Rs5 million, coupled with the power vested in the Electoral Commissioner to issue enforceable “Directives”, which I mentioned earlier, is considered to be dissuasive enough to ensure compliance with the law.

Government has opted for financial penalties, instead of other forms of sanctions, like imprisonment, disqualification or loss of office, deregistration, amongst others, as we consider that a fine is simple and relatively easy to enforce and is more in line with our democratic tradition. It is also the most common form of sanction internationally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 26 of the Bill grants jurisdiction to a Magistrate to try any offence under this Act and to impose any penalty provided therefor.

Clause 27 of the Bill empowers the President of the Republic to make regulations for the purposes of the Act, after consultation with the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner. It is to be noted that this is similar to the provisions of section 85 of the Representation of the People Act, which also empowers the President to make regulations for the purposes of the Act.

Clause 28 of the Bill deals with the consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act.

Section 51 of the RPA is being amended to provide for an upward review of the ceilings of election expenses so as to bring it to a more realistic level. As the House is aware, the present ceilings were set in 1989 and have not been revised since then.

The House will recall that the Sachs Commission identified the violation of the unrealistic expenditure ceilings as being a big loophole in our law, which makes a mockery of the whole issue of placing ceiling on expenses. The Commission therefore forcefully recommended an increase of the expenditure ceilings to a reasonable and realistic level so as to match the cost of elections.

Accordingly, the expenditure ceilings are being revised through this Bill as follows –

- (i) for a National Assembly election –
 - (a) in respect of a party, a ceiling of Rs1,500,000 per Constituency is being prescribed, provided that the party has fielded at least one candidate in that Constituency. It is to be noted that so far, there was no ceiling prescribed on the expenditure of political parties;
 - (b) in respect of a candidate, who is not the only candidate belonging to a party at the election in the Constituency, the ceiling is being increased from Rs150,000 to Rs1,500,000;
 - (c) in respect of a candidate who is the only candidate belonging to a party at the election in the Constituency, the ceiling will be Rs2 million; and
 - (d) in respect of a candidate who does not belong to any party at an election in a Constituency, the ceiling will be Rs2 million;
- (ii) for the Municipal City Council or Municipal Town Council Election, the ceiling is being increased from Rs50,000 to Rs300,000 per candidate;
- (iii) for Village Council Elections, the ceiling is being increased from Rs50,000 to Rs200,000 per candidate;
- (iv) for a local region election, or an Island region election in Rodrigues, the ceiling is being increased from Rs100,000 to Rs300,000.

I wish to point out that these expenditure ceilings include the monetary value of the donations in kind that a party or candidate may receive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the other amendments proposed in the Representation of the People Act are as follows –

- (i) the limit of expenses to be incurred by a candidate, as provided in section 53 of the Representation of People Act, is being increased as follows –
 - (a) expenditure for the candidate's personal living expenses is being increased from Rs25,000 to Rs150,000;
 - (b) petty expenditure is being increased from Rs2,500 to Rs25,000;
- (ii) in section 56, the minimum expenditure to be supported by vouchers is being increased from Rs30 to Rs5,000;
- (iii) a new section 56A is being introduced to impose an obligation on the treasurer of every political party which has fielded at least one candidate at a general election, to make an election return to the Electoral Commissioner within 90 days of the proclamation of results. As the House is aware, at present, only candidates are required to submit such election returns given that expenditure limits are applicable only to candidates. I wish to point out that such election return in case of party alliance should be made jointly by the respective treasurer of the political parties constituting the alliance. Insofar as candidates are concerned, they are required to submit their election returns within six weeks of the proclamation of results, as provided in the Representation of the People Act;
- (iv) the fines prescribed in part V for various election offences like, illegal payment or hiring, bribery and treating, undue influence and offences in respect of ballot boxes are being increased from Rs1,000 or Rs2,000 to Rs50,000;
- (v) a new section 72B is being inserted to provide for temporary political headquarters and campaign quarters, commonly known as "*Baz*". There shall be not more than one political headquarters per Constituency, Municipal City

Council, Municipal Town Council, District Council or local region, as the case may be, and not more than one temporary political campaign quarter, that is, “Baz” per polling station. Moreover, no political headquarters or “Baz” shall be set up before the issue of writs of election.

- (vi) a new section 72C is being inserted to empower the Electoral Supervisory Commission to issue directives to ensure compliance with the provisions regarding temporary political headquarters and campaign quarters. A person on whom a directive will be served, will have the possibility of making representations to the Electoral Supervisory Commission as he deems necessary. The functions and powers of the Commission under this new section shall be discharged and exercised by the Electoral Commissioner;
- (vii) section 74(1) presently provides, *inter alia*, that a person who is found guilty of an illegal practice, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs1,000. This fine of Rs1,000 is also being increased to Rs50,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while framing the proposals embodied in the Political Financing Bill, we have drawn inspirations from best practices in both established and transitional democracies, taking into account our own local context and realities. The House may be aware that, in recent years, a significant number of countries have introduced legislation to reduce the negative impact of money in politics. As far as Mauritius is concerned, we do not have, as yet, any specific legislation on political financing, despite our international commitment vis-à-vis the UNCAC more than 20 years ago. The absence of such a legislation indeed constitutes a big gap in our governance and democratic framework.

As I have said previously in this House, there is no universally agreed system of regulating political finance. Each country has to craft its own model that suits its local context. We consider that the proposals embodied in these two Bills are appropriate and workable in our local context.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would invite the Opposition this time to look at the proposals in a dispassionate and rational manner and to put national interest above party political considerations. As I stated earlier, in 2019, the Opposition chose to be on the wrong side of

history when they decided to thwart the Government's initiative and frustrate the will of the people by not supporting the Political Finance Bill. Today, they are being given an opportunity to make amends and redeem themselves. The House and the population will recall that, for the 2014 general election, the Labour Party/MMM coalition promised, in their electoral manifesto, to introduce legislation to regulate political financing, although that was not sufficient enough to convince the electorate. For the 2019 general election, the MMM, in its electoral manifesto, promised to, and I quote –

“Introduire un financing of political parties Bill efficace pour permettre aux parties politiques d’assumer démocratiquement leur rôles sans les ficelles des financement occultes”

Unquote.

In regard to the Labour party, surprisingly, or, should I say, unsurprisingly, we do not see any such commitment in their 2019 electoral manifesto. But, be that as it may, such pledges to promote integrity and clamp down on corruption must be more than campaign promises and words on paper. Therefore, I make an appeal to the Opposition, who often present themselves as anti-corruption and integrity champions, to come forward and fulfill their commitment not only towards the people of this country but also towards the international community. Parliamentarians should be the first to take a moral stand and support a culture of integrity. It all begins with setting the right example. By helping to tackle corruption, Parliamentarians can show they mean business.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, the proposed Bills constitute a much-needed legislative framework, with the very lofty objective of strengthening our democracy. The people of this country are watching. The Opposition will be well advised not to miss the opportunity this time; else the people will not forgive them. The Government has done its part. It is time for the Opposition to walk the talk and demonstrate what they stand for. This may not be a perfect Bill. After all, there is no such thing as a perfect political financing legislation. But we need to start somewhere, and we can build on that, in the light of experience that we gather, as we go along.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 10th Session of the Conference of State Parties to the UNCAC was held in December last in Atlanta, USA. One of the key issues which were on the Agenda was precisely the question of how to stop opaque money from corrupting democracy. In that context, a broad coalition of more than 100 international institutions and civil society, including the

International IDEA, the US-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the UK-based Westminster Foundation for Democracy made a joint appeal to the delegates attending the UNCAC Conference of Parties to further prioritise and enhance political finance transparency by, *inter alia*, closing loopholes for illicit funds in politics, improving oversight and accountability and strengthening international cooperation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude my speech, I would like to quote the following from their submissions, which underscore the need for countries like Mauritius to regulate the role of money in politics, and I quote –

“Political finance is a pivotal issue in the fight against corruption. The integrity of democratic processes is contingent on financial transparency and accountability in politics. The lack of transparency in political finance leads to waste or misuse of often limited public resources, posing a threat to the entire sustainable development agenda.

When financial contributions to political parties, electoral campaigns, or candidates are opaque and unaccountable, this enables clientelism, fuels corruption, increases the cost of political participation and destroys trust in governments. These outcomes adversely affect public services, drive conflict and make politics an exclusive club. These negative impacts are felt most keenly by women, young people, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups.”

Unquote.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this pertinent and insightful quote, I commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: So, at this stage, I suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 5.08 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.41 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated. I now call Dr. Boolell.

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened, like most of us, intently to the speech delivered by the Prime

Minister. There is, however, one missing link in the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, and it is honesty and sincerity of purpose. If the main concern of the Prime Minister is electoral integrity, transparency in political financing, free and fair elections, he should have moved the Bill mid mandate after wide consultation with all stakeholders. The Prime Minister knows very well that he is moving a stillborn Bill, and he is enjoying it. I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he understands the meaning of consultation. Consultation does not mean a decision taken unilaterally, and I will give a fair definition of consultation later on. How can the Opposition, parliamentary and extra parliamentary, NGOs, enter into wide discussion with the regime which thrives on hostility and bad blood?

The Bill is being introduced by hard-up, desperate regime trying to obtain some political mileage. There is no salvation; the doomsday scenario inscribed for the regime. And this is not history in the making, Mr Deputy Prime Minister; it is a mockery of history. The Bill is being moved on the threshold of dissolution of Parliament. *La montagne aura acouché d'une souris*. It is almost a copycat of the July 2019 legislation, but we, on this side of the House, as a responsible Opposition, want to regulate preventively and not accidentally. The regime is like a car crash waiting for a wall. Let us look at the meaning of wide consultation. The legislation should have been the subject of wide consultation at the bar of public opinion.

Consultation with honesty and sincerity of purpose with all stakeholders, accompanied by all stakeholders, paying heed to what they have to say, and make patience a virtue. And it can be done within a reasonable time but not on the threshold of dissolution of Parliament. I have stated earlier that the Government deliberately wants the Bill to suffer a natural death. I hope the Government will act positively to the proposal made by hon. Ganoo when he intervened on the Bill in 2019.

I have with me a copy of a PQ dated 15 September 2015 which reads –

“Doesn’t the Rt. hon. Prime Minister think that this is a fit case where a Select Committee should be set up with a definite time frame, presided by the Attorney General or some other Minister, to allow all the political parties in the House or outside this House to come and depone?”

This is the subject - and I quote him - which interests all political parties, of course, the society at large. But a Select Committee with a definite time frame under the Chairmanship of a Minister should be set up to hear evidence about what type of law we need for the financing of political parties and what is best suited for Mauritius.

And the Prime Minister then, on 15 September 2015, was Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, and he replied –

“Well, we will take this into consideration and, if need be, we will have recourse to this.”

The debate rests also on the funding and incentive structures to provide funding to enhance women participation. No woman should be left out. There is unanimity for fair representation of female candidates at the general election; not less than one third of women to stand as candidates. What is now a reality at municipal/village council election should be equally right for general election.

What is happening currently now on the threshold of dissolution of Parliament? Who is influencing peddling day in and out? Even Police Officers in Station have been coerced to use promotional pens with MSM logo. And the Prime Minister dares to talk of level playing field. The MSM is the last to want disclosure of its war chest. It thrives on opacity and in a cesspool of corruption. The Leader of the House shapes the agenda. The political arm of the executive is yet again moving a stillbirth legislation on financing of political parties; an act of desperation from a politically bankrupt regime. Money politics, fake news, fake AI-generated videos will not help them. The dice is cast. They know it is a winter of discontent. And on the 12 September 2019, who was more militant and vocal to condemn this legislation as a stillbirth?

Who, like a fiddler on the roof, blurted out that it was wrong to move the Bill on the threshold of general elections? *Cela crée des soupçons de dessein politique, d'hypersensibilité et de tentative de démagogie !* Who has unashamedly made a big U-turn? The Deputy Prime Minister and his sheer hypocrisy! Today, the statements of the DPM on financing of political parties are nothing but a soap opera. This is hypocrisy at its crescendo. And he wants to put us before our responsibility, which we are assuming, but from which he has run away!

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us look at section 9 - Prohibited political donations, section 10 - Suspicious donations in the Bill. Compelling indeed! The clauses enable us to walk down the lane to recall the dirty deeds of the MSM. There is still a conspiracy of silence over the war chest of the MSM. If there is sincerity of purpose, as I have stated in my opening speech, if there is honesty of purpose, the Prime Minister, as mover of the Bill, should set the right example and disclose, Mr Speaker, Sir. Of course, transparency or accountability has never been the mantra of this regime. Say loud and clear, Mr Prime Minister, that there is no proceeds of crime in the war chest, that there is no drug money. But who expects the Financial Crimes Commission to investigate? Certainly not the political arm of the Executive! It is not the Attorney General who will say otherwise, irrespective whether he is in the *chassé* or in the office. Sooner than expected, not in power.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the then Prime Minister and Leader of MSM in mid-90s said in this very House that he unknowingly took drugs money donated by a well-known drug trafficker. The Prime Minister claimed he never received the Rs10 m. from the self-proclaimed Advisor, Mr J.M.L.S. Of course, the latter donated more in cash and kind.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. The hon. Member is making an allegation that I have received money from Mr so and so. He has to prove what he is saying. Otherwise, I can also say a lot of nonsense about him. So, I move that he withdraws what he has said, unless he can substantiate what he is saying in this House!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you are going too far. You started well. You are going too far, and I think that you will not be able to substantiate whatever you are saying. So, you better withdraw this allegation and apologise and continue your speech.

Dr. Boolell: If you want me to withdraw, I am simply echoing what the hon. gentleman has stated; if I can call him honourable!

Mr Speaker: No! Listen!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Okay, you want me to...

Mr Speaker: Do not take my time! Either you withdraw or you withdraw from the House!

Dr. Boolell: You know, there is no need to threaten. You want me to withdraw?

Mr Speaker: I do not want any explanation!

Dr. Boolell: Okay, I withdraw. I withdraw!

Mr Speaker: The Chair only rules!

Dr. Boolell: I withdraw! To please the Chair, I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: No! Not to please me, but the House!

Dr. Boolell: Alright! Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: There are rules and regulations in the House!

Dr. Boolell: Okay, I bow to your rules and regulations.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Sir!

Dr. Boolell: Now, I am going to quote what a political analyst has stated. A political analyst has openly stated that the regime has more than Rs4 billion to give away. There are those who will take or send them packing. Now, what is the provision in the Bill? A recurrent fine of Rs5 m. as stipulated in the Bill is chicken feet, if ever the MSM and its appendages were to be sanctioned. It is hypothetical, I agree, and hypocritical, but we all know that it will never happen because the Bill will not sail through.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us look at international support. Financing of political parties is something for the next Government to introduce, and we shall move the legislation. The IDA, the EU and the US have sent strong signals that financing of political parties should be regulated by way of legislation. IDA, with whom I had a meeting, is willing to dispense technical support. Of course, I exchanged views with the representative of IDA and I put across the views of the Opposition very forcefully, and I take it for granted convincingly. I said we are all for legislation

to regulate financing of political parties, but it cannot happen on the threshold of a general election and not prior to wide discussion at the bar of public opinion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as an Opposition and soon Government to be, we will enter into effective negotiation with all willing parties and the people to regulate financing of political parties. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will make sure that no one is left out. It will be a priority. Together with PACE and Freedom of Information Act, we will feature it prominently in our programme. Let me put things with a historical perspective. At page 5 of Presidential Address in October 2000, it was stated –

“41. Government will introduce a Public Funding of Political Parties Bill with a view to promoting sound, dynamic and lively democracy and eliminating the risks of corruption and influence peddling.”

The mover of the Bill had never any intention to act in good faith. There was no discussion at the bar of public opinion and there has never been any discussion since 2015; I am talking of effective discussion. But because they have been too busy harassing, intimidating political opponents and making money, it is, of course, the best Government which money can buy. When the Bill was moved prior to the General Elections of 2019, there was unanimous decision taken by all Members of the Opposition to refer the Bill to a Select Committee. But then, the then Government turned its back on the offer of the Opposition! It is not hon. Ganoo or MP Abbas Mamode who will say otherwise. They were fully supportive.

A Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, which has failed lamentably to wage war on a parallel economy laced with hard-core drugs has no sense of duty. This Bill, as I have stated, is a mere eyewash. The MSM was indifferent to proposals of Professor Sachs and his team. The latter had made pragmatic proposals in 2002. The findings of the 2001-2002 report have to be considered carefully. I will refer to a document which *Lalit* published on the funding of political parties on 16 January 2002, and it highlighted the possible influence of big business on Government policy. It is good to quote what *Lalit* stated –

“The relationship between big business and political parties represents one the major crises of modern liberal democracies. There is now ample evidence that in many countries,

including Mauritius, there is a dubious relationship, to say the least, between big business and mainstream political parties (...)"

The relationship between the regime and the big business is big business. Are you surprised that the Annex to the Budget and Finance Bill makes provision to entertain the setting up of a graphite refinery project in the Freeport? For a few dollars more, the regime can ignite a time bomb. Let me quote an excerpt from an interview given by a financial analyst –

“The MIC has allowed the private sector to privatize gains while socializing losses via Rupee depreciation.”

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, you have a Bill here!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I am referring to the contribution made by the private sector.

Mr Speaker: Yes, but you are referring to political or what economic analysis. Refer to the Bill that is in front of you! Go ahead!

Dr. Boolell: I am talking of profits which were deposited in the war chest of the regime. What is wrong with that?

Mr Speaker: Okay! I will stop you where you go wrong. Do not worry.

Dr. Boolell: Alright, thank you very much. I am glad that you have acceded to what I have said.

The report of the Select Committee on funding of political parties was submitted in October 2004. It was chaired by the then hon. Leung Shing QC who was Attorney General. There are three of the nine members who are sitting Members of the House today. The MMM since then never deemed it fit to have wide discussions on the relevance of the recommendation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Labour-led Government in 2005 gave priority to the Law Reform Commission as proposed by Lord Mackay. In 2013, the Labour-led Government produced a paper on “Modernising the Electoral System”. It is unfortunate that the alliance Labour-MMM was not successful at the election of 2014. Otherwise, electoral reform and financing of political parties would have been addressed. As we say, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

This Bill before us is a red herring, an eyewash, another instance of social engineering, a way from distracting us from the real issues. There is a cost of living crisis and financial bubble which will turn our credit ratings into a junk status. It is worse than a black comedy rooted in the tragic realities of a decadent regime. An all-out internal conflict is brewing within the rank and file of this Government, and it is not the Deputy Speaker or the Leader of the ML who will contradict me. They are dagger drawn, Mr Speaker, Sir. The DPM and his Militant Platform is falling flat on its face. The MSM and its renegades will bend backwards to use the resources from the war chest in a vain attempt to buy votes. People are not dupes! Voters will strike back with a vengeance to overthrow the stinking regime at the ballot box. The regime will bite its dirty bullet.

The Ministers are giving the nation a foretaste of electoral bribery with lavish distribution of goods from dirty money – dirty money from betting, fixing horse racing, bribery and corruption. Do we have a Gambling Regulatory Authority which can act...

Mr Speaker: You are going out of the Bill! Talk on the Bill, not GRA or whatever you are talking about!

Dr. Boolell: But FSC is mentioned in the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Don't insist! I know what I am telling you, and you know what I am telling you!

Dr. Boolell: Alright.

Let me come to crowdfunding. Certainly, it is not crowdfunding which has been raised by the regime and it is not crowdfunding money which is in the war chest of the MSM. But when we talk of suspicious donation, it has to apply to all political parties. That is why I insist, and I make a plea to the Prime Minister to disclose and to tell us whether proceeds which have been deposited into the war chest are clean and neat proceeds. What I ask is a legitimate question. What is good for the Labour Party is equally good for all political parties, and disclosure is mandatory. And, up to now, they have failed and they have failed abysmally to disclose. We do not know what they also have overseas.

An hon. Member: Of course not!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the right to stand as a candidate is a constitutional right. Any attempt to amend the Representation of People Act to foil the democratic process will be anti-constitutional. I ask the regime to stay away and not to use the tyranny of numbers to exercise undue pressure. Game for vengeance, harassment and threat is the political yardstick. But what has been the fate of the main agent of the MSM in Constituency No. 8? He wanted to talk on manipulation of vote, on vote buying, on corrupt practices, but he was...

Mr Speaker: I will stop you here! You are talking about electoral practices and we are talking of something else here!

Dr. Boolell: ...I am not talking of... I am talking of what...

Mr Speaker: Don't discuss! Stick to the Bill!

Dr. Boolell: Alright. You want me to stick to the Bill? You do not want me to ascertain, okay.

Mr Speaker: Stick to the Bill!

Dr. Boolell: Okay.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the financing of the Labour Party, as I have stated, is public knowledge. But then, people within the rank and file of the Labour Party did not keep company with the likes of Agliotti, Dr. Sobrinho. And it is important that I say so because these people are called upon to make hefty contribution to the war chest of the Party in power. What are we proposing? The hon. DPM has asked what we are proposing. We are proposing the setting up of a Serious Fraud Office which will act vigorously and independently, and funding of political parties has to be justified. A Labour-led alliance will introduce the legal framework. It will be a people's legislation and it will be the subject of wide discussion at the bar of public opinion, transparency and accountability with no yacht donors' provisions. And as I said, nothing will be imposed; nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House can rest assured; we will be mindful and watchful. The Office of the Electoral Commission and the Supervisory Commission is expected to be more diligent. It has to be given all the means. The constant breakthrough in digital technology has its merits, but the Electoral Commission must not be caught off-guard. The Electoral Commissioner has given firm assurances that ID card and passport will be used to identify voters, and I hope there will be no pressure borne upon the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Commissioner from the Government House or Le Réduit to change course. The Electoral Commissioner together with the Electoral Supervisory Commission are the sole master to steer the electoral process, more so from dissolution of Parliament, till the results are pronounced and electoral returns made. The people will never forgive nor forget that MSM in Government from 2014 to 2024 is a blatant mistake, an act of fraudulent practice. It has to go, and the people are calling for a snap election.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, with this Bill, *la montagne aura accouché d'une souris*. In other words, this Bill, which is largely repetitive of its 2019 version, is in essence ill-timed and must not be adopted by this House.

Thank you very much.

Mr Toussaint: *Li'nn bliye macaroni la!*

Mr Speaker: I now call hon...

(Interruptions)

Silence!

I now call hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

(7.04 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you very much to allow me to bring my contribution to this extremely important piece of legislation, and I start by congratulating the hon. Prime Minister for his usual unwavering and his usual ironclad commitment to genuinely regulate political financing in a bid to strengthen transparency, integrity in our political landscape.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I think one of the words that he used at the very beginning of his intervention was a 'mockery'. Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, through you, I would like to tell the House what exactly is a mockery. Is the hon. Leader of the Opposition actually serious when he uttered the words 'a mockery'? What is a mockery, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Leader of the Opposition is citing the gold standards of IDEA, and yet, when we bring this Bill to Parliament, they have already announced to the population that they will not be voting for it. What is a mockery, Mr Speaker, Sir? The selective memory of that Leader of Opposition because he seems or *essaye de faire croire* that the Political Financing Bill is coming to Parliament only today. This Bill was brought in 2015, again, in 2019. As a matter of fact, today, it is in the House, having taken into consideration all the shortcomings that were raised by the Opposition. So, to me, this is a mockery that the Leader of Opposition is making reference to.

The Leader of the Opposition went on asking the hon. Leader of the House to disclose the sources of funding. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should in the first place ask his Leader to disclose the sources of the fresh, uncirculated dollar bills that the population recalled *pe grene depi dan kof-for*, instead of coming and asking the Leader of the House to disclose sources.

Another thing that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned during his discourse, all the Bills that come to this House, all measures and policies that the hon. Prime Minister and this Government brings in a bid again to regulate matters, to bring more transparency, to align ourselves closer to our democratic principles, all of them are questioned. Why are they questioned, Mr Speaker, Sir?

When it comes to this Bill in particular, they have already gone and made it very clear that they are not going to be voting. What is not clear in this Political Financing Bill? As far as I know, it is not in Latin, it is not in Greek. Why have the Members of the Opposition Party only voted against or not stood in favour of political financing? What is the real motive? The same thing applies for Lam Shang Leen Report, Drug Trafficking, Anti-Money Laundering. Allow me to rephrase it. Is there some kind of linkage between the Drug Trafficking, between Political Financing which explains why this Opposition refuses to stand by the side of transparency? It's a

question, Mr Speaker, Sir, that through you, I put to the House and to the population. What do they have to hide?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke about selective memory. Allow me to jog the memory of the Leader of the Opposition. Why was it that when the Select Committee on the funding of political parties invited all political parties to submit memoranda on that subject of political funding, only one party responded, Mr Speaker, Sir? Only one party – the MSM, we responded. Where were you? And you talk about selective memory? This is selective memory from the part of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is quite clear, it is plain that they are trying to conceal, to hide something from the population. What is it that they are hiding? This august Assembly is the platform, the platform for discussions to bring relevant changes, Mr Speaker, Sir. And when we bring matters, we bring acts of Parliaments, bills to be debated. In that bid, the Opposition is absconding.

Why, Mr Speaker, Sir? The why is very important. *Comme le dit si bien, il n'est pas là aujourd'hui, l'honorable Assirvaden, le peuple a le droit de savoir. Pourquoi ?* We want answers, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is it of the very clear connection of the PTR Leader, of the Members sitting in Opposition, is it because in connection with the seizure of assets? *La question se pose, M. le président.* Because the issue we are debating today indeed is about dubious political financing. Dubious! We are here to once and for all do away with money-laundering when it comes to money in politics and I must admit I am fair while they were in power, Opposition Parties, they did, in fact, commission a few reports here and there but what was the outcome? What was the total sum of those reports on election reform? *Rien! Nothing! Zero!* The outcome was zero! So, we see a lot of *koz koze. Action zéro comme d'habitude, M. le président.*

The House and the population are not going to forget, they will recall very vividly that these bills have failed in August 2019. They have failed because they lacked the support from the Opposition. The Prime Minister even replied to a PQ of my colleague hon. Luchmun Roy in April last year and with your permission, I will quote the reply from Hansard, the reply from the hon. Prime Minister, I quote –

“However, the first concrete attempt in our political history to introduce a Political Financing Bill into the National Assembly to regulate the financing of political parties was made in 2019. In fact, the genesis of this Bill can be traced back to December 2015 when

Government, under the prime ministership of Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, had set up a Ministerial Committee to make recommendations on several important aspects of our electoral system. The terms of reference of the Ministerial Committee were, amongst others, to make proposals on electoral reform with a view to introducing a dose of Proportional Representation in the National Assembly and proposing a draft Financing of Political Parties Bill.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister further goes on to say –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, regrettably, both Bills could not secure a three-quarter majority as required by section 47(2)(b) of the Constitution, as the Opposition parties voted against the enactment of the Bills.

In fact, after the rejection of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill in 2018, this turned out to be the second time that the Opposition boycotted prominent attempts at electoral reform...”

End of quote, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, the Opposition should refrain, the Leader of the Opposition, in particular, should refrain from making as if this is the first time he is coming across this kind of Bill brought by us, brought by this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is obvious, like I said earlier on. They have already told the whole world that they are not going to be voting for this Bill. In fact, my very humble opinion is that they don't have the moral right today to sit in judgement after having let the whole country know their stand on this matter that they will not vote for transparency, they will not vote for fairness, they will not vote for accountability on the financing of political parties. We know; we heard them in the press, we heard them everywhere, the people have heard them. The \$64 question is why will they not vote? Why won't they vote, Mr Speaker, Sir? Not for the *farfelu* reasons that have been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition just now and definitely not for the reasons that the Leader of MMM has desperately tried to put forward during his press conferences. He spoke about the timing. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not about the timing. What it is is a deliberate and a systematic boycott of any legislative provisions for political financing.

Political financing, Mr Speaker, Sir, a continued inability to govern this aspect of practical politics; it jeopardises the very concept of political democracy, Mr Speaker, Sir. If we do not enact this, if we do not pass this legislation, we are going to widen avenues, keep them open for political parties to receive dubious financing either whether it is by way of bank cheques as we all remember, *on se rappelle du fameux cheque de 10 million sous-tapis*, all those narco-dollars, those fresh unpacked dollar bills for supposedly financing their political campaigns...

(Interruptions)

Ekoute la, taler ou dir mwa!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come back to the 'why'? Why will they not vote?

(Interruptions)

Perhaps, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opposition does not want to consolidate our democracy.

In fact, I recall, on so many occasions, Members of the other side, especially hon. Ms Anquetil, *qui tout le temps termine son discours avec* "the next Prime Minister of this country will be Navinchandra Ramgoolam, we will be in power". Hon. Leader of the Opposition has just said they are going to be forming the next Government. The decent thing would have been vote today when, if God forbid, you do form Government, you amend. *Non mai ou pa p fer li*. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is called *la démagogie*. In fact it is cowardice, you are absconding from your responsibilities and let me for one second, Mr Speaker, Sir, put the Opposition on the back stove. The country remembers, this House remembers various manifestation, *les marches pacifiques*, groups of people wearing masks, groups of people brandishing *pancarte* outside Parliament, inside Parliament, *les extraparlémentaires*, where are they? *Les sections spécifiques de la presse*, *les certains medias*, where are they? Why isn't a single one of those groups of people questioning the Opposition on their position? Why are the chattering classes not questioning this acutely undemocratic decision by Members of the Opposition of not voting for this bill? Where are all the think tanks? *Les politologues*, where are the leaders of opinion? *Les centaines de manifestants*, where are they? *Chup Chap! Zone tuite, comme dit l'honorable Ganoo - tuite*. It is a deafening silence, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In fact, it's a very sad day for democracy and this is one of the reasons why they are not voting. The decision is on par for the cause because amongst other reasons which I will come into very shortly. One of the reasons is, if they do vote for this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is going to shatter *leur* alliance, it going to shatter their coalition which is already hanging by a bare thread. They are used to saying "*dan ICU*". This is called being in ICU, Opposition and your famous alliance. *Pa ICU, sanla direk dan la morgue ! Lopozişion dan la morgue !*

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am coming back to the Bill. In a bid to prevent corruption and to promote transparency, it is critical for any government and it is an ongoing effort that requires commitment from all stakeholders. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has given chapter and verse on the provisions of this Bill, about how it is going to be creating a level playing field for all contenders. As a matter of fact, these two Bills are historic for our country, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Accountability remains a compelling object of this Bill. It is going to prevent corruption which often results from unchecked political funding, it is going to tackle the issue of political money laundering and I will stress on the issue of political money laundering by adding some flesh to the bones by citing a very live issue in our country.

An issue which we have witnessed, we have all lived and breathed together. Mr Speaker, Sir, *le peuple* will recall that Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the leader of *l'alliance de l'autre côté*, the leader of PTR party, former Prime Minister of Mauritius, has been allegedly charged with conspiracy and money laundering in 2015. We will recall that just after the general elections of 2014, during a search at his residence, Police coming across coffers filled with Rs220 m. in cash. We will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, most of it in foreign currencies, *s'il vous plaît !*

We will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam ultimately being led from his home in handcuffs, Mr Speaker, Sir. According to the leader of the PTR – here I am going to table something that is already in public domain, extracts from famous newspapers – the funds came from lawful contributions made to the Labour party. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very fair and I will try to give him some credit. I admit that Dr. Ramgoolam made some effort to refute the allegations made against him.

Again, I refer to the article which was published on 17 September 2016 with a title ‘*Ramgoolam: la provenance des Rs200 million peut être expliquée.*’ Then, there is the article that goes to say that “Dr. Ramgoolam believes in justice,” [in the truth, *dans la vérité*] and « *si nous récupérons cet argent, nous irons de l’avant avec le nouveau Quartier Général. Voilà la vérité.* » Talking about part of it was his *per diem*, he stated that the dollars, uncirculated dollars, came from his *per diem*. *Eoula! C’est incroyable, M. le président!* I am sure the population agrees with me.

I could see when the Leader of Opposition was intervening before I took the mic, I could see his discomfort. I can see because maybe somewhere you do have a conscience *qui vous interpelle aujourd’hui*. I am going to come to the MMM party as well because they are the ones who claim to have *latet haute, lamain prop*. You are bed fellows today, I have said it in this House, I repeat it, MMM is bed fellows. *Ou p apendan ek langouti de Navinchandra Ramgoolam* and his coffers today!

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a shame! This case, I have brought it up because it is more relevant to political financing because in April 2024 to be precise, the same Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam was charged under the FIAMLA on no less than 23 counts pertaining to overpayments. He allegedly got cash payments to the tune of Rs63.8 m. in cash *s’il vous plaît* between January 2009 and February 2015, over a 6 year period to be precise. Behold again, what is the strategy? After all these years, he is still maintaining *le droit de silence*. Mr Speaker, Sir, I know it is a right. The population will also draw their inference from this deafening silence of a former Prime Minister charged with money laundering, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, *droit de silence* in this august House today to those very Members of Opposition, you are aiding and abetting that kind of leader by maintaining this conspiracy of silence, Mr Speaker, Sir!

An hon. Member: *Arvin pa dakor li !*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Qui se ressemble s’assemble, peut-être! In this Assembly today...

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order! This case is still pending before a court of law and the person has a defence. You are allowing this Member of Parliament under the

privilege of parliamentary immunity to speak and give her opinion on the defence of someone who is being tried before a court of law. Is this allowed?

Mr Speaker: Let me give you my reply. She's quoting the very defence – I should not say hon. Member – that that leader of the party has given. She is stating facts of that defence, coming from that defence. Nothing more, nothing less!

Mr Ramful: She is not a judge! She is not a judge!

Mr Speaker: No! You are not the judge also. Your point of order is over! Your point of order is over, please! You are a lawyer; you know what I am saying! You are a lawyer! First of all, obey the rule. Continue!

Mr Toussaint: Relax! Relax!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: If I may, Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, all this is in public domain. I am not making reference to the judicial determination of the case. Come on! The learned Member should know about what I am saying. So, I am talking about abetting and aiding that kind of leader by keeping quiet, by helping him *dan so droit de silence*. So, it is not a wonder that today, this Bill is coming, is sounding like a pistol shot under your neck, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that goes to the Members of Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opposition Members have chosen and they have made their choice public, they have made it known that they are not going to vote. They are not going to vote for this legislation, but their leader, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, had the audacity to seek our courts of justice regarding electoral petitions. They are going to vote for this legislation, but the former Prime Minister Dr. Navin Ramgoolam went as far as the Privy Council, not to mention that each time they have failed lamentably. *Zot inn gagn klak national, international tou !* But when it comes to voting, *kan ena pou vote*, they are not here, Mr Speaker, Sir! *Zot sove, zot tchuit !*

Mr Speaker, Sir, they run away, and I reiterate, this is cowardness. The Leader of the Opposition as well as previous Leader of Opposition as well as Members of that Opposition, on so many past occasions, have made allusions that this Government, the hon. Prime Minister, Members of Government, have a hidden agenda. Hidden agenda? Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will disclose what is the hidden agenda here. Allow me to explain what could be

potentially the hidden agenda of hon. Paul Bérenger, his hidden agenda for not voting for the Political Financing Bill all the way back in 2019. Mr Speaker, Sir, I took the time to go and look for it, the answer is found in the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister on the Financing Bill in August 2021.

The answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, is found – I took the time to go and look for it – the answer is found in the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister on the Finance Bill in August 2021, and I quote –

« Comme je disais auparavant, peut-être en l’absence surtout du MMM, c’est connu, M. le président, que le président du MTCSL, un certain J. M. G., que je disais très proche du MMM, est un membre du MMM; il est très, très proche de son Leader (...) »

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister goes on saying –

« Dans la presse, ça n’est pas rapporté comme ça, mais il faut que je rapporte, fidèle aux principes parlementaires – « J. M. G., ancien directeur de ... » d’une compagnie qui s’appelle U.B.P. (...) est intervenu sur une plateforme politique ... » M. le président.

« (...) Un meeting politique du MMM ; et il est également intervenu... »

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister goes on, in Hansard, to state –

« Donc, comme je disais, il avait travaillé sur le manifeste électoral en marge des élections de novembre 2019, et qui plus est, la compagnie où Monsieur J. M. G. était CEO, renfloue régulièrement les caisses du MMM. ».

Mr Speaker, Sir, has the agenda become clearer? Is the agenda now a bit more apparent? Now, we understand. Now the population will recall and understand why the Leader of MMM asked not to vote for the Finance Bill in 2019 and even the members of the Labour Party did not vote in favour of the Bill at that time. Is the Opposition suffering from amnesia now?

Mr Speaker, Sir, these undemocratic behaviours have zero justification, and any attempt to justify this time is going to amount to the last straw in the political career of the MMM and, by extension, that of the leader of the PTR and all their nefarious associates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, I wish to say, and this is a known fact, each party, be it the PTR, MMM, or the respective parties on the government side, we all have a philosophy.

We all have a history, Mr Speaker, Sir. And allow me to say it very bluntly, quite loudly too, that after each defeat in a general election, the MMM comes forward to ask for new legislation on electoral reform, on political fundraising, on accountability, on fairness and equal participation. And the Bill we are debating today, Mr Speaker, Sir, contains all these provisions. This is what the hon. Prime Minister comes in this House to do, asking us to vote, to guarantee campaign finance transparency by enforcing, precisely, laws to govern political fundraising. Nothing else!

Again, what comes to mind when I hear of the Members, the Leader of Opposition, again I will reiterate my demand from earlier on. You say you are going to form the next government, show some good grace by voting now and the amending if ever you do come into power. That would be the right democratic, patriotic action to do. *Il ne faut pas faire la démagogie!*

And from here, Mr Speaker, Sir, before I close my speech, again, I will come to the MMM – destitute MMM. I know for a fact that most of them, most of the Members of MMM, they agree to the Political Financing Bill. They do, because as a matter of fact it is your baby, it is their baby, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The MMM who has spent years talking about this much needed legislation. I look at them today and I know some of them, somewhere, the cages of their conscience are being rattled, *mais ki pou fer, pe bizin pez nene bwar Lysol, bwar delwil* because they are in coalition *avek gran frer ti frer ek bofere, demi ser, mo pa kone. Pe bizin fer plezir!*

Mr Speaker, Sir, through you, I speak to those MMM Opposition members. Through you, I speak to the population, but in particular, to the MMM members. You are throwing away your own baby by not voting for this Bill. You are abandoning your brain-child by not voting for this Bill. *Kifer just pour sauve face vis-à-vis de leur partenaire d'alliance, le parti Travailleiste, pou zot kapav sauve kotion du parti Travailleiste*, this is what the MMM has become today!

Can the House, can Mauritius – *les Militants, où sont les militants coltar?* Would they believe and condone such actions from the MMM? I am a MMM child, I grew up as a child with *les valeurs Militantes*. Is this what the MMM has been reduced to today? *Où sont passé ces grandes valeurs Militantes, M. le Président?*

But, worry not, *heureusement*, we have the hon. Prime Minister who is not only going to *deklar to piti*, he is also going to nurture it, he is going to *grandi li*. So, no worries, at least we have the comfort of having a strong Prime Minister *ki pa kile* in front of his responsibilities.

I am truly concluding now, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will share a last thing with the Members on the other side of the House. In fact, I am reiterating. What I felt was a very humble, heartfelt plea, invitation from the hon. Mover of this Bill earlier on today.

Le Premier ministre a invité les membres de l'opposition, let us put it like that, we talk in the context of the Champion Leagues which is happening at the moment, so many interesting matches being played. The Prime Minister is giving the Opposition a chance for a rematch. You are given a chance for a rematch; do not pass up on this chance because history, Mr Speaker, Sir, history will remember those politicians for not voting – those who are against accountability and those who are against transparency. Like I said, there are no excuses, history is going to remember them and by not voting you are actually hammering that last nail in your political coffin today! You call this a mockery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however small the step is, every journey begins with the smallest step, even the biggest or mightiest oak tree was once a nut! This Bill is going to contribute to extending the rule of law into a domain that has remained far too long immune from concepts of basic fairness, transparency and accountability. Let us see, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us see who wants to be remembered for creating history and let us see who is going to end up in the ash heap of history, that is *dans la poubelle de l'histoire*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I will finish by saying that your silence, the silence of the Opposition Members, *avec tou zot leader so droit de silence et tout*, sometimes the silence in itself is an answer and the population has heard your answer. You are going to hear the population's answer *très, très bientôt!*

Long live the Republic of Mauritius! Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank everybody for their attention.

Mr Speaker: I will now call hon. Dhunoo!

(6.36 p.m.)

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all thank the Prime Minister for bringing this Bill again to the House as it was brought before. The object of this Bill is to make provision for accountability and transparency with regards to political financing with a view to promoting a levelled field, ensuring a fair competition and preventing improper influence and corruption. These two Bills, Mr Speaker, Sir, are being debated together today, but we need to bear in mind that these are two different Bills. One is the Constitution (Amendment) Bill and the other one is the Political Financing Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to regulate for political financing has been long overdue, as stated earlier by the Prime Minister. In 2002, the issue was included in the terms of reference of the Sachs Commission which made recommendation on this matter and also drafted a Bill. Subsequently, a Select Committee under the Chair of Mr Emmanuel Leung Shing Q.C. was set up in April 2002. A report was submitted by the Select Committee in October 2004, but nothing was implemented.

On 09 July 2019, the previous government, under the able leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, presented the Constitution (Amendment) Bill (No. XIII of 2019) and the Political Financing Bill (No. XIV of 2019) were again presented in this august Assembly and were debated. It has to be noted, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it was the first time that a government brought a Bill on political financing. Unfortunately, it was not voted.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, if it was done at that time, it would have fulfilled one of our important international and regional obligation in relation to political financing namely under the United Nation Convention Corruption and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption. As stated by the hon. Prime Minister Article 10 of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, which Mauritius signed in 2003 but gratified in 2018, these two Bills to the House today will ensure maximum transparency and accountability and financial control of our political parties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister is absolutely right in his engagement that he has taken on behalf of the people of Mauritius to bring politics clean. We are not talking about public

funding, Mr Speaker, Sir, this does not form part of the Bill. Previously it has been debated, but in other countries, for example, in the European Parliament, if this Bill had been voted in 2019 maybe we could have come to it and we would say in the gist of Mauritius, it would have been adopted because we know that the Mauritian population would not be agreeable that we use tax payers' money for political financing. But in other countries it is different, but Mr Speaker, Sir, let's talk about donation. The rules for donation, let's see what the situation is now.

As it is now, Mr Speaker, Sir, anyone can make a donation. There is no requirement like in a bank, like a KYC – Know Your Customer. There is no requirement that should ask questions especially at election time, there is a pressure on political parties for financing. We know that with this law now, like we say *baz* will be controlled and the pressure is being dealt here by banning certain forms of donation. At this point, Mr Speaker, Sir, I know what is disturbing the opposition. It is the clause 10. I think my hon. colleague who spoke before me, hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah, has given a lengthy explanation about it but suspicious donation is perhaps the central question in that part of the Bill.

A registered political party or a member or a candidate cannot accept a donation that he knows or ought reasonably to have known, is a donation which originates from the proceeds of a crime. And that party, member or candidate, as the case may be, shall in such case report the matter to the relevant investigatory body. That is a rule that now applies to the general law, to certain professions when you receive money such as barristers, attorneys, members of the legal professions, banks, insurances. When receiving money, first of all, they cannot receive in cash or more than a certain amount of Rs500,000, but we have witnessed in 2014 through the TV, we have seen in the coffers, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have also seen Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to donation from private sectors.

The Opposition has to be very careful when thinking about this Bill. When voting for the Bill, you're making clear that BAI situation can no longer arise like it had been in the past when the international organisations since 2013 were saying what the issue is with the BAI but nothing has been done since then Mr Speaker, Sir. But suspicious donation can no longer happen when you vote against this Bill. It means, what we are saying, we have no problem with leaving the situation as it is now because now, we have to go to general law in order to know whether a donation is suspicious or not. That is a huge matter. What is important in that Bill is that the

Commission is given the power to report suspicious donation to the investigatory bodies like the FCC, like the FIU and other institutions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not have any legal framework for political financing and, this Bill is what we need and we have to move forward Mr Speaker, Sir. If you want to see Mauritius moving forward and tomorrow if you want to see who has donated – like it is being done in Canada. For instance, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you want to know who has donated to which member or which party, you can do it electronically. Once the return will be made, like has been said in this Bill, the person can see who has donated and what is done electronically.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am inviting the Opposition members to vote for this Bill because we have to move forward, and I would like to quote, Mr Kofi Anann,–

“Poorly regulated political finance can diminish political equality, provide opportunities for organised crimes to purchase political influence and undermine public confidence in elections. Indeed a failure to regulate political finances threatens to hollow our democracy and robs it of its unique strength.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you want to move forward, we have to be truthful to ourselves. Earlier, I heard the Leader of the Opposition when I read his speech in 2019, he said the same thing that we are going to lose the election. Let me quote what he said, he said that “we are going to be lynched; we are going to lose” but Mr Speaker, Sir, we know what the result of the election in 2019 was. The people out there are intelligent, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Mauritian people know what they are doing and they know what they want.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am inviting the Opposition Members to vote for this Bill. If they are serious about it and they want a proper framework for political financing, I am inviting them to vote for this Bill.

On this note, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are my remarks. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Rawoo!

(6.45 p.m.)

Dr. I. Rawoo (Third Member for Rivère des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Speaker, Sir, I take the floor and I speak on behalf of the hon. Third Member for Stanley & Rose-Hill, who is unable to speak on this Bill for reasons beyond his control.

The Leader of the ML has asked me to state clearly that the ML supports this Bill, and he will be present at time of voting. As the Deputy Leader and spokesperson of the ML, I can state that we have discussed the provisions of this Bill to address the matter of paramount importance for the future of our democracy – the Constitution (Amendment) Bill which seeks to bring about significant reforms in political financing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before diving deep into the debate, I would like to commend our Prime Minister, Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for his courageous leadership and genuine commitment to these reforms. His vision for a transparent and accountable political system is evident in the bold step he has taken to propose this Bill. I am proud to say that we, at the *Muvman Liberator*, unanimously support the government and the Prime Minister in this endeavor. Our unity on this issue underscores the importance of these reforms and our commitment to ensuring the success. This collaboration within the government reflects our sheer dedication to strengthening our democracy.

M. le président, l'objectif principal de ce projet de loi est d'instaurer une plus grande responsabilité et transparence dans le financement politique. Avant de plonger dans les détails et l'importance de ce projet de loi, permettez-moi d'aborder une question clé. Pourquoi les dons politiques provenant des citoyens non-résidents y compris notre diaspora doivent être interdits ? L'inclusion des citoyens non-résidents dans la liste de ceux qui ne peuvent faire des dons politiques visent à prévenir la corruption internationale et à protéger la réputation de notre pays.

M. le président, avant d'aller en profondeur, je tiens à préciser que mes propos sont basés sur des faits réels, sans attaques personnelles ni allégations infondées. M. le président, il est crucial de rappeler les événements passés qui ont entaché l'image de notre nation sur la scène internationale. L'affaire tristement célèbre du coffre-fort et des dollars du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam est un exemple frappant.

M. le président, nous ne pouvons pas discuter de la réforme du financement politique sans aborder le cas notoire de l'ancien Premier ministre, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam. Pour ceux qui ont

oublié, rappelons-nous les 220 millions retrouvés dans le coffre-fort de l'ancien Premier ministre, dont 3,16 millions de dollars américains, environs R 150 millions. Le Dr. Ramgoolam à cette époque a affirmé à la police qu'il avait reçu ces dollars de l'étranger en guise de financement politique, sans révéler les sources exactes. Cette opacité soulève de sérieuses questions sur l'origine et la destination de ces fonds, suscitant d'importantes préoccupations quant à leur légitimité et leur finalité.

M. le président, les enquêtes ont révélé que ces dollars avaient transité par deux banques allemandes, à Chicago et à New-York, avant d'être livrés à Maurice. Ces billets n'ont jamais été mis en circulation dans les circuits bancaires et c'est sans précédent. En 2017, même le FBI s'est impliqué dans l'enquête révélant les noms des banques allemandes.

M. le président, de telles quantités de nouvelles devises non circulées nécessitent généralement l'implication des banques centrales et des mesures de sécurité strictes, pourtant elles ont été trouvées dans une résidence privée. Les liasses des billets scellés retrouvées au domicile du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam sont généralement émises par les banques centrales des pays respectifs et transportées par voie maritime ou aérienne. Une fois à Maurice, ces billets sont transportés sous une forte escorte à la banque centrale.

Cependant, le Dr. Ramgoolam a été trouvé en possession de plusieurs paquets contenant chacun 1 000 unités, des billets de 100 dollars neufs, totalisant environ 3 millions de dollars américains. Ces billets n'ont pas été intégrés dans le circuit bancaire local. Ce qui soulève des soupçons de corruption internationale. Cette découverte a mis en lumière une grave violation des protocoles financiers et suggère un lien potentiel avec des opérations internationales de blanchiment. Ces fonds n'étaient pas seulement considérables en montant, mais impliquaient également des transactions financières internationales complexes jetant un ongle sur l'intégrité de notre nation.

M. le président, l'enquête a également révélé que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, possédait deux cartes de crédit de luxe, l'*American Express Centurion*, communément appelée *Black Card*, réservée aux individus dépensant plus de 250 000 dollars par an et gagnant plus d'un million de dollars par an. Cette découverte avait même attiré l'attention de la *National Crime Agency*

(NCA) du Royaume-Uni qui avait contacté les autorités mauriciennes pour obtenir des détails sur ces cartes de crédit.

Imaginez-vous, M. le président, qui parmi nous ici même, dans cette auguste Assemblée, ou parmi les Mauriciens à fort revenus, peuvent posséder pas deux cartes, mais une seule *Black Card* et peuvent dépenser R 12 millions par an au minimum et en tout ayant un revenu de R 45 millions. 8 fois plus que la paie d'un Premier ministre pendant une année, M. le président !

M. le président, dans une interview réalisée le 18 février 2016 dans les locaux de La Sentinelle, que vous pouvez visionner en ligne et sur YouTube, qui a pour titre 'Bérenger: à bâtons rompus avec les journalistes.' Et comme principal thème, le leader de l'opposition à l'époque a abordé plusieurs sujets d'actualité avec les journalistes de La Sentinelle, des échanges francs et honnêtes dans un cadre propice au dialogue. *Rightly said so in the interview*, tout à son honneur, l'honorable Bérenger a cité une très, très belle parole, *I quote* –

« *Avan, ou koze fonn sa. Les paroles s'envolent. Aster les paroles ne s'envolent pas. Les paroles tas dan internet !* »

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have quoted that because during the interview, à une question du directeur de la rédaction de La Sentinelle à l'honorable Bérenger, *I quote* –

« *Mai ou rest Riverwalk, zame ou finn truv sa ban kofs la ou ?* »

L'honorable Bérenger a répondu avec toute honnêteté et franchise, *I quote* –

« *Pa fode ou gourma, fode ou bet ousi ou gard 2 kofs avek plis ki 220 milyon rroupi dan ou lakaz !* »

(Interruptions)

M. le président, comment cacher un coffre rempli de billets ? C'est cela que nous apprend l'honorable Bérenger, un politicien chevronné. Il faut être malin, M. président, il faut être malin quand même !

M. le président, ces tristes événements soulignent l'importance de la transparence et de la responsabilité dans le financement politique. Le peuple mauricien mérite de connaître la vérité sur l'origine de ces fonds et si ces billets ont été utilisés illicitement. En interdisant le don politique de citoyens non-résidents, nous prenons une mesure proactive pour éviter de telles situations à l'avenir.

M. le président, l'interdiction de dons politiques de citoyens non-résidents est une mesure fondamentale pour éviter que des incidents similaires ne se reproduisent. Voici les principales raisons pour lesquelles ces restrictions sont essentielles –

- (1) réduire l'influence étrangère, permettre aux citoyens non-résidents de faire des dons politiques, ouvre la porte à l'influence étrangère dans la politique nationale. Ces contributions peuvent orienter les priorités politiques et les politiques publiques vers les intérêts des donateurs étrangers plutôt que ceux de l'électorat local. En interdisant ces dons, nous garantissons que les décisions politiques restent entre les mains de ceux qui en sont directement impactés.
- (2) M. le président, c'est d'assurer la transparence et la responsabilité. L'interdiction des dons non-résidents améliore la transparence du financement politique. Il est beaucoup plus difficile de tracer l'origine des fonds étrangers, surtout lorsqu'ils passent par plusieurs juridictions avec des niveaux de contrôle réglementaire variables. Cette interdiction simplifie le processus de vérification et garantit que toutes les contributions politiques peuvent être adéquatement surveillées et examinées.
- (3) M. le président, c'est de protéger l'intégrité nationale. Maintenir l'intégrité de notre système politique est primordial. Les scandales impliquant des fonds étrangers peuvent gravement nuire à la réputation sur la scène internationale. L'affaire de l'actuel leader du Parti travailliste, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, a attiré l'attention négative des organismes internationaux, y compris le FBI et la NCA du Royaume-Uni. Prévenir des contributions des non-résidents protège Maurice d'être impliqué dans un scandale financier international et préserve la réputation de la nation.

M. le président, je m'adresse particulièrement aux membres de l'opposition, ne refusez pas de voter en faveur de cet amendement simplement parce que vous êtes dans l'opposition. Libérez-vous du syndrome de *nanye napa bon mem*. Cessez de prendre des médicaments placebos inefficaces en pensant que tout va mal. Admettez les faits. Nous savons que toutes les dépenses actuelles sont bien supérieures à celles prévues par la loi, comme mentionné dans la *Representation of the People Act* adoptée il y a des décennies, ne reflètent plus les dépenses actuelles que chaque candidat doit engager dans une circonscription. Il est donc impératif de réformer cette législation pour la rendre conforme à notre époque.

Revenons à la réalité. De plus, la réduction du nombre de bases qui font partie du folklore mauricien a favorisé les activités non-transparentes. J'ai personnellement discuté avec plusieurs membres de l'opposition et ils ont accueilli favorablement cette décision.

Il est déconcertant de constater que ces mêmes membres de l'opposition ne souhaitent pas soutenir cette proposition au Parlement. Je vous demande de cesser d'être égoïste et hypocrite votre approche. Tout n'est pas politique, tout n'est pas politique, le patriotisme est un devoir et une responsabilité. Pensez à l'intérêt général, soyez réalistes et reconnaissez l'importance de ce projet de loi. Mettez de côté les considérations partisans et votez en faveur de cette réforme nécessaire. En réglementant ces activités, nous renforçons l'intégrité de notre processus électoral.

M. le président, l'inclusion des citoyens non-résidents dans la liste de ceux qui ne peuvent faire des dons politiques vise à prévenir la corruption internationale et à protéger la réputation de notre pays. Dans une interview réalisée le 10 juin 2016 à ION News par le Dr. Ramgoolam, encore une fois, à une question du Rédacteur en chef au Dr. Navin Ramgoolam sur la loi du financement politique à Maurice, le Dr. Ramgoolam a répondu, *I quote* –

« Peut-être avec la nouvelle loi du financement politique ki bizin vote mo pense I bon lide pou bann' tou fiansman étrangères complètement. »

Which is which, M. le président? Comme l'a si bien dit son frère, l'honorable Bérenger, avant les paroles s'envolaient mais maintenant les paroles ne s'envolent pas, les paroles *tas dan internet*. Pour répondre aux commentaires, qui pourrait être jaloux de l'étreinte passionnée entre les leaders du parti Travailleurs et du MMM, car même, M. le président. Ces jours-ci, on a droit à un spectacle digne des plus grandes comédies romantiques avec des promesses, murmures à la

Macarena sous les lampadaires de Riverwalk. Peut-être entre deux accolades chaleureuses, ils trouveront le temps de s'occuper des véritables problèmes du pays.

M. le président, de ce fait, je demande aux membres de l'opposition de faire preuve de courage et de vision en soutenant ce projet de loi. Les amendements que nous proposons ne sont pas une menace pour vos aspirations politiques. Ils sont une opportunité de renforcer notre démocratie. Nous avons besoin de votre collaboration pour assurer l'adoption de ces réformes essentielles. Il est facile de critiquer et de s'opposer pour le plaisir de s'opposer. Cependant, le véritable leadership se manifeste par ceux qui peuvent dépasser les lignes partisans et travailler pour le bien commun. En soutenant ce projet de loi, vous montrerez votre engagement en faveur de la transparence, de la responsabilité et de l'intégrité de notre processus démocratique.

M. le président, pour mettre en œuvre ces réformes essentielles, il est nécessaire de modifier la Constitution. Cela nécessite l'approbation de trois quarts de l'Assemblée, un seuil qui souligne la gravité et l'importance de ces changements. Le projet de loi de modification de la Constitution est la pierre angulaire sur laquelle reposera l'amendement sur les financements politiques. Sans cette modification fondamentale, nous ne pouvons pas avancer avec les réformes nécessaires sur les financements politiques.

M. le président, les honorables membres de l'opposition doivent montrer leurs capacités à faire la différence aujourd'hui et non leurs égos. Avancez et votez ce projet de loi. Pour une fois venez écrire l'histoire en cette fin de mandat. C'est un appel que je vous lance, membres de l'opposition. Nous devons moderniser notre système pour qu'il reflète fidèlement les réalités actuelles de la campagne électorale et garantir ainsi une plus grande transparence et une meilleure gestion des dépenses.

M. le président, le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, au côté de son gouvernement, a montré un courage et un leadership exceptionnel en plaidant pour cette législation transformative. Cette démarche audacieuse démontre un fort engagement en faveur de la transparence, de la responsabilité, de l'intégrité globale du processus politique à Maurice tout en affirmant un dévouement à la réforme et à la bonne gouvernance. Principalement, M. le président, c'est d'où vient l'argent et où va l'argent. Cette initiative est particulièrement courageuse étant donnée la résistance potentielle de ceux qui profitent des pratiques financières

opaques en politique. En défendant cette cause, le Premier ministre, a privilégié l'intégrité nationale et la santé démocratique. Le gouvernement actuel a joué un rôle essentiel dans l'élaboration et le soutien de ce projet de loi. Nous, au Muvman Liberater, soutenu par l'honorable Ivan Collendavelloo, avons montré un fond unis pour promouvoir ces réformes essentielles.

L'effort collaboratif au sein du gouvernement pour concrétiser cette législation, illustre un engagement partagé en faveur de la gouvernance éthique et du bien public. M. le président, il faut aussi saluer le courage et la solidarité de l'honorable Ivan Collendavelloo et du ML qui sont un allié crucial dans cette législation. Notre soutien indéfectible au projet de loi reflète un alignement fort avec les principes de transparence et de responsabilité. La contribution d'Ivan Collendavelloo et du ML souligne notre compréhension de l'importance d'un processus électoral propre et transparent.

M. le président, malgré ses défis, le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, et son équipe ont montré une persévérance remarquable et un sens stratégique pour surmonter ces obstacles. Cela démontre non seulement une bravoure politique mais aussi un engagement profond à réformer le système politique pour le bien de la nation.

M. le président, pour conclure, j'invite tous les membres de cette honorable Assemblée à soutenir le projet de loi de la modification de la Constitution. Ces réformes sont un témoignage de notre engagement envers la démocratie, la transparence et la responsabilité. En adoptant ce projet de loi, nous franchissons une étape décisive vers un système politique plus équitable et juste. L'avenir de notre démocratie dépend des décisions que nous prenons aujourd'hui. Faisons le bon choix pour le peuple de Maurice en veillant à ce que notre système politique sert tous les citoyens de manière égale et juste. C'est un appel patriotique que je vous lance, membres de l'opposition. Travaillons ensemble au-delà des lignes partisans, au-delà des coffres-forts pour mettre en œuvre ces réformes essentielles.

Les honorables membres de l'opposition devraient oublier Riverwalk et penser aux pays. *Members of Riverwalk party*, il me semble que vous n'allez pas voter en faveur de ce projet de loi. *Marke garde, lepep pou donn' zot enn' leson biento pou zot abstention*. Je vous remercie, M. de président, pour votre qualité d'écoute au service de notre démocratie.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger!

(7.05 p.m.)

Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): M. le président, nous avons toujours été en faveur d'une loi sur le financement des partis politiques et nous le sommes plus que jamais aujourd'hui. Mais nous voulons d'une bonne loi, d'une loi digne de ce nom.

En avril 2016 déjà, le rapport d'un *Cabinet Committee* sur la réforme électorale et le financement des partis, présidé par l'honorable Xavier Luc Duval, alors Deputy Prime Minister, fut approuvé par le Conseil de ministres et envoyé au State Law Office – nous sommes donc en 2016 – pour le *drafting* d'un *Bill*, d'un projet de loi. Le *Bill* préparé par la State Law Office, arriva devant le Parlement trois ans et demi plus tard, en juillet 2019, avec des différences fondamentales avec ce que le *Cabinet Committee* avait proposé. Et cela, à la veille des élections générales de 2019. Toute l'opposition – Parti travailliste, MMM, PMSD – toute l'opposition s'exprima contre ce projet de loi et l'amendement constitutionnel qui accompagnait le *Bill* n'atteignit pas le trois quarts requis pour amender la Constitution.

Au cours des débats, l'opposition proposa avec instance un *Select Committee*, comme le leader de l'opposition l'a fait aujourd'hui. Toute l'opposition donc, proposa un *Select Committee* pour dégager un consensus, mais le gouvernement refusa. Et, le projet de loi, le *Bill* tomba dans les oubliettes. Il refait surface aujourd'hui, encore une fois à la veille des élections générales et dans une attitude du *take it or leave it* du gouvernement. Attitude qui a exclu qu'un consensus soit trouvée.

En fait, comme en 2019, le gouvernement actuel n'a pas eu une majorité de trois quarts pour amender la constitution. Il le sait et n'a rien fait pour arriver à un consensus. Au contraire, le gouvernement actuel sait qu'il n'a pas une majorité de trois quarts. Il sait que ce qu'il propose ne passera pas comme en 2019. Il sait tout cela. Le but est purement et simplement de *zet labou* et on a entendu quand nous avons écouté quelques orateurs qui ont pris la parole jusqu'à présent. Le but était et est purement et simplement de *zet labou*. C'est honteux et c'est irresponsable !

Par contre nous, nous prenons ici l'engagement une fois de plus qu'une vraie réforme électorale avec au moins un tiers de femmes sur la liste des candidats pour les élections générales

et une bonne loi, une vraie loi sur le financement des partis politiques seront parmi les priorités d'un prochain gouvernement et que cela sera réalisé dans le consensus avec toutes les consultations nécessaires. C'est l'engagement que nous prenons à nouveau devant le pays et dans cette Chambre aujourd'hui.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Lesjongard!

(7.10 p.m.)

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Merci M. le président, de me donner l'occasion d'intervenir ce soir sur le *Constitution (Amendment) Bill* et le *Political Financing Bill*.

Comme il est de coutume, M. le président, permettez-moi de féliciter le Premier ministre pour la présentation de ces deux projets de loi et permettez-moi de faire ce commentaire. Le Premier ministre se positionne comme le champion de notre démocratie ce soir, M. le président. Ces deux projets de loi sont un pas en avant pour notre démocratie et dans l'organisation des élections au sein de notre république.

Au tout début de mon intervention, je souhaiterais citer un extrait de la *United State Agency for International Development (USAID)* dans un manuel sur le financement politique: *Office of Democracy and Governance (2003) Money in Politics Handbook: A Guide To Increasing Transparency In Emerging Democracies and I quote, Mr Speaker, Sir –*

“Political finance is a vital issue for democracy, governance, and development. No matter how flawless are the country's elections, how active its civil society, how competitive its political parties, and how responsible its local authorities, the role of money in politics undeniably influences the quality of democracy and governance. Only through greater transparency will one fully understand the extent and nature of this influence.”

M. le président, pour résumer, nous pouvons avoir une belle démocratie qui marche, qui fonctionne, mais ce ne sera pas complet sans qu'il y ait de la transparence dans le système de financement des partis politiques.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since decades, this topic has been on the lips of many political leaders in our country. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, many political leaders came forward to claim that there should be a legislation that will regulate the financing of political parties. However, some persons, when in a governing position, have never ever dared to come up with such legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, on this side of this august Assembly, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, have the light and stewardship to come up with such a piece of legislation. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, again, this Government makes dreams come true. Not only have we implemented many infrastructural projects all over the island today but we have also introduced a number of legislations that we have voted in this House, and today we are bringing forward the law on political financing which will bring more transparency in our electoral systems.

On the other side, hon. Members and also political parties have said it loud that they will not vote for such a law. And the question is why? Why? Is it because we are bringing this legislation forward? *N'est-ce pas, M. le président, un cas de pure frustration ? Car sous ce gouvernement nous avons piloté des grandes réformes dans le pays.*

M. le président, malgré les balivernes de nos opposants, cette loi changera le paysage politique de la république de Maurice. Venir déclarer les sources de donation de financement ne devrait pas poser de problèmes. Au contraire, cela apportera plus de transparence.

M. le président, il est vrai de dire que les partis politiques à travers le monde doivent leur salut à des bienfaiteurs. D'ailleurs dans certaines grandes démocraties, des *crowdfundings* sont organisés afin de financer les partis et les candidats et ce projet de loi est d'une importance capitale, car elle va définir le processus démocratique et la bonne gouvernance. Cela permettra aussi de mettre en place le cadre légal nécessaire pour l'organisation des élections dans notre pays.

Ce projet de loi, M. le président, vient aussi avec des mesures sur les limites des dépenses des candidats et des partis politiques. Et, ceux qui ne voteront pas cette loi continueront à alimenter cette pratique de financement occulte. Et en ce faisant, ils empêcheront une avancée historique de notre république.

M le président, l'histoire retiendra les noms de ces gens qui ont mis un frein à l'avancement de notre démocratie. Ces mêmes personnes qui, aujourd'hui, refusent de voter cette législation crient souvent sur les toits que notre démocratie est menacée, mais quand arrive le temps d'agir et de prendre des actions concrètes, ils se sauvent devant leurs responsabilités.

M. le président, ce projet de loi vient apporter une bouffée d'oxygène. Cela est en parfaite harmonie avec le processus que le pays a enclenché avec la loi FIAMLA et surtout dans le domaine du blanchiment d'argent. Avec ce projet de loi, M. le président, nous répondons aux pratiques internationales. Nous souhaitons aussi nous positionner comme une destination sûre pour les investisseurs et avec ce projet de loi, nous démontrons notre sérieux, notre engagement et notre volonté à faire de Maurice une destination qui prône la bonne gouvernance.

La loi sur le financement des partis politiques n'est pas uniquement l'affaire des différents partis politiques. L'image de notre pays aussi en dépend. C'est un fait, M. le président, que les agences de lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent et la corruption soulèvent souvent l'importance de ces lois. La dernière lettre adressée à l'*United Nations Convention against Corruption* en décembre dernier par plus de 100 organisations mondiales démontre les inégalités causées à la société à cause du financement occulte des partis politiques pendant les élections, et je cite –

“Political finance is a pivotal issue in the fight against corruption. The integrity of democratic processes is contingent on financial transparency and accountability in politics. The lack of transparency in political finance leads to waste or misuse of often limited public resources, posing a threat to the entire sustainable development agenda.

When financial contributions to political parties, electoral campaigns, or candidates are opaque and unaccountable, this enables clientelism, fuels corruption, increases the cost of political participation and destroys trust in governments. These outcomes adversely affect public services, drive conflict and make politics an exclusive club. These negative impacts are felt most keenly by women, young people, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups.”

M. le président, en 2019, pour retourner en 2019, il y a eu la présentation du *Constitution (Amendment) Bill* et du *Political Financing Bill*. Malheureusement, il n'y a pas eu de vote après que l'opposition s'était élevée contre ces deux projets de loi.

Aujourd'hui, ce gouvernement, M. le président, fait un autre pas en avant en démontrant notre sincérité dans cette démarche, et l'opposition, de par ses positions prises, démontre clairement qu'elle a un agenda caché. Le peuple est en droit de se poser des questions sur la crédibilité que représente cette alliance rouge et mauve. M. le président, c'est facile de faire des promesses comme l'a fait l'honorable Paul Bérenger quand on est dans l'opposition. Mais de ce côté de la Chambre, nous tenons nos engagements pris avec le peuple.

Lors de leur rassemblement du 1^{er} mai, cette alliance avait annoncé 20 mesures phares de son programme. La première mesure, M. le président, permettez-moi de citer cette toute première mesure où il est dit : une vraie réforme électorale avec au moins un tiers de femmes sur la liste des candidats des partis pour les élections générales et une bonne loi sur le financement des partis politiques.

M. le président, de par l'intervention du leader de l'opposition et de l'honorable Bérenger, on comprend qu'ils veulent apporter une loi sur le financement politique. Mais la question qui reste à poser : quelle loi veulent-ils vraiment présenter ? Quelles sont leurs propositions ? À écouter l'honorable Bérenger qui a parlé avant moi où il a fait référence dans son intervention, que nous emmenons ce projet de loi au Parlement pour, comme on dit dans notre langage créole, *zet labou*. *Zet labou* sur qui ou sur quoi ? *Zet labou* sur le coffre-fort de Navin Ramgoolam qui est à quelques pas de chez lui ? Toute une population, M. le président, a vu non seulement ce coffre-fort, mais l'intérieur qui était choquant pour le peuple.

The Prime Minister: *Zet labou lor lamar!*

Mr Lesjongard: Justement ! Alors, venir dire cela aujourd'hui au Parlement comme seul argument sur un projet de loi aussi important que le financement des partis politiques, M. le président, c'est non seulement nous prendre pour des imbéciles, mais prendre toute cette population pour des imbéciles.

Nous faisons des propositions concrètes en comparaison à l'opposition. Mais ce que nous faisons aujourd'hui, c'est un premier pas en ce sens. Et il faut le dire, le financement des partis politiques n'est pas un sujet comme la réforme électorale où on sait qu'il y a certaines appréhensions. Mais je peux comprendre que certains au Parti travailliste ou au MMM ne veulent pas voter parce qu'avec ce projet de loi, ce n'est ni Ramgoolam ni Bérenger qui entrera dans l'histoire politique comme celui qui a fait voter une telle loi pour notre démocratie.

M. le président, le programme gouvernemental 2020-2024 prévoyait l'introduction d'un nouveau projet de loi sur le financement des partis politiques. Et pour faire un peu l'historique, il y a eu un comité ministériel présidé par le Premier ministre avec pour objectif de venir de l'avant avec des recommandations sur le financement des partis politiques. Il y a eu une ébauche de ce projet de loi émanant de ce comité qui a été rendue publique le 29 avril dernier sur le site web du bureau du Premier ministre afin que la population et les partis politiques puissent soumettre leurs propositions.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, de revenir sur certains points qui sont du domaine public par rapport au financement des partis politiques. Et je reprends, l'opposition ici présente et celle de 2019 aussi, ceux qui se disent démocrates affirment qu'ils ne voteront pas ce projet de loi. Il faut le dire, M. le président, ce Parlement a siégé sans grande interruption, sauf pour les vacances parlementaires. Et le gouvernement a présenté quelque 92 textes de lois depuis 2020. Et comme en toute démocratie, les membres de l'opposition ont pu participer et faire des commentaires à l'intérieur de cette auguste Assemblée, mais aussi à travers leur conférence de presse hebdomadaire. Cela démontre que nous avons une démocratie vivante.

M. le président, nous assumons nos responsabilités devant cette population. C'est la deuxième fois que ce projet de loi est présenté au Parlement, et encore une fois, cette opposition s'oppose aux changements que nous préconisons pour une élection plus propre et plus saine. Et la question, encore une fois, doit être posée ce soir, pourquoi ?

Je peux comprendre la démarche des travaillistes puisque la caisse du parti Travailliste est à Riverwalk et ils ne veulent pas que la vérité éclate sur le financement occulte dont le parti a bénéficié dans le passé, et en bénéficiera sûrement à quelques mois de ces élections.

Mais ce que j'ai du mal à comprendre et je pense que mon collègue l'honorable ministre Koonjoo-Shah a aussi fait référence à cela et je pense aussi que la population a du mal à comprendre la position du MMM sur ce sujet. Un parti qui a longtemps fait de la réforme électorale et du financement politique une priorité. Venir dire maintenant que c'est un projet de loi qu'on a travaillé pour *zet labou*. M. le président, c'est du non-sens.

Comme je l'ai annoncé un peu plutôt dans mon intervention, nous avons déjà annoncé dès la présentation du programme électoral et aussi du discours à l'intérieur de la Chambre depuis 2020 que nous allions venir de l'avant avec ce projet de loi. Malheureusement, il y a eu la covid, le pays a été paralysé pendant deux ans. Il y avait d'autres priorités, par exemple, à remettre l'économie en marche. C'est pourquoi nous venons aujourd'hui avec ce projet de loi.

M. le président, ces mêmes personnes qui adorent parlé de démocratie vont encore une fois de plus, tout comme en 2019, refuser que notre pays fasse un pas pour une élection plus propre et transparente. M. le président, un projet de loi, nous pouvons débattre sur certains points qui pourraient être améliorés. Il y a toujours des améliorations à faire, M. le président. On peut amender une loi mais rejeter dans sa totalité la proposition du gouvernement pour commencer quelque chose de mieux pour la démocratie est de mauvaise foi et découle d'un *hidden agenda* de l'opposition.

La prise de position du leader du MMM est incompréhensible mais je vais le dire pourquoi. Depuis plusieurs années, principalement après les élections de 2014, lui-même, son parti mais aussi le parti Travailleiste, régulièrement dans des conférences de presse utilisent le terme de *money politics*. Et aujourd'hui ces mêmes membres vont voter contre une loi qui va empêcher le *money politics*. Mais à qui profite le crime, M. le président ? Et en plus de ça, ils aiment souvent parler d'autocratie et cette même opposition qui a aujourd'hui l'occasion d'affermir la démocratie dans notre pays, veulent retarder cette législation qui apportera plus de transparence dans l'organisation de nos élections. M. le président, les institutions internationales qui émettent souvent les rapports sur la démocratie à Maurice doivent prendre bonne note sur la position de cette opposition, particulièrement après les efforts que nous faisons pour combattre le financement illicite.

M. le président, tout gouvernement responsable a le devoir d'œuvrer afin de faire avancer le système démocratique. La démocratie elle-même n'est pas statique et sa pratique nécessite régulièrement une remise à jour de ses instruments. Nous avons-nous, ici, M. le président, membres de cette auguste assemblée, le devoir de léguer aux générations futures des instruments de démocratie qui contribuent à son épanouissement.

La pratique actuelle du financement des partis politiques a souvent été décriée par tous: politiciens, médias et organisations non-gouvernementales. Or il est étonnant de constater qu'au moment venu, beaucoup, et surtout l'opposition fuient devant leurs responsabilités.

Toute avancée dans une société, M. le président, doit commencer quelque part. Justement, le financement des partis politiques est un des éléments clefs de cette réforme qui, pourtant est le souhait de tous. D'ailleurs, il faut le dire, elle figure en bonne place dans les manifestes électoraux de presque tous les partis politiques.

Cependant force est de constater que nous ne pouvons procéder à des réformes à l'emporte-pièce, d'où la présentation de ce projet de loi qui vient redéfinir les paramètres du financement des partis politiques.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, à mon humble avis, si nous continuons sur la voie actuelle, nous finirons par nous retrouver face à une possible emprise des possédants, comme l'appelait jadis le MMM naissant, sur la machinerie politique. Il est primordial de jeter les bases d'un système qui prônerait la transparence, *l'accountability* et qui éliminerait toute tentative de trafic d'influence.

M. le président, un jugement rendu récemment par la cour suprême de l'Inde, jugement entre *l'Association for democratic reforms & others versus union of India & others, en février 2024*, met en exergue certains aspects du financement des partis politiques et je cite –

“L'information sur le financement des partis politiques est essentielle à l'exercice effectif du droit de votes (...)”

Fin de citation.

L'aspect sécuritaire pour le pays en termes de dons vers les partis politiques doit être pris en considération. Et là, encore une fois, c'est intéressant de le dire, par exemple, je fais référence là à des liasses de dollars retrouvées dans le coffre-fort chez le leader du parti Travailliste et cela, M. le président, vient alimenter nos craintes.

Dans ce projet de loi qui est présenté ce soir, M. le président, nous avons revu certaines clauses du Political Financing Bill 2019 et l'un des articles du nouveau projet de loi concerne le trésorier. Un des points en désaccord soulevé en 2019 par l'honorable Bérenger et qui concernait le rôle du trésorier. Il avait soulevé le fait que le trésorier devait être responsable de toute collecte de fonds à travers le pays et que dans la pratique ce serait compliqué.

L'article 6, M. le président, qui fait référence au '*Political donations received on behalf of candidate*' du nouveau projet de loi vient rendre plus pratique le financement à travers des agents mais tout financement doit être enregistré dans un délai prescrit.

M. le président, permettez-moi de conclure mon intervention et je vais conclure sur une note qui a toute son importance au sein de ce parlement aujourd'hui. Comme un gouvernement responsable, comme des membres responsables de cette auguste assemblée, nous avons écouté le peuple surtout concernant le financement occulte des partis politiques.

Le premier ministre, le gouvernement, nous assumons notre responsabilité devant la population et il est clair, M. le président, que l'opposition va encore une fois fuir devant ses responsabilités et on comprend pourquoi, M. le président. Parce qu'ils ont un agenda caché. M. le président, le peuple portera son jugement sur ceux qui ont assumé leur responsabilité et aussi sur ceux qui ont fui devant leurs responsabilités.

M. le président, j'en ai terminé. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry!

(7.38 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset allow me congratulate the hon. Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth for coming forward with the Political Financing Bill No. VI of 2024, a pivotal and transformative piece of legislation designed to transform our political landscape by instilling an

unprecedented degree of accountability and transparency. This Bill is not only and merely a regulatory measure, it is a bold and unequivocal statement of our Government's determination to fostering fair competition and upholding the highest standards of integrity within our valued democratic processes.

For far too long, the issue of political financing has been shrouded in secrecy and opacity. This lack of transparency has allowed unprincipled individuals and entities to exert undue influence and undermine the integrity of our democratic processes. The Political Financing Bill aims to shed light on these obscure practices and create a level playing field. In so doing, every citizen can have faith that our electoral system is impartial and free from improper influences and we shall be therefore consolidating our regional and international commitments that our domestic elections are carried out and led by the strictest principles of transparency and accountability.

M. le président, les membres de l'opposition, animés par une volonté naturelle d'accéder au pouvoir, ont exprimé leurs réserves face à ce projet de loi. Ils ont malheureusement relayé des critiques qui ne semblent pas justifiées. Cependant, leurs efforts faibles ne trahissent que leur propre peur et insécurité profondément enracinées face à la transparence et à la responsabilité que ce projet de loi apportera. M. le président, le peuple n'a pas oublié le chèque de R 10 millions de la BAI ou encore le coffre-fort de *River Walk*. En hindi je dirais "*saaph haath*" – la main propre.

Excusez-moi, M. le président, *zavel mem fel la*. Aucun autre gouvernement n'a jamais présenté un projet de loi aussi ambitieux et avant-gardiste. Notre gouvernement est véritablement un pionnier en apportant sur la table une législation aussi significative et porteuse de sens. Nous devons examiner comment ce texte permettra d'instaurer transparence et rigueur en matière de financement politique. Nous le faisons quand le peuple a besoin de savoir. Notre gouvernement a toujours souscrit à ce principe fondamental de transparence envers les citoyens. En présentant ce projet de loi historique, nous réaffirmons notre engagement inébranlable à œuvrer dans l'intérêt supérieur du peuple et de la démocratie.

Let me reiterate, this Bill is not simply a legislative exercise. It is a bold statement of intent, a declaration that we will no longer allow the influence of money to corrupt our political landscape. No longer will deep pocketed special interest hold sway over our democratic

institutions. Instead, we will create an environment where impartial competition and ethical conduct are the corner stones of our political system. At the core of these provisions, lies the long neglected issue of political financing now placed under an impartial lens. A disinterested and watchful eye will help ensure greater transparency and integrity in the functioning of our democratic system.

This bold Bill will not leave any stone unturned, bringing much needed clarity and liability. It will enable a better understanding of the democratic process while offering an unbiased approach. In a sense, this legislation represents an opportunity to act in good faith and uphold the integrity of our governance system. Our resolve aims to enhance responsibility and contribute to a greater understanding and respect of the democratic process. No longer will the spectre of undue influence and corruption haunt our political landscape. This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, sends an unequivocal message; our democracy is not for sale to the highest bidder.

We are taking a principal stand to protect the sanctity of the people's will. The key pillars of transparency limits on expenses and regulation of campaign activities will reshape our political arena; a new era of ethical governance dawns where ideas and vision triumph over deep pockets and vested interest.

M. le président, ce projet de loi, comprend plusieurs dispositions clé. Premièrement, seul les partis politiques enregistrés, les membres de l'Assemblée nationale et les candidats officiellement nommés pourront recevoir des dons politiques. Cette mesure met fin aux contributions non traçable qui peuvent saper la confiance du public. Deuxièmement, nous modifions la loi sur la représentation du peuple pour imposer des limites sur les dépenses électorales pour les partis politiques et les alliances. Cela garantie que les élections se jouent sur la force des idées et des politiques plutôt que sur la puissance financière.

Troisièmement, le projet de loi introduit une réglementation pour les quartiers généraux politiques temporaires ou bases pendant les élections. Cela empêche l'utilisation abusive des ressources et favorise l'équité.

Mr Speaker, Sir, critics may decry these measures as over reach but we must remain steadfast in our pursuit of transparency and accountability. For too long, our nation has suffered from the corrosive effects of unchecked financial influence in politics, eroding public trust and undermining the very fabric of our democratic system. With this Bill, we are taking a bold step

by ensuring that the will of the people shapes the trajectory of our Nation and certainly not the whims of the wealthy few and their treasure chest.

To those who doubt our tenacity, I say this; our Government has a proven track record of delivering on its promises. We have tackled the most pressing issues facing our Nation from economic reform to social justice. We have emerged victorious time and again. This Bill is yet another testament of our steadfast commitment to the betterment of our nation and the wellbeing of our people.

We have never and will not falter. We will not wither, for we are guided by the principles of transparency, accountability and the relentless pursue of justice. The eyes of our nation are upon us and the people demand action by supporting this Bill. We are not merely enacting legislation; we are safeguarding the very foundations of our democracy. We are ensuring that the voices of the people are heard and that their will is respected. We are creating a political system that truly serves the interests of the many, not the vested interest of the privileged few.

M. le président, la position de l'opposition semble révéler une réticence à adopter une plus grande transparence. En s'opposant à ce projet de loi, ils défendent en fait un *statu quo* qui autorise des pratiques financières opaques. Cette position n'est pas conforme aux valeurs de bonne gouvernance et d'intégrité démocratique que nous devrions viser. Mais que devons-nous espérer mieux d'eux ? Chassez le naturel et il revient au galop ! Notre peuple est sacré. Nous ne permettrons jamais que l'argent des contribuables soit dilapidé ou même enfoui dans des coffres-forts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let the pessimists take heed. Our resolve on this front is unshakable. We shall not wither in our pursuit of an electoral process that embodies accountability and the highest standards of integrity. Let us stand together, united in our resolve and usher in a new era of political integrity, an era where the power truly rests in the hands of the people and where our nation shines as a beacon of democracy and good governance. Let us embrace a system that we can be truly proud of and one that will serve as an inspiration to nations around the world. This is a fight for the very soul of our democracy and those who care for our motherland, for our people, for honesty and for integrity, will join us if their hearts be true to support this Bill.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: I call hon. François!

(7.50 p.m.)

Mr F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, this year 2024, is one of the most historic years ever, with around 72 countries in the world going to poll. It is the biggest test of all times for 49% of the world population to choose democratically their representatives. It is one of greatest tests of integrity of elections ever in a modern time of misinformation and disinformation through social media, money-politics influence and unethical political practices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the world celebrated, Sunday last 30 June 2024 since 2018, the International Day of Parliamentarism, which revolves around the theme: “Strengthening Democratic Institutions for Sustainable Development.” The theme highlights the critical role that parliaments play in fostering democracy, ensuring transparency, and promoting sustainable development globally. This is important for our democracy and us parliamentarians, at a time when trust and confidence in our political institutions are being faced with so many challenges, and there is strong need for transparent and accountable parliaments.

In the same breadth, I surely retain what the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said about the World Parliament Day and I quote –

"It is an opportunity to raise awareness of the contribution that Parliaments make to democracy. It reminds us of the importance of consistently engaging, educating and communicating with the public on the work that Parliaments do."

Further, Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out and specified by the hon. Prime Minister that Article 10 of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption requires each State Party to adopt legislative and other measures to –

- (a) proscribe the use of funds acquired through illegal and corrupt practices to finance political parties, and
- (b) to incorporate the principle of transparency into funding of political parties.

Mauritius is a member state of the African Union since 2003 and ratified in 2018. This is exactly what our Parliament is called upon today while debating upon the two Bills introduced by the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, namely the Constitution (Amendment Bill) (No. V of 2024) and the Political Financing Bill (No. VI of 2024). The current Bills had already been debated nearly five years ago in July 2019, with updates from the previous proposals, to reflect the various inputs to eliminate big money out of our political system and to regularise political donations and election expenditures. Certainly, I will not repeat all what I said in my speech, which remains live.

This Bill is empowering the ESC and EC to control the indiscriminate and inordinate influence of private money in politics to the disadvantage of the ordinary members and the public interest.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, from the arguments heard from a quarter of the House, it looks like there is no consensus on these two pieces of legislations. Yes, no consensus despite the public exposure of the Bill and request for proposals through an open public examination and dialogue, put aside the timing as argued, which I have no quarrel about one's position before the introduction of the Bill to the House. I suspect it will be difficult to enact and implement same as the National Assembly election is coming this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I feel that we will not make any further progress since 2019, which I would not say, it is a matter of regret, but I leave it to the responsibility and conscience of one and all towards the future of our democracy.

Now, Mr Speaker sir, let me ask the following questions –

- What is our democracy all about in modern times?
- Is it not to provide for accountability and transparency with regard to all our political actions towards the country and our people?
- Is it not time for our democracy to face clean politics and a clean reputation of party-political funding?

- Is a real political party financing reform possible in our Republic? If yes, is it time to do it now and let's move in the right direction, and if not, when and how to reach an agreement among all parties in our Republic?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to the report of the Select Committee on the Funding of Political Parties of 2004, by the hon. Leung Shing, Q.C, it is admitted and I quote –

“It may take a couple of years to produce a full-fledged report encompassing all the factors that need to be considered in modelling a legal framework for political funding in Mauritius”

Today, 20 years later, the nation is still witnessing that consensus looks unreachable with all the political societal divides in our Republic. So, what is the way forward and also to put an end at times sleaze donations?

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said so, as this Bill will not get through, I would propose that in the coming 8th National Assembly mandate, all political parties, should take a pledge and commitment in their political manifesto to support the setting up of a standing Parliament Committee to make progress with regard to political financing in our Republic.

In a few of my previous speeches, I have already proposed that it is imperative that our National Assembly introduces a Parliamentary SDGs Committee and for this particular political funding proposal, a Special Political Party Funding Standing Committee, bearing in mind that State political funding could become a reality tomorrow.

We all agree that money for political parties has become the greatest problems for a sustainable future, as the cost for an election campaign has risen exponentially. No one wants to see a distortion in the democratic political process of our Republic through unlawful or unsolicited donation and money from proceeds of a crime, etc.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an election should be determined by the quality of candidates, the power of one's ideas and a party's credible societal vision. It should not be about the power of money, at times dirty money and all sorts of political offerings.

You will note that the hard truth is that public confidence in our democracy is in a decline, it is not with regard to political parties or alliances X or Y in power, but to our political system, requiring a progressive reform today. We need to take real steps to quickly address this decline or risk falling into the extreme political dysfunction in our Republic.

Are we all bold enough to face the reality, not with trivial political mathematical equations to only win elections, if a decision is taken thereof. *Il nous faut agir au-delà de notre présente culture politique, M. le président.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, the population at large has the right to know how political parties are obtaining money, be it by private donations, membership dues, and business enterprises. Most developed countries require donors to disclose their identity once they donate. Public disclosure of funds received by any political parties is useful information that should be a check and balances upon parties' reliance upon particular special interests.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during my 14 years in this House, how many alleged political financing scandals I have heard in this august Assembly, from both side of the House, in relation to the movement of money between all kind of donors and politicians and/or decision-makers and so on. We all know how political parties routinely fail to comply with the provisions of the law, with regard to political money transaction during elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no reliable or accurate data on the total amount raised or spent by political parties either on party administration or on election campaigns. So, shall we remain *status quo* and do nothing to bring a new revolutionary system in our democratic process?

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, I do agree on the principle of privacy of donors, donors who wish to protect the privacy of his or her political preferences, that is democracy. But, shall party donations and financial sponsors remain an acceptable secrecy or a question of choice? Nevertheless, the big challenge and difficulties remain, how do we reconcile the principle of Disclosure and Reporting of Information on Party Finances Privacy and the principle of Transparency of Political Funding?

However, despite all odds, if we want our democracy to make significant progress, we must strike a reasonable balance between part public and private funding, for example, today, media broadcast by MBC-TV during election, it is free. I will come back to that later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, OPR Party subscribes to the control and limit of parties' campaign spending and other expenses. Large donations should be more tightly regulated to remove, again, opportunities for undue influence. The influence of money shall not undermine the health of our democracy nor endanger our national stability and security from possible external funds.

The law shall also regulate the maximum threshold or limit to the amount of money a permissible donor who can contribute to a political party. For example, Mr Speaker, Sir, in countries like Latvia, there are limits on the amount that can be donated. In Kenya, the annual contribution limit per individual donor is 5 percent of the party's spending in the immediate past year. In Nigeria, it is one-million-naira (\$14,000) donation limit per candidate. Mr Speaker, Sir, while the law provides for spending limits for candidates and political parties during elections, however, there are no such limits outside the electoral period which could make election-related spending limits redundant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill at clause 10 (1), Suspicious donations, provides that a recipient shall not accept a political donation, where he has reasonable grounds to suspect that the donation originates from the proceeds of a crime, often labelled 'anonymous contribution'. We heard it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, foreign donations is another fundamental principle that is prohibited under this legislation as per clause 9. It provides that a recipient shall not accept a political donation, whether directly or indirectly, from a "non-resident citizen" or a "non-citizen". Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised that even during the last Regional Assembly Election, the disintegrating political alliance thereat benefited indirectly political financing from abroad, namely from Australia because one of the donors publicly voiced out on social media. We all know the deceptions thereafter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know how political parties have lost a significant number of volunteers today, who would have to work for the party as unpaid political missionaries or

campaign activities for free. This has led some political parties to even engage in fishy activities. I refer to Rodrigues; there is actually what is called a *Scandal Later, Saga Later* or *Festival Later*, as was rightly depicted by hon. Dr. Boolell in September 2022. The situation has worsened, and today, it is the talk of the town in Rodrigues and there is an uproar from the population that: *'nou la ter, nou leritaz, nou tresor, pe vande, ki pou arrive nou zanfandemain?'* And that, since 2022, there is a sort of *mafia la ter* in Rodrigues, with alleged bribery and money politics involving politicians from various corners.

There is an actual controversial illegal occupation of a portion of agricultural land of about 90,000 m² (21 arpents) to the disadvantage of other local breeders in the region of Marechal, Rodrigues. The population is asking, who is the political party sponsor behind this suspicious project and the irresponsible misuse of public resources and involvement of local authorities, with much embarrassment to the Central Electricity Board-Rodrigues? Mr Lesjongard, *affaire à suivre*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Explanatory Memorandum at point 2, it is stipulated that –

“No political donation shall be made to a non-registered political party or to any person, other than to a registered political party, to a member of the National Assembly and to a person nominated to stand as a candidate at National Assembly elections.”

This clause shall apply to the Regional Assembly Elections as well as for a fair and equitable regional assembly election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the perception of corruption is damaging trust in the local political system and this has to be eliminated and regulated now. We all know that all political parties that have contested elections in our Republic have defaulted in their submissions of their elections return. Clause 28, section 51 of the Representation of the People Act is amended for the maximum monetary value of election expenses to be incurred at a National Assembly election, at sub-clause 1A(b), in respect of a candidate, in a constituency, who is not the only candidate belonging to a party, to be Rs1,500,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do appreciate that the hon. Prime Minister, has considered my proposal, to amend section 51 of the Representation of the People Act, as per the new subsection – 1B(c) –

“To revise and increase, the maximum amount in cash of election expenses to be incurred at a local region election or an Island region election in Rodrigues, shall, in respect of a candidate, be Rs300,000.”

It was previously Rs100,000. This is reasonable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, state funding or public subsidy for political parties is an avenue that we should consider in the future, be it as party or secretariat subsidies.

A criterion for eligibility, is its allocation that can simply be in terms of proportion to party share of parliamentary seats or a party obtaining let's say at least 15% of votes in previous election. For example, in Portugal, all state subsidies are by law related to a fixed proportion of the national minimum wage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, the State is already financing part of our electoral process. The actual free of charge duration and time of radio and television programmes used for each candidate or parties during campaign, as decided by our national radio and television administrations. My question: should this not be coordinated and regularised by the Electoral Supervisory Commission?

What are the monetary value and the cost of air-time by MBC for a party during national or Regional Assembly elections? It will be interesting to find out the cost.

Mr Speaker, Sir, election now, through the high level of digital penetration, will witness remarkable growth in the use of digital and social media platforms for political and election campaigns. This is where, I believe that State involvement in party financing of political parties derives in the creation of an equal playing field, equal opportunities, fairness and to enhancing quality of political competition.

At the level of OPR Party, with the continuous rise in cost of democratic elections, with no official source of political revenues, we believe that a well-defined and established mechanism, state funding could help and is a necessity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 22(6) –

“Where the Commission registers a political party that does not hold a bank account, that party shall, within one month of registration, apply for and open a bank account, failing which its registration shall lapse.”

I am of the opinion that being given that in our case, OPR Party as a political party, we are not officially registered and we don't have a legal status apart with the electoral commission during elections period and this seems to be contrasting with clause 8(1) for creating and having the legal status to create a bank account on the name of a party.

I think it will be difficult for a party to have an account on its own name, if it only registers with the Commission as per clause 22(1).

Mr Speaker, Sir, last point, as per the new section 72B 'Restriction on temporary political headquarters and campaign quarters commonly known as 'baz', I lay much emphasis with strong support to this component of the Bill, especially with regards to Rodrigues.

In Rodrigues, during national and local elections, 'baz', locally referred to as '*ti cabane*' built alongside roads and sometimes on roads or track roads in villages, should be completely prohibited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before concluding, apart from political party funding, our political system, should consider that voting at General Elections, By-elections, Local Government Elections and Regional Assembly Elections should be compulsory, as is the case in Australia, with necessary fines.

Another subject which we need to ponder upon, is also Trade Union Political Funds and also the political financing for disabled persons, women for inclusive politics, that should be considered in this reform.

In 2019, I proposed a Clean Political Environment Practices by banning the use of plastics *oriflamme*, banners, posters and other environmental polluters during elections. I guess even without this legislation, each and every political party could adopt same, as an environmental pledge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will conclude by addressing to the electors by large particularly in Rodrigues – *na pa vann zot vote, na pa vande zot dignite pou larzan*. C'est le mal de la corruption politique et de la politique de l'argent pendant les élections. Votre vote est sacré. Ne vous laissez pas piéger dans la déstabilisation de notre système électoral par les chemins dangereux des promesses naïves par certains partis politiques. Regardez ce qui se passe au Kenya et bien à Rodrigues même, trop de fausses promesses au goût amer, provoquant ainsi, beaucoup de chaos et violence et des mensonges au public.

À Rodrigues, notre autonomie paie les lourdes conséquences des fausses promesses, du démantèlement du secteur public et d'un affaiblissement de nos institutions publiques, comme l'a vivement protesté par le boycott massif des fonctionnaires, lors de la célébration de la journée de la fonction publique le 23 juin dernier à Baladirou, une maigre participation de moins de 100 fonctionnaires seulement, M. le président. *Enn mesaz sa !*

M. le président, Rodrigues might be marching towards a public sector paralysis soon, if things do not change at local level, as the public sector Unions namely – Rodrigues Government Employees Association (RGEA), Rodrigues Private Sector Workers Union (RPSWU) and Rodrigues Nursing Workers Union (RNWU), have last week just engaged in creating '*Platform Anou Sauve Nou Société Rodriguaise*', to defend their cause through a series of resolutions. And I thank them for their responsible actions towards the rule of law and its positioning to prevent an arbitrary conduct and anarchism in our autonomous Rodrigues Island.

I also call upon all the civil society to become a solid partner to combat money-politics in our society. Do not let yourselves be used, as a *bequilles* for the political gain of some political *rusés et bandits*. I value local civil society organisations like Carefour and Unions for their societal education towards the people of Rodrigues, as true patriot and responsible partners for a clean democratic Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, again, on behalf of the OPR Party, my colleague hon. Léopold is on mission in South Africa and myself, as a legacy of clean politics practiced by my honorific Leader Serge Clair, we subscribe to this constitutional amendment and the Political Financing Bill provisions for more accountability and transparency through simple and effective requirements of disclosure of political funding and donations in our Republic.

Public confidence in the integrity of our political system and institutions is the way forward, as we OPR, we believe in clean, honest politics, and not a Money Political System for the good health of our democracy. Et moi, M. le président, comme Leader de l'OPR, *mo de lame prope*.

M. le président, sur ce, je vous remercie pour votre attention. Merci beaucoup.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful, you will speak after dinner. I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 8.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.17 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West, Mrs A. Navarre-Marie, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

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

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move, under Standing Order 29(1), to present a motion without notice.

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

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West, Mrs A. Navarre-Marie, I beg to move that hon. Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West, Mrs A. Navarre-Marie, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and the next two Sittings unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

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

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Should I give you the floor? You kept sitting!

Mr Ramful: Thank you.

Mr Speaker: No, answer first! I have to give you the floor,

Mr Ramful: You are...

Mr Speaker: Just listen to this joke, without me giving you the floor, you cannot speak. So, what do you do now?

Mr Ramful: I am in your hands. I am in your hands!

Mr Speaker: How do you feel about it now?

Mr Ramful: I am in your hands.

Mr Speaker: The disrespect you show to the House! You took an oath of allegiance and you are a lawyer.

Mr Ramful: My time is running.

Mr Speaker: No problem! So,...

Mr Ramful: Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Since you are my good friend.

Mr Ramful: Thank you.

(9.18 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): M. le président, le jugement de l'Inde, dont l'honorable Lesjongard a fait mention, est un jugement éclairé sur le financement des partis politiques. En février de cette année, la cour suprême de l'Inde a unanimement annulé les bons électoraux qui permettaient le financement des partis politiques à

travers l'achat des bons électoraux en banque. La cour est arrivée à la conclusion que le financement des partis politiques, à travers ces bons électoraux occultes, est une atteinte au droit d'un électeur d'être renseigné sur la source du financement des partis politiques. La cour a ordonné avec effet immédiat la vente de ces bons électoraux et a aussi demandé à la banque de fournir à la commission électorale de l'Inde l'identité et les détails sur les porteurs des bons. En sus, la cour a ordonné à la commission électorale de publier la liste des porteurs de ces bons sur le site officiel de la commission.

Alors, M. le président, la transparence sur le financement du processus électoral et l'identité des donateurs sont des éléments clés pour qu'un électeur puisse prendre une décision réfléchie et éclairée. Allons voir, M. le président, si le gouvernement ici a vraiment la volonté de légiférer sur ce sujet. En 2019, le gouvernement, presque à la veille des élections générales, avait présenté une loi presque similaire sur le financement des partis politiques. Tous les partis politiques qui étaient représentés au Parlement avaient exprimé leur opinion sur ce projet de loi. Parmi, il y avait même des membres de l'opposition qui maintenant font partie du gouvernement qui avaient exprimé des réserves sur le projet de loi.

Entre autres, on avait exprimé des réserves sur le manque de consultation et de dialogue, sur le mode de financement proposé, sur le risque d'un *over reliance* sur les grosses entités privées, sur la nécessité d'avoir un *level playing field* entre les partis politiques indépendamment de leur capacité financière, sur le risque de voir la disparition des petits partis politiques et sur le besoin de donner des pouvoirs accrus de supervision et de sanction à l'*Electoral Supervisory Commission* sur les dépenses pendant la campagne électorale.

Le projet de loi de 2019, comme c'était prévu, n'avait pas eu la majorité de trois-quarts puisqu'il fallait aussi passer le *Constitutional Amendment Bill* qui requiert une majorité de trois quarts, et par la suite, on a eu les élections générales. Entre-temps, le projet de loi est parti dans les oubliettes jusqu'à que cinq ans après, et encore une fois, à la veille des élections générales, le gouvernement revient avec le même projet de loi avec des changements cosmétiques et qui n'adressent aucunement les divergences d'opinions fondamentales qui divisent toujours l'opposition et le gouvernement.

Pour moi, M. le président, ce projet de loi, même réchauffé, contient plusieurs lacunes. Firstly, the Bill does not make any distinction between small individual donors and large

corporate donors. You cannot, Mr Speaker, Sir, place the small individual donors and large corporate donors in the same basket when it comes to disclosure. Many jurisdictions for good reasons have made disclosure of the identity of the donor legally binding only when the amount donated is above a certain substantial amount. An individual who voluntarily donates a negligible sum just because he is a supporter of the party cannot be treated on the same footing as a big corporate that donates millions, not because it necessarily supports the party, but for his own vested interest. Therefore, I propose that the privacy of voluntary supporters of a party should be preserved.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill instead of reducing the risk of corruption through political financing, is in fact legalising corruption. Allow me to explain why, Mr Speaker, Sir. Any law that seeks to regulate political financing has to address two components –

- (1) regulating and supervising how funds are raised, and
- (2) regulating and supervising how the funds are spent.

The more money you have, the more you spend, and the more the power of money would influence the democratic process of the election. This is precisely what this Bill is condoning by not placing a ceiling on the amount of donation that a private entity can give to a political party. If you allow, just as an example, a private entity that has investment in horse racing to finance a political party without imposing any cap on the amount, of course, that private entity will eventually try to influence and dictate the policy of government on horse racing, thus leading to collusion and corruption.

Thirdly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill fails to safeguard the interest of shareholders of private entities. The Bill proposes that a company may by written resolution of its Board of Directors donate any amount of money to a political party and disclose the donation in the annual account of the company. What about the consent of the shareholders before the donation is given? Do you find it normal that I am a major shareholder in a company and the Directors decide on their own, without my consent, to donate millions to the MSM, for example? Is that legally fine? Is this normal? I am the owner of the shares in the company; you are taking part of my profit without my consent and giving it to a political party?

Fourthly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill fails to bring consequential amendments to the Declaration of Assets Act. Every Member of the National Assembly has to make a declaration of his assets after being elected and that includes disclosure of the amount of money in his bank account and also currency exceeding Rs1 m. The Bill provides that an elected Member of the National Assembly shall hold a separate bank account in which the unutilised monetary donation shall be deposited. Should therefore money obtained as donation be considered as assets for the purposes of the Declaration of Assets Act?

What about limitation of payment of in cash over Rs500,000 under the Anti-Money Laundering Act? Does political donation in cash falls within the definition of payment under the Anti-Money Laundering Act? And this is a major issue and has to be expressed clearly in the Bill. Can a party or a candidate accept donation in cash more than Rs500,000? Is donation considered as payment? This, the Bill fails to clear. On the whole, Mr Speaker, Sir, so long as a political party is allowed to obtain political financing directly from private entities, the risk of collusion and corrupt practices shall continue to prevail.

A number of jurisdictions have adopted state funded financing. However, the modern approach now seems to favor funding obtained from private entities but the fund is retained and distributed by the electoral commission according to the number of elected members in Parliament.

In addition to this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we truly intend to regulate political financing, we should also consider a comprehensive review of the Representation of People Act which was passed in 1958 and which, at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, catered for only two hundred thousand voters, and now, we have approximately nine hundred thousand voters. So, the whole law has to be revisited, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we are serious about regulating political financing. Therefore, these are, from my perspective, some of the issues that have not been addressed in the Bill.

Donc, tout le monde le sait et nous l'avons déjà dit publiquement que nous n'allions pas voter pour une loi que nous avons rejetée dans le passé, qui n'a pas changé dans le fondement et que cet exercice est futile pour les raisons que j'ai mentionnées. Même si le gouvernement le sait pertinemment bien qu'on aura pas une majorité de trois quarts, pourquoi est-ce qu'il persiste à avoir un débat sur ce projet de loi surtout à la veille des élections ? La réponse, la population, M.

le président, le sait déjà. Ils ne sont pas dupes. La décision et le timing de présenter ce projet de loi réchauffé à la fin d'un mandat est une décision purement politique, afin de donner l'occasion aux membres du gouvernement de faire de la politique de bas étage qu'on vient d'ailleurs de témoigner.

Qui va prendre au sérieux la démarche du gouvernement, comme l'avait bien dit l'honorable Ganoo, qui avait lui-même voté contre le projet de loi en 2019. Quand il avait parlé d'*over reliance* des partis politiques sur le financement provenant des entités privées. Il avait proposé un financement mixte de l'État et du secteur privé. Il avait parlé de la nécessité d'imposer un plafond sur le montant du financement provenant des entités privées. Il avait aussi demandé le gouvernement d'instituer un *Select Committee* composant des membres du gouvernement, de l'opposition et des extra parlementaires pour qu'il y ait *meaningful consultation* et consensus autour de ce projet de loi. Ni en 2019 ni en 2024, les propositions de l'honorable Alan Ganoo n'ont été retenues. Pire, l'honorable Ganoo avait lui-même voté contre ce projet de loi en 2019. Est-ce que l'honorable Abbas Mamode prendra au sérieux ce projet de loi qu'il avait lui-même rejeté en 2019? Même si une...

Mr Ganoo: But you must cite... Please, excuse me.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait, wait.

Ms J. Bérenger: *Eh... Ekoute!*

Mr Ganoo: Eight long pages; I said this Bill contains a lot of good proposals.

Ms J. Bérenger: *Kiete sa...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramful: Mais vous avez dit sur les affaires fondamentales, *you don't agree with the Bill. This is what I have quoted only those issues that you said you did not agree with the Bill.*

Même si une ébauche du projet de loi a été publiée sur le site web du Prime Minister's Office et que les membres du public et de l'opposition ont été invités à soumettre leurs propositions on ne peut parler de consensus et de dialogue parce que le gouvernement semble

imposer unilatéralement ses intentions sur le financement des partis politiques. Seul un *Select Committee*, comme l'avait affirmé l'honorable Ganoo et tant d'autres, aurait apporté à ce projet de loi sa légitimité.

M. le président, j'entends certains membres du gouvernement parler de financement du Parti travailliste. Les comptes du Parti travailliste, M. le président, sont connus du grand public.

(Interruptions)

Qu'en est-il du financement du MSM ?

(Interruptions)

Ayez le courage de nous dire, comment la campagne de 2015 et de 2019 ont été financée et par qui ? Je ne vais pas utiliser l'immunité parlementaire pour faire des allégations à tort et à travers sur les personnes mais j'inviterai les membres du MSM d'aller lire les conclusions du rapport Lam Shang Leen.

Ms J. Bérenger: Exactement !

Mr Ramful: Vous saurez comment la campagne a été financée au MSM.

Ms J. Bérenger: Mafia!

The Prime Minister: *Be dir li!*

Ms J. Bérenger: Mafia!

An hon. Member: *Twa ki mafia...*

Mr Ramful: La population vient de témoigner, les grands moyens financiers du MSM dans le contexte de l'organisation du 1^{er} mai. Le nombre de banderoles orange qui ont été placardées autour de l'île, les ronds-points de l'autoroute ornés d'oriflammes par les contracteurs rémunérés, le nombre d'autobus engagés même si la plupart étaient vides...

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramful: Tout ça nous donne une indication du war chest...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful, come back to the Bill.

Mr Ramful: Je termine, je termine. Du *war chest* qu'on a déjà préparé pour les prochaines élections et maintenant vous osez régulariser le financement des autres parties.

M. le président, l'intention du gouvernement en proposant ce projet de loi à ce stade, à la veille des élections, sachant très bien que l'opposition n'allait pas voter et un *political gimmick* pour des raisons purement politiques et seul un *Select Committee* de la Chambre aurait été souhaitable dans les circonstances.

Merci, M. le président.

The Prime Minister: *La cour si pe fer politik la, kan case Ramgoolam divan la cour!*

An hon. Member: *Get twa...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! No crosstalking! So, I now call hon. Maudhoo.

An hon. Member: *Dir to boss komien kas ena...*

Ms J. Bérenger: Dites comment le Sun Trust a été conçu !

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Sa kapav pruve sa!*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Sun Trust! Kuma inn finanse?*

The Prime Minister: *Pann met kas dan pos!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Kuma inn finanse ?*

(Interruptions)

Kas dan tant !

Mr Speaker: Order! Both of ...

(Interruptions)

No crosstalking!

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: *Kas dan tant!*

The Prime Minister: *Kas dan pos!*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Dan tant! Pou finans batiman de la honte...*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger! Could you please be quiet?

Hon. Members on this side, please, be quiet! Let us listen to hon. Maudhoo!

(9.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): M. le président, on a un mandat de cinq ans qui arrivent à terme en novembre. Alors, on n'est pas à la veille des élections. On est dans le temps. Ce n'est pas le timing, c'est le résultat qui compte.

Alors, Mr Speaker, Sir, has the Labour Party ever presented any Bill with regard to financing of political parties? Never!

(Interruptions)

Alors, the Labour Party is the last to criticise us on this issue as only this Government has dared to bring such an important, long awaited Bill to this House. Anyway, the whole nation knows where all donations to your party landed – in the coffre-fort of your Leader. This is why we need proper laws to prevent repetition of such wrongful acts; in fact, it is in the interest of all members of Labour Party because no one trusts your Leader.

M. le président, je constate que la présentation de ce projet de loi sur le financement des partis politiques qui nécessite une modification de la Constitution a déjà eu lieu dans le passé, mais sans succès, faute de l'adhésion de l'opposition, pour des raisons partisanses et sans aucune considération pour les intérêts de la République de l'île Maurice.

Je remercie donc, notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, pour son combat sans relâche pour plus de transparence dans nos processus électoraux, malgré le comportement puéril des membres de l'opposition. C'est la preuve de l'engagement de notre Premier ministre pour renforcer notre République et la faire progresser vers plus de modernité, en prenant en compte les menaces qui pèsent sur les démocraties du monde entier.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reckons –

“Finance is a necessary component of the democratic processes. Money enables the expression of political support as well as competition in elections.”

But like in all things, there should be some sort of regulations to prevent policy capture by those who own most of the economic resources. Striking the right balance is the object of these Bills, because we all know financing is important when it comes to elections, but the way donations reach the political parties should also be regulated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these Bills intend to put Mauritius on the map of the most transparent democracies. Let us never forget, we are ranked among the very few “full democracies” in the world according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index Report 2022, giving us a leadership role in the African democratic landscape.

Should the Opposition agree to vote in favour of both Bills, we could further strengthen not only our democratic foundations but also the perception of the integrity and transparency of our democracy. In order to do that, the Constitution needs to be amended, on the back of three quarter of the votes in this August Assembly.

M. le président, j'ai du mal à croire que l'opposition puisse refuser, comme ils le font déjà, de participer à rendre le financement des partis politiques plus transparent, pour des raisons

purement partisans. Alors, pour quelle raison les membres de l'opposition refuseraient ce projet de loi encore une fois? Est-ce qu'il y aurait au sein de l'opposition un courant de pensée qui refuse la transparence sur le financement des partis politiques? C'est quand même difficile à croire, surtout quand les saints de l'opposition se dressent toujours en pseudo-sauveurs.

M. le président, en parcourant les journaux ce matin, je suis tombé sur un article de l'ex-Ministre, M. Anil Gayan, qui déclare, je cite –

« L'argent versé aux partis politiques ne date pas d'hier. Dans toute démocratie qui se respecte, il faut avoir une loi sur le financement des partis politiques. Depuis 2000, on en parle et il y avait des projets pour faire des réformes afin que le financement des partis politiques devienne transparent. Cependant, jusqu'à présent, cela n'a pu aboutir à cause de nombreux obstacles »

M. le président, je me suis demandé quels étaient ces obstacles, qui sont ces obstacles, et pour quelles raisons ils persistent. Mais, ce n'est pas une surprise, les obstacles sont devant nous, là – l'opposition, M. le président.

Mr Speaker, Sir, 'party politics' should be put aside when it comes to such important Bills for our democracy. I would like to ask the Opposition to consider the fact that these Bills will have to be adopted, whether now or in the future, it is just a question of time. So, let us work together to make sure we contribute to more transparent electoral processes. It is a matter of patriotism indeed.

M. le président, je ne peux que dénoncer une opposition qui enchaîne les déconvenues, et qui malgré le fait qu'on essaye de réformer le financement des partis politiques, continue de faire la sourde oreille. C'est tout simplement de l'hypocrisie. Avec eux, rien ne va. Même lorsque nous renforçons l'État providence avec le récent budget, ils nous disent que ce n'est pas suffisant.

Maintenant, on veut réformer un système de financement, qui nous permettra de renforcer non seulement le fonctionnement de notre démocratie, mais également l'image que nous projetons aux institutions internationales, et on sait tous à quel point notre réputation à l'international est importante dans notre développement économique.

M. le président, puisque certains dans l'opposition ne semblent pas s'en rendre compte, je pense qu'il est bon de rappeler, ici, que ces projets de loi donnent les pleins pouvoirs à la Commission électorale et au Commissaire électorale pour intervenir, réguler et contrôler les dépenses et les sources de financements lors des élections générales, municipales ou locales.

Il n'y aura donc aucune interférence de nature à permettre à un gouvernement en place, d'intervenir de façon à pénaliser un quelconque parti politique. Tout se fera de façon indépendante, dans le respect de notre démocratie. De plus, il y aura une traçabilité sur la provenance des donations en fonction des profils des donateurs autorisés, ce qui permettra d'assainir le financement des partis politiques. L'enjeu est évident ici, avec les menaces liées au blanchiment d'argent et au financement du terrorisme.

Alors, quelles sont ces raisons qui les empêchent de positionner sur ces deux projets de loi? En tous cas, les raisons avancées jusqu'ici par les membres de l'opposition ne tiennent pas la route. Que des raisons ridicules, je dirais. Tout cela laisse un goût amer au peuple de notre pays.

Je me demande, est-ce pour continuer avec la saga des coffres-forts de Navin Ramgoolam? Est-ce pour continuer avec le chèque de la disgrâce de R 10 millions tiré au nom du MMM ? Si c'est cela leur motif, bientôt le grand jugement du peuple de la République s'approche et sans nulle doute, ils vont sanctionner cette alliance contre nature.

M. le président, on a tous vu de cette alliance contre nature, dans un passé récent. Par contre, il y a une constance, qu'il y a victoire ou défaite, le divorce est très rapide entre eux et quand on voit dans une vidéo lors d'un *meeting* à La Louise, le leader du MMM avait dit, « *ki ena dan so latete* » à l'encontre de Navin Ramgoolam. Et maintenant sa *zafer dan so latet la, inn vinn diber zordi vouzot* ! Quel miracle!

Alors là, pour faire des miracles, je vais dire que l'honorable Bérenger est un vrai spécialiste. M. le président, c'est pour cela que le peuple, avec raisons, a des mots très dégoûtant à leur rencontre. Quiconque qui est sain d'esprit, un vrai patriote et un vrai travailleur social ne doit jamais soutenir celui qui par ces nombreuses frasques en tant que Premier Ministre, pour ne citer qu'Albion, Kaya, coffres-forts, *Kotomili*, et j'en passe. Il y en a trop !

Mr Speaker, Sir, if I mention the Electoral Commission, it is because this institution is the jewel of our democracy and has lifted our State at par with some of the most efficient democracies in the World. It has proved time and again its independence and its ability to deliver.

What could the Opposition possibly fear from letting the Electoral Commission regulate political financing? Most importantly, how can they justify not voting for these Bills? Refusing to vote for these Bills, Mr Speaker, Sir, will send the wrong signals to the people of the Republic of Mauritius and to international observers and could backfire in the long-term. Therefore, I reiterate my appeal to the Opposition to collaborate and vote to pass these Bills.

M. le président, le refus de l'opposition de participer à l'adoption de ces projets de loi sera perçu comme une trahison par la population. En effet, comment expliquer que le Parti travailliste a considéré l'augmentation de la pension de vieillesse comme un *bribe* électoral, et qu'aujourd'hui, les députés du PTR refusent la transparence dans le financement des partis politiques.

Cette incohérence flagrante est une tâche supplémentaire sur l'alliance PTR-MMM-ND. Alors, on peut résumer la situation ici pour comprendre la philosophie de l'opposition : augmenter la pension est pour eux un *bribe* électoral, les coffres-forts doivent être récupérés à tout prix avec une opacité totale sur la provenance des fonds, et à les entendre, le refus d'adopter ce projet de loi sur les financements des partis politiques est tout à fait logique. Alors, je leur souhaite bonne chance pour expliquer cette "logique" aux citoyens.

Le pire est que la perception que l'opinion publique à des partis politiques est entachée, surtout après avoir visionné les images des millions de roupies et de dollars - je prends les paroles de l'honorable Bérenger - que vomissait le coffre-fort du leader du Parti travailliste.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to me, the adoption of these Bills is a no brainer. How could we possibly let this opportunity go? How can we explain to the future generations that we could not strike a balance between party politics and the interests of the State? These Bills are the tools needed to prevent illicit activities from influencing and tarnishing the reputation of our electoral processes.

M. le président, je souhaiterais faire référence à une récente émission de radio sur le même sujet, en ce qui concerne l'argument de certains membres de l'opposition qui considèrent que ces projets de loi auraient dû être présentés en début de mandat. Je leur réponds, comme je l'ai dit au début de mon discours, que le gouvernement est élu pour une période de cinq ans en moyenne, et que les électeurs ne votent pas pour un timing, mais pour des résultats.

Donc, voilà, j'espère que cet argument – je vois que l'honorable Ramful en a parlé – arrêtera d'être utilisé à cause de son absurdité. D'autant plus, qu'à peu de choses près, il s'agit du même texte qui avait été présenté en 2019.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one more argument frequently used by the Opposition is the fact that they consider this to be a piecemeal approach, and that we should reform the entire electoral system instead. But they are dreaming of a world that doesn't exist. Our First-Past-The-Post Political System is based on coalitions and alliances. No one knows if or when a political party or alliance will be able to get three fourths of the seats in the future. By using this argument, they are misleading the citizens of this country because they know all too well that this situation is difficult to be unlocked.

But if this Opposition, today, votes against this much awaited Bill a second time, our population, *le peuple de l'île Maurice*, will definitely entrust us the majority, in fact, entrust us the majority to our team in the next election to bring such changes, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the people will decide, not this Opposition.

Listening to them, they promise to change the world and they have had many occasions to bring change when they were running previous governments. The truth is that they will be remembered for having simply refused to initiate a much-awaited change.

M. le président, l'exemple le plus marquant est sans doute le fait que le MMM a reçu un chèque de R 10 million de l'entreprise BAI presque à la veille des élections générales de 2014. Ce qui dérange une immense majorité des Mauriciennes et Mauriciens dans cette histoire est que ce financement n'a pas pu être accordé au MMM sans aucune contrepartie de protection, par exemple. Cette perception d'influence du MMM par la BAI, qui était une entreprise posant un risque systémique à notre économie, est une chose que personne ne pourra jamais oublier, et qui nous conforte dans notre décision de réformer les financements des partis politiques.

Nous ne voulons plus jamais revoir ce genre de situation se reproduire. Quand on pense que le leader du MMM se vante souvent d'avoir 'la tête haute et les mains propres', on comprend l'appréhension de la population par rapport à cette alliance de l'hypocrisie.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the Hansard. During the intervention of the treasurer on this Political Financing Bill, hon. Reza Uteem – I think he is the treasurer of the MMM –, I quote –

An hon. Member: Président!

Mr Maudhoo: Président, okay ! Alors, je ne sais pas qui est le trésorier. I quote what he said –

“But, unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are also those who finance political parties with a view of getting an advantage or a favour in turn. You scratch my back, I will scratch yours. I finance your campaign and once you are elected, you give me specific tax concession, tax holidays, VAT exemption, land conversion (...).”

Alors, M. le président, permettez-moi de répondre aux insinuations faites par le député l'honorable Reza Uteem concernant le financement des partis politiques. Je me demande si l'honorable Reza Uteem a des informations privilégiées sur les pratiques financières de son propre parti, le MMM, qui semblent désormais être financées par des sources bien éloignées, très bien éloignées, des cotisations des *ti-militants koltar*, de la vente du journal *Le Militant*, qui n'existe plus comme c'était le cas dans le passé. Apparemment, les caisses du MMM se remplissent désormais grâce à des bailleurs de fonds dont tout le monde connaît l'identité.

M. le président, il serait plus honnête de la part de l'honorable Uteem de cesser de jeter des accusations en l'air sans preuves concrètes et de se concentrer sur la transparence et l'honnêteté dans les finances de son propre parti. Alors, *to grat mo ledo, mo grat to ledo*, les R 10 millions versés sur le compte du MMM. Était-ce une opération *grat ledo* version honorable Uteem?

M. le président, même dans ma circonscription lors de la campagne électorale de 2014, qui ne connaît pas cette rumeur qui circulait sur toutes lèvres '*70 millions inn disparet dans Anil Baichoo so loto*'. Alors, il y avait tout cela à notre époque.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2019, when the Leader of the MMM stated that his party would vote against this Bill, he mentioned the risk of disclosing the names of individual donors or private companies in the public domain. However, the names of individual donors and private companies will be collected by the Electoral Commission, but will never be disclosed in the public domain. This is a standard practice, and in a country like France, where private companies are prohibited from financing political parties, the names of individual donors are not disclosed in the public domain.

M. le président, d'autres s'opposent à ces projets de loi sous prétexte qu'ils fausseraient le déroulement des prochaines élections. Je leur réponds que c'est tout le contraire, et que l'on pourra enfin connaître la provenance des donations, empêcher les financements occultes et surtout empêcher l'influence disproportionnée d'intérêts privés ou encore étrangers. En ce faisant, c'est notre démocratie qui ressortira gagnante.

M. le président, lorsque l'honorable Lobine accusait hier, dans une émission de radio, ces projets de loi de ne pas prendre en compte les avis de toutes les forces vives du pays, je lui rappellerai que des consultations publiques ont eu lieu et ont abouties à ces textes. Par exemple, le financement public des partis politiques a été rejeté au cours de cette consultation en 2018-2019. On voit bien le caractère participatif de ces textes. C'est vraiment de la démagogie d'aller clamer sur les radios que personne n'a été consulté.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if these Bills are not perfect, but there is nothing wrong in them. They are at least one step in the right direction, and we should always remember that the smallest step toward transparency is a major accomplishment for our nation. More transparency is what we can achieve today, so why not all work together? This is just the beginning of a long process to reform our electoral system, and we will keep improving for the benefit of the people of Mauritius.

Pour terminer, je fais un vibrant appel aux membres de l'opposition de se ressaisir, si vraiment, vous êtes élu pour servir le pays comme de bons patriotes et non pas pour faire la lèche-bottes de vos leaders, qui sont une disgrâce pour notre République. Oui, il y a de la place pour des vrais fils du sol dans cette auguste Assemblée. Si vous sentez que ces projets de loi sont dans l'intérêt public, alors comme on dit dans les campagnes électorales, votez et faites voter ces

projets de loi, car vous êtes mandaté par le peuple pour travailler dans l'intérêt de la République de l'île Maurice.

Notre génération et aussi les générations à venir vont vilipender toutes les personnes dans l'opposition qui cherchent toute sorte de prétextes bidons pour voter contre ces projets de lois qui est un premier pas majeur en ce qui concerne le financement de partis politiques. M. le président, aujourd'hui, j'ose tout de même espérer que la raison l'emportera sur les égos démesurés de l'opposition.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: I call hon. Minister Dr. Ramdhany!

(9.56 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Dr. A. Ramdhany): Mr Speaker, Sir, I stand before this august Assembly with a high sense of duty and responsibility to debate on a very important Bill brought by the hon. Prime Minister on the issue of the political financing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the enactment of this Bill would require a prior amendment to our Constitution. If successful, this new legal provision would have significant ramification for our vibrant democracy. Regulating how political parties are financed, the Bill's timing is opportune as in a few months' time, our people will cast their votes for candidates they believe will represent them, defend their interest and ultimately rule our country.

To uphold the ideal of *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*, we must ensure that Government functions reflect the voice of our people operates through their consent and serve their best interest. In other words, the principle of a Government of the people, by the people and for the people has to be upheld. I save this opportune moment to express my gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister for this bold set in his unbending commitment to bring our vibrant democracy to a next level which is beacon of inspiration and a shining example for the region and the world.

Mr Speaker, Sir, yet as a young Member of this august Assembly, a deep sadness fills me, the democracy values our forefather fought so valiantly to secure the right to vote seem

under threat by those putting their own personal interest over public good. May I remind that this is not the first time a similar Bill has been presented in this august Assembly? In July 2019 while I was not actively involved in politics, I closely followed the debates on a similar proposal. Unfortunately, the Bill was not enacted because it did not garner the partisan support at that time. This time the draft Bill has been circulated since April 2024 where it has received broad and positive feedback from stakeholders across the board except as expected the Opposition. I can, therefore, come to a conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Bill present an existential threat to the Opposition as their mode of operation has always been opaque not to say suspicious fuelled by occult financial support.

It is, therefore, not surprising that they will use all sorts of lame excuses for not supporting this Bill but the population is intelligent and will not hesitate to deal with them in the weeks or months to come as they did in 2014 and 2019. As a matter of fact, the collective memory of the population remains fresh and vivid when in February 2015, a few months following the General elections, it shockingly discovered that a former Prime Minister had amassed an unimaginably large amount of high denomination bank notes including US dollars that were never put into circulation and which were hidden in an overflowing coffer.

While I will not further comment on this matter as the case in a court, occult political financing collect within and outside the country has been advocated. Now, imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, how much more money was collected and spent during the election. Imagine the dire consequences to our country if by any stretches of the imagination this former Prime Minister was back in power. Here we can only bow to the courage and maturity of our population which firmly resisted to being corrupted by occult forces and financing and taught them a lesson that they will never forget.

Moreover, there is another Leader with whom they are in *alliance* and who claim to be *lame prop ek late tot*, such personage deserve no less than our *mépris* when the population uncovered to their utter disbelief that he had pocketed a cheque of Rs10 m. from defunct BAI, what a shame. And what a shame we have hon. Bhagwan, he always says he is a clean politician for more than 40 years and now maybe he got his part of the deal with Rs10 m. from the BAI share. He always says that he will not get in alliance with the Leader of the Labour Party and he

will prefer to drink *Lysol* but now it's the population to decide. Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, again to put into context, we all know of the money that had been found *dans le coffre-fort*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I still remember and I want to quote what a senior counsel, late Mr Yousuf Mohamed, has said when he was appearing for that leader with the *coffre-fort*, and I quote –

“Mo pa kapav fer mirak”.

Now, is he going to do *mirak* when so much money so much money has been found until today; it has not been explained.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in other countries which have wrestled with the same problems suggested that there is no ready-made solution that will eliminate all difficulties. We have to make one to measure by balancing different consideration and this is precisely what we this Government has done, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me come with some example why we should vote for this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir. Keeping foreign money out of domestic politics is a recognised issue in most democracies and many seek to ban such money from political finance.

In the UK there was first legislated one by the PPERA in 2000 before this there was no restriction on where donation to any political party could come from. The liberal democrats had received donation in excess of 2.4 m. pounds from 5th Avenue Partners Ltd, a company whose registered address was in Mallorca and from whom no account has been at the time been filed. Even the SFO in the UK has clear mandate to institute criminal proceedings for obvious reasons of efficiency and more importantly, given to the nature and complexity of such crimes. The Conservative Party has been fined a total of 70,000 pound sterling following the conclusion of the Electoral Commission's investigation into the party's campaigning spending and on the evidence available, I think we can say that with a fair degree of certainty that there are two cases related to Johnson that clearly fall within the definition of corruption.

First, the Owen Paterson case that entrusted power as an MP was abused, lobbying in breach of the rule for private gain. This certainly falls within the definition of corruption. The support given to Paterson by his political chums in Government as they sought to change the rule so that we would not be found to have breached them demonstrates collusion by the

Government. That collusion may not in itself have been corrupted but it adds to the picture of systemic corruption under the Johnson Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to bear in mind that the ultimate objective of this new law is to inject transparency and accountability in political finance and eliminate corrupt practices. The requirement to have all donations channels through the treasurer will obviously allow an effective accounting and reporting of such donation. Any attempts to loosen this rule will compromise the attainment of the objective of this legislation. The argument that this arrangement is too constraining on the party is very weak, indeed. Nowadays, the transfer of money or settlement of claims does not pose any particular challenge. The more so that the Bill provides that any monetary donation by a company shall be made by cheque or electronic means is, in fact, better because it is traceable.

Our proposals are based on the principle but do not ignore practicability. They are based both on an understanding of the particular context and challenges in our country and international trends in political finance regulation. Our proposal constitutes a package that will ensure a greater degree of integrity. They are proportionate to the weakness we want to address in the status quo and what is important is that it will not discourage or inhibit democratic engagement and popular participation in the political life of a country. But it will surely prevent money from illicit sources from infiltrating into and corroding the political process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for sure money is necessary for a democracy to function well. Yet it poses serious challenges and threat to the political process. Therefore, money in politics must be monitored and controlled. The challenge for the Government was to strike the right balance between limiting its negative effect while also encouraging and consolidating of democracies through healthy competition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, political parties are an essential element of our democracy. They play a critical role whether in Government or in Opposition, but of course, they need adequate funding. This is a fact, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a reality and if they have to play their role as effectively as possible, our aim is not to undermine, as it has been said, any party in any way. What the public wishes to be reassured of is that the political donations are not self-serving as we have, for too long, been witnessing this unhealthy public suspicion about the motivation of both donor and

recipient. The suspicion reached its climax after the high profile cases which were unveiled following 2014 general elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will conclude by saying that we all have a moral duty to pass on a legacy to the next generation of a society which is free from reprehensive, unethical, illegal, immoral and repugnant practices. Unfortunately, these practices darken our reputation and undermine our resolve. As a responsible Government under the able leadership of the Prime Minister, history will retain our contribution and enduring spirit in building a strong moral edifice and lay foundation for a just and equitable country free from illicit practices including the political financing.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I call hon. Uteem!

(10.09 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président, pour les honorables membres présents en juillet 2019 lors des débats sur l'amendement constitutionnel et sur *the Political Financing Bill*, il y a comme un sentiment de déjà-vu. Ces deux projets de loi avaient fait l'objet de longs débats, débats passionnés. J'ai avec moi les extraits des débats, 200 pages de Hansard. Des débats qui s'étaient conclus tôt dans la matinée et nos positions respectives n'ont pas évoluées depuis, M. le président.

L'honorable ministre Koonjoo-Shah nous demande pourquoi l'opposition ne vote-elle pas cette loi. Mais, madame la ministre, vous auriez mieux fait d'aller lire les débats de juillet 2019 au lieu de nous faire un procès d'intention. En particulier, je vous conseillerais de prendre le temps de lire intervention de votre collègue de Cabinet, l'honorable Alan Ganoo. Et nous, nous n'allons pas perdre le temps de cette Chambre. On a déjà dit tout ce qu'on avait à dire sur le projet de loi en 2019. C'est pourquoi on n'a pas l'intention de répéter tout ce qu'on a dit.

Comme l'a souligné l'honorable Paul Bérenger, ce projet de loi requiert une majorité de trois quarts pour amender la constitution. En juillet 2019, seulement 44 députés avaient voté en faveur des deux projets de loi. Il faut 53 votes pour amender la constitution. Aujourd'hui, ce gouvernement, même avec l'appui de l'honorable Ganoo et l'honorable Abbas Mamode qui

avaient voté contre le projet de loi en 2019, même avec ces deux personnes, le gouvernement n'a toujours pas la majorité de trois quarts.

Alors, M. le président, posons-nous la question. Pourquoi le gouvernement n'a pas mis sur pied le *Select Committee* que tous les partis de l'opposition en 2019 avaient demandé au Premier ministre de mettre avec des représentants des membres de l'opposition pour trouver un consensus pour qu'on puisse amender la constitution et avoir une loi sur le financement des partis politiques? La réponse est évidente. Le gouvernement, au fond, ne veut pas vraiment que ces deux projets de loi deviennent loi. La plupart des appréhensions des membres de l'opposition qui avait été soulevées lors des débats sur le projet de loi en 2019 n'ont malheureusement pas été adressées dans ces deux projets de loi aujourd'hui devant la Chambre. Par exemple, M. le président, l'opposition était contre le plafond des dépenses qu'un candidat et qu'un parti puisse faire lors des élections générales.

En 2019, le montant suggéré était de R 1 million par candidat, par circonscription et R 1 million par parti, par circonscription, ce qui nous fait si on prend en considération les deux candidats de Rodrigues, un montant de R 83 millions pour une élection générale. Nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, en 2019 on trouvait que c'était trop. C'était trop parce qu'il y a très peu de partis à Maurice qui puissent se vanter d'avoir un *Sun Trust* qui peut décaisser R 83 millions pour une élection.

(Interruptions)

R 83 millions ! Il y a tous ces petits partis politiques qui ne vont pas pouvoir faire R 83 millions.

(Interruptions)

Mais vous savez quoi, M. le président ? Au lieu de nous écouter, au lieu de réduire le seuil, qu'est-ce que ce gouvernement fait dans le projet de loi aujourd'hui ? Il vient augmenter les dépenses. Cela passe pour un candidat de R 1 million à R 1,5 millions et pour parti politique d'un million à R 1,5 millions par circonscription. Donc, aujourd'hui le montant qu'un parti politique comme le MSM pourra dépenser si ce projet de loi était voté sera de l'ordre de R 124,5 millions ! M. le président, on n'était pas d'accord pour R 83 millions. Pensez-vous qu'aujourd'hui on sera

d'accord pour voter une limitation de dépenses à la hauteur de R 124,5 millions ? Je vois l'honorable Dr. Padayachy, je sais que la roupie a été dévaluée, je sais qu'aujourd'hui ces R 124 millions ne valent pas grand-chose, mais quand même ! On ne peut pas attendre que l'opposition aujourd'hui soit d'accord de monter les dépenses à R 124,5 millions alors qu'on n'était pas d'accord sur R 83 millions en 2019.

M. le président, certaines des nouvelles provisions – et je ne m'attarderai que sur les nouvelles provisions, je ne vais pas répéter ce que j'ai dit en 2019 – mais selon moi, certaines provisions de ce projet de loi sont bien plus pires que les dispositions des projets de loi qui étaient présentées en 2019. Et, je suis sûr que la plupart des gens du gouvernement n'ont même pas lu ce projet de loi parce que quand je les écoute, c'est que du venin sur le MMM, sur le Parti travailliste, sur Ramgoolam, sur Bérenger, que du venin et rien sur le projet ! Rien, ils n'ont même pas eu l'audace de citer une provision, ne serait-ce une disposition de ce projet de loi pour venir dire pourquoi ils sont en faveur de ce projet de loi. Que comme l'honorable Paul Bérenger l'a dit : *operation zet labou*.

Alors voir ce que ce projet de loi que nous ne souhaitons pas voter prévoit. Par exemple à la section 22(3) qui est pour moi, une provision extrêmement dangereuse, voire antidémocratique. Qu'est-ce que cette nouvelle disposition nous dit ? Cette disposition concerne l'enregistrement des partis politiques. Si un parti politique n'est pas enregistré auprès de l'*Electoral Supervisory Commission*, il ne peut pas avoir de donation. Donc, il ne peut pas avoir de donation, donc il ne peut pas dépenser l'argent. Et la section (3) nous dit –

“Where writs for a general election have been issued, no application for registration shall be entertained by the Commission during the period starting 5 days after the day on which the writs are issued and ending on the day on which the election results are proclaimed.”

Donc, un parti politique n'a que quatre jours – à partir de la date d'émission du *writ of election*, un parti politique, une alliance n'a que quatre jours pour s'enregistrer et dans ces quatre jours-là, ils doivent trouver le leader, leur trésorier, les *office-bearers*, le président, le secrétaire. Ils doivent aussi pouvoir ouvrir un compte bancaire. Seulement quatre jours et si le Commissaire rejette votre demande, vous devez faire appel dans les 24 heures.

Donc, allez chercher un avocat qui va travailler toute la nuit pour mettre une affaire en cour et le juge va donner sa décision au plus tard deux jours avant le *Nomination Day*. Vous réalisez, M. le président, que deux jours avant le *Nomination Day*, c'est là que les partis politiques vont pouvoir aller s'enregistrer ? Le gouvernement, bien sûr, a un avantage sur tous les autres partis politiques. Bien sûr, le Premier ministre est le seul à savoir quand sera fixée la date des élections. Bien sûr, il est le seul à savoir quand sera émis le *writ of election*. Donc, lui, il sera prêt, ses candidats seront prêts. Il va pouvoir s'enregistrer quand il veut, mais tous les autres partis politiques, tous ceux qui ont décidé dans le tard de se présenter ou de former un parti politique ? Est-ce qu'on est d'accord avec une telle loi qui donne seulement quatre jours après le décret de *writ of election* pour s'enregistrer ? Donc, finalement, on se demande, M. le président, si le but de ce projet de loi n'est pas d'empêcher un maximum de partis de l'opposition et les candidats du parti de l'opposition d'avoir de l'argent pour les élections.

Autre nouvelle disposition controversée, la section 9, *Prohibited political donations, a non-resident citizen cannot finance a political party or candidate*. Un recul ! Un recul, M. le président, au moment où la diaspora mauricienne exige le droit de vote et aspire à jouer un plus grand rôle dans la vie politique locale. Certains de notre diaspora, certains *non-residents* ont même émis le souhait d'avoir un député pour les non-résidents, comme cela se fait à l'étranger, comme cela se fait en France. Et, aujourd'hui, je suis sûr que le gouvernement qui regarde sur l'internet – l'honorable Dr. Rawoo a parlé de l'internet – je suis sûr qu'ils sont sur l'internet, donc, je suis sûr qu'ils savent ce que la diaspora mauricienne pense de ce gouvernement. Donc, ils savent que si la diaspora mauricienne va financer un parti ou des partis qu'elle va voter, elle va financer les partis de l'opposition. Donc, c'est pourquoi le gouvernement vient avec une loi pour empêcher la diaspora mauricienne de pouvoir financer des partis politiques à Maurice. Est-ce qu'on peut être d'accord avec une telle provision ? Non !

Sous la section 9, on fait une liste des institutions qui ne peuvent pas faire une donation politique, par exemple, un *state-owned enterprise, statutory corporation*. M. le président, le gouvernement, qui a à sa disposition des bâtiments du gouvernement, des bâtiments des corps paraétatiques, des bâtiments des *statutory corporations*, a accès à des *halls* gratuitement pour accueillir des gens, peut tenir un discours politique ! Est-ce qu'à la SVICC, le Premier ministre ne peut-il pas tenir un discours politique ? Est-ce que ce n'est pas là une contribution, une

donation de la SVICC aux partis politiques, aux politiciens qui décident et qui disent à l'assistance de voter pour moi ? Si vous votez pour moi, je vais augmenter votre pension. C'est quoi ça ? Est-ce que c'est un *prohibited donation* ou pas ?

Maintenant, on va plus loin, M. le président. Un corps paraétatique décide de louer un bâtiment qui appartient à un parti politique, est-ce que c'est une donation ? Si on fait pression sur un corps paraétatique de venir louer nos locaux politiques, est-ce que c'est une donation politique ? Et j'ai le jugement 2004, *Sun Trust v. State of Mauritius*. *Sun Trust* a été loué. Et quand le gouvernement a changé et qu'ils ont résilié le contrat, *Sun Trust* a poursuivi le gouvernement ! Entre temps, il y a eu un changement de gouvernement et il s'est poursuivi lui-même. *Sun Trust* a poursuivi le gouvernement dont le Premier ministre est le propriétaire de *Sun Trust*. Est-ce qu'il y a une donation politique ? Est-ce que c'est permis ? Je n'ai pas entendu un mot des membres du gouvernement qui ont parlé. Le *Sun Trust*, c'est quoi ? Est-ce que le *Sun Trust* appartient au MSM ? Le *Sun Trust* est un *trust*, qui sont les *trustees* ? Les membres du MSM ? Est-ce que l'honorable Gobin est un *trustee* ? Est-ce que l'honorable Maudhoo, l'honorable Koonjoo-Shah sont des bénéficiaires du *Sun Trust* ? Est-ce que le *Sun Trust* appartient au MSM ? Et le MSM qui a construit ce bâtiment, comment a-t-il construit ce bâtiment ? Avec quel argent ? Je suis sûr que le Premier ministre et les personnes qui sont derrière le *Sun Trust* vont venir nous indiquer combien de coffres-forts il en faut pour remplir le *Sun Trust* !

An hon. Member: *La pa dir la ! La pa dir la !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Uteem: Combien de coffres-forts ? La personne qui a construit le *Sun Trust*, combien de dollars a-t-elle reçu ? Combien d'argent ils ont reçu de Taiwan ? Parce qu'on se souvient bien que l'ancien Premier ministre nous avait dit que *moralite pa rampli vant. Moralite pa rampli vant !*

Ms J. Bérenger: Shame!

Mr Uteem: Et aujourd'hui, le MSM veut nous donner des leçons ? Des leçons ! Allez nous dire, M. le Premier ministre, où vous avez vous trouvé l'argent pour construire le *Sun Trust* !

Certains intervenants, M. le président, notamment l'honorable Koonjoo-Shah, mais aussi l'honorable Dhunoo, nous ont parlé des *suspicious donations* sous la section 10. Mais, aujourd'hui, ils ont changé les mots. Aujourd'hui, il faut qu'un *recipient*, et je lis –

“(1) A recipient shall not accept a political donation where he has reasonable grounds to suspect that the donation originates from the proceeds of a crime.”

C'est un test subjectif. Auparavant, en 2019, ce n'était pas cela qui était prévu. Ce qui était prévu, c'est que –

“(...) candidate shall not accept a donation that he knows, or ought reasonably to have known, (...) originates from the proceeds of a crime (...).”

Donc, on retire quelque chose d'objectif qui était en ligne avec les dispositions du *Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act* (FIAMLA), on remplace, donc, un critère objectif, *'ought to have known,'* par un critère subjectif, *he knew or 'he has reasonable grounds to suspect'*. Donc, *if he does not have any reasonable ground*, on ne peut pas le poursuivre. C'est un huge step backwards, but predictable, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we know how close certain members of the MSM and candidates are allegedly with people involved in drugs and illegal betting. The links between...

The Prime Minister: *Ein! Kisanla?*

Mr Uteem: I am going to cite. I am going to cite. Don't worry!

The Prime Minister: *Dir!*

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister seemed to forget who was the Member of Parliament who was arrested in December 1985 in Schiphol carrying 20 kilos of heroin? The Amsterdam boys!

(Interruptions)

In whose government?

(Interruptions)

In whose government?

(Interruptions)

In whose government? Who was the Prime Minister?

(Interruptions)

Who was the Prime Minister?

(Interruptions)

He forgets! He was in his Government! He forgets. He forgets what was said. He forgets! How can hon. Members forget what was said by Sir Maurice Rault in his Commission of Inquiry in February 1987, and I quote at page 7 –

“No political campaign can be run without vast sums of money and only hypocrites deny that in raising funds, all major political parties accept contribution without pausing to ask if money brought to them smells or not.”

Et puis, à la page 28 –

“The drug tycoons realised that MLAs were virtually immune from search and with great daring set about corrupting a number of MLAs, who at their instigation became drug courier.”

30 ans plus tard, le rapport Lam Shang Leen, qui a été cité par les honorables membres avant moi, dédie un chapitre en entier, chapitre 16 –

“(…) (xiii) whether there is any evidence of political influence in drug trafficking trade; (…).”

Qu’est-ce que le rapport Lam Shang Leen dit ? Ce n’est pas moi qui le dit, c’est le rapport, je cite ce que le rapport dit –

“The Commission has [learned] from the notorious drug trafficker that he had financed the electoral campaign of the now governing party and that was because all his counsels were from that party.”

Who was the now governing party? C’est le MSM! C’est le MSM, le rapport Lam Shang Leen nous dit le lien qu’il y a entre le MSM et le trafic de drogue et aujourd’hui, on vient nous pointer du doigt, M. le président.

M. le président, autre problème, section 11 – ‘Register of Political Donations’. Pour un candidat, il doit garder son registre pendant cinq ans mais par contre un parti politique lui, *he can deregister anytime* et qu’est-ce qui se passe ? Après les élections générales, si un parti qui a commis des infractions, décide de *wind up*. Il a simplement à donner une *notice* au Commissaire et c’est tout, on peut poursuivre son trésorier mais son trésorier n’a qu’à dire que *l’offense has been committed without my knowledge*. Le leader ne sera pas *liable*. *An offence is committed and the Party receiving the donation in cash or from undisclosed donor, the leader is not accountable. The treasurer, if he says that he did not know about the source, he will also not be accountable and this is the kind of law that you want us to vote? Clearly no one really gave an effort about this Bill.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I read this Bill, I see that it is heavily biased in favour of the dictatorship of leaders of political parties. Now everything, anyone, any candidates who receives money is accountable to his Party so the leader really controls the purse and makes sure that none of the candidates, none of the hon. Minister, hon. MPs can raise donation. All the donations must be reported to the Party and what is more if an hon. Member passes away, this money goes to the Party. The money that he has received, his donation, will not go to his heirs, will not go to his political heirs, it goes to the political leadership...

Mr Toussaint: *Li anvi donn dimounn...*

Mr Uteem: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end up by saying that there are only two things. There are two things that we had asked in the 2019 Bill which is still not here and I am saying it because hon. Maudhoo mentioned it: should there be a provision which compels a political party to disclose what facility it has afforded to a donor after the elections? *L’honorable Maudhoo a*

parlé de contrepartie. But we have evidence, Mr Speaker, Sir, of a gentleman who went on radio and he said that I have financed the MSM at the tune of Rs10 m...

(Interruptions)

He said it on radio. Everybody heard it. I heard it also. He said that he financed the MSM political party at the level of Rs10 m. And after the election, the gentleman get the horserace for himself, ...

An hon. Member: *Champs de Mars pou li...*

Mr Uteem: ...Le Champ de Mars on *enn plato* for him. There is no offence. A donor who after the election receives a payback, there is no offence in this Bill, there is no offense? And when we talk about the offence, the hon. Prime Minister tells us that a fine is sufficient: Rs5 m. fine is sufficient. A political party may receive hundreds of millions if not billions of rupees....

An hon. Member: *200 millions dan kof la ...*

Mr Uteem: ... in breach of this law and the only sanction is a fine of Rs5 m. and this is against the Representation of People Act. The Representation of People Act today if you spend above the limits, it is an illegal practice. Today if you spend above the limit, it's an illegal practice...

The Prime Minister: *Dir sa Ramgoolam!*

Mr Uteem: ... and under the Representation of People Act: a person who is guilty,...

Mr Toussaint: Donation...

Mr Uteem: ... who is convicted of illegal practice, he is barred for five years from voting or from standing as candidate but if you breach this Bill, you have only a fine of Rs5 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, can you blame the Opposition when you see so many loopholes that we decide not to vote in favour of this Bill? I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we will not vote and condone this type of practice.

Thank you.

An hon. Member: Bravo Reza!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Gobin!

(10.32 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor. I lend my voice, Mr Speaker, Sir, in support of both Bills.

There are two Bills before the House: the Constitution (Amendment) Bill and the Political Financing Bill. I say it again, I lend my voice in support of both Bills and, of course, I also wish to commend the hon. Prime Minister for bringing these two Bills before the House *parce que nous sommes tous les élus dans cette Chambre face à l'histoire*. We will be judged by history. I thank the former orator hon. Uteem for his brevity especially at this late hour but you were not as brief as your leader hon. Bérenger who had made a guest appearance a little bit earlier in the course of the debate.

I wish to come first of all to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to explain why we need to amend the Constitution and why we need the three-quarters majority. It is important for the population to understand and it is important for history, for the record, for Hansard and also very importantly for international observers to know, to note and to especially observe what the Opposition is doing in this House. The Constitution (Amendment) Bill contains only three paragraphs (a), (b) and (c). We are amending, at least, we are proposing to amend section 41 of the Constitution – Section 41 provides for the ‘Functions of Electoral Supervisory Commission and Electoral Commissioner’. As the law is now as the Constitution stands, the Electoral Supervisory Commission has general responsibility for, I quote –

“(...) supervise, the registration of electors for the election of members of the Assembly and the conduct of elections of such members (...)”.

There are two limbs to that: the supervision of registration of electors and the conduct of elections. And, of course, the Electoral Commissioner works under the supervision as the name suggests of the Electoral Supervisory Commission. Neither the Supervisory Commission nor the

Commissioner has the necessary jurisdiction to look into the financing, the expenses, the accounts of political parties. We need to give that power to our election management body.

As the law stands therefore, neither the ESC nor the Commissioner can supervise financing, expenses, accounts, auditing of political parties and this is a fundamental question – why are we amending the Constitution? The answer is very simple, Mr Speaker, Sir, *on est devant l'histoire et je le dis pour le public à Maurice, je le dis pour le public à l'international, je le dis et je vais le répéter pour international IDEA*, for the US State Department, for friendly countries, for regional economic blocks. I will say it for everyone to hear it loud and clear – we are presenting a Constitutional (Amendment) Bill to empower our election management body to supervise the financing, the expenses of political parties in this country and the public, the electors, the international observers, the NGO, the Civil Society, the academics, the opinion leaders, both locally and abroad will note that in this House, the MSM will vote for this empowering of our Election Management Body. *La plate-forme militants* will vote for empowering our Election Management Body.

Le ML will vote in favour of empowering the Election Management Body. *Le Muvman Patriot Morisien* will vote in favour of empowering the Election Management Body to supervise, I say it again, financing expenses accounting auditing of political parties and the MMM will vote against, the Labour Party will vote against and the newly created party and they I suspect will also vote against.

So when an international cooperating partner, whether a donor from any institution, locally or abroad, will ask me the question: what has happened to the Constitution Amendment Bill? I will say this is the paradox of this country where the Government is proposing transparency, Government is bringing a Bill to empower an Election Management Body and the Opposition is saying ‘no, we do not want transparency, we do not want the Election Management Body to have the power to poke its nose into the accounts, into the expenses of political parties’. This is the paradox of this country.

In other democracies, Opposition calls for transparency, Opposition calls for more powers for the Election Management Body and here, the Government is bringing a Bill to the House. It is black on white, this is what we are proposing and the Opposition is saying that they do not

want transparency. They do not want the Election Management Body to look at expenses, accounting and auditing of political parties. C'est ça the record, l'histoire va juger très sévèrement les membres qui vont voter contre ce projet de loi.

And I always listen with a lot of interest when hon. Dr. Boolell speaks. I say it once again; he is the fourth Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament. Five years, four Leaders of Opposition. He always refers to the tyranny of numbers. We do not have the numbers this time on this Bill. We are not the tyrant. We are appealing to you to vote in favour because we do not have the numbers. There is no tyranny of numbers hon. Dr. Boolell. Yet, you say you will not vote. This is the poetry we are used to hear. The tyranny of numbers! Now that we do not have the numbers, you say that you will not vote for transparency. You will not vote to empower our Election Management Body to bring transparency in political financing. This is what this Opposition is saying tonight.

Can the population understand that? This is the paradox that will be inscribed in Hansard and in History for the whole world to take note. And, I say this also for hon. Bérenger, the Leader of the MMM. The whole career of hon. Bérenger we see calls for transparency in political financing. As a mantra – indeed hon. Ganoo, as a mantra! Now that this Constitution Amendment Bill is before the House, in three paragraphs (a) (b) (c) to empower this jewel called Electoral Supervisory Commission with the power, they say 'no'. Vous, je le dis encore une fois, vous serez jugés par l'histoire. And the question is simple, if you are for transparency and accountability, you vote for this Bill, as simple as that.

There is something else which we always hear in the speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Apart from the tyranny of numbers, we are always referred to the bar of public opinion. So I therefore say – you all will be judged at the bar of public opinion for your voting against this empowering of our EMB, our Electoral Management Body. And we know why you are doing that, because we have heard from the speeches of my hon. colleagues from this side. The population recalls very clearly what we have seen on TV where hon. Ramful was saying there is transparency in the accounts of the Labour Party. Yes! Yes, I agree, totally agree, there is transparency in your accounting because we have seen on TV how transparent it was. The population will always remember that. And hon. Ramful referred to the Supreme Court of India. Yes, let me explain so that you all understand what the system there was. The system was that

any person could not bring donation directly to the Party. Any person wishing to give any donation had to go to a bank and buy a Bond. It is therefore understood that when that person would buy a Bond, the banker would perform KYC – Know Your Customer, would perform due diligence, would perform the test on source of fund before providing the fund and taking the money. So the onus was on the banker. And then the Bond was given to an ex-political party, that political party would have to cash the bond. Again, there would be the intervention of a banker for due diligence etc.

Well, fair enough, the Supreme Court has struck this system down. Hon. Ramful mentioned it *du bout des lèvres*. What did the Supreme Court of India say? It ordered that all the bank records be referred to the Electoral Commission. Vous avez dit ça! So you are in favour of transferring the records in India to the Electoral Commissioner of India but when we want to empower our Election Management Body, you say – “no, you do not want the Election Management Body of Mauritius to have a sight on your accounts. This is what you are saying.

This is for the Constitution Amendment Bill. Let me come to the Political Financing Bill. I think my colleagues have spoken a lot about it. I want to restrict my argument in view of the time allocation Mr Speaker, Sir, to one aspect only of this Bill namely: Clause 13, Clause 14, Clause 17 and Clause 19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 13 speaks of accounting records of political parties. It provides, I say it without any specific quoting but it generally provides for a Treasurer of Political Party to keep accounting records. It states and that the –

“The accounting records shall –

- (a) disclose, at any time, with reasonable accuracy, the financial position of the registered political party, and
- (b) enable the treasurer to ensure that any statement of accounts prepared by him complies with this Act.”

Furthermore, I lay emphasis on the following –

“(3) The accounting records shall, in particular, contain –

(a) entries showing all political donations...”

I think we have covered sufficiently well the question of donation. But we are not speaking of payments –

(3) The accounting records shall, in particular, contain –

(a) entries showing all political donations received and any payment made by the registered political party and the matters in respect of which the receipts and payments take place, and.”

Paiement et reçues, M. le Président !

Furthermore it states that there should be a record of assets and liabilities. Accounting records should be preserved for at least 5 years; should be audited, should be signed by the Treasurer and Leader or President and Statement of Account submitted to the Election Management Body will be available for consultation by the public. If the election management body is not satisfied with the accounts, it has the general supervisory power relating to political financing and furthermore, under clause 19, it has powers of investigation. Why am I saying all this and laying emphasis on the question of expenses, payments and receipts? Because, Mr Speaker, Sir, the accounting is to be kept in accordance with the Schedule to the Act. In the definition section, there is a definition for ‘statement of accounts.’ Statement of accounts means –

““statement of accounts” means a statement of accounts in the form set out in the Schedule;”

The Schedule shows that accounts should be kept for the balance, cash, receipts, subscription fees, interest, monetary donations in kind, others, and payments as well.

We say it loud and clear, we are voting in favour of the Bill. We have no qualms whatsoever to keep accounts in accordance with the Schedule. MSM, *Plateforme Militante*, ML, MPM, we will keep accounts in accordance with the Schedule. This is called transparency! It will be submitted to the Electoral, it will be audited and it will be available for consultation by the public. *Ce n’est pas le cas pour les partis de l’autre côté de la Chambre. Pourquoi ?*

(Interruptions)

Eh bien ! Je vous donne quelques exemples, M. le président. Je n'accuse personne, je prends des situations hypothétiques. S'il y a, au pur des hasards, un parti qui utilise l'argent du parti pour payer, par exemple, pour une nuit, R 691 000 à l'hôtel George V à Paris...

Hon. Members: Aaaahhh!

Mr Gobin: *It is called an expense!*

An hon. Member: *La pena transparens!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Gobin: So, this will go into the expenses, alright? If a political party's funds...

(Interruptions)

...are used...

An hon. Member: George V !

(Interruptions)

Mr Gobin: If a political party's funds in the political party accounts are used to pay R 856 000 de shopping chez Chanel...

(Interruptions)

...it will be in the expenses!

(Interruptions)

Political expenses, we know for some is not only about buses, banners, *oriflamme*, *baz*...

Mr Toussaint: *Macaroni!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Gobin: ...or foodstuffs!

(Interruptions)

There are instances, let me give another example to illustrate my point, if political funding is used to the tune of Rs1.2 m. in one day at Selfridges and Louis Vuitton...

(Interruptions)

If Rs1.3 m. of party funding is spent in Paris at Le Printemps and at Louis Vuitton, it is political expenses and it goes in the Schedule!

I ask the question: would not a member of such a party like to see transparency and like to see the expenses incurred by the political party? Any reasonable member of such a party would like to see the Schedule and see the payments and the expenses. But there is one specific party, very well known here by everyone, which does not want such a Bill to go through. We have all understood why. The whole population has understood why. All the international observers from all quarters have understood why. I need not give any further explanation why.

I do not know if this is parliamentary or not, but I take pity at the members of such a party who have to sit down and watch quietly the depletion of the funding of such a party. Instead of building a decent headquarter for the party, money is being squandered away!

(Interruptions)

Instructions are being given to vote against the Bill! *Je vais le dire encore une fois, nous allons prendre notre responsabilité devant l'histoire. Prenez la vôtre !*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: ...is the aider and....

Mr Gobin: Yes! You should not be on the wrong side of history, aiding and abetting the squandering away of your own party funds. *Pour le MMM, je vais leur dire*, at least as far as we know, *vous n'avez pas de coffre*. As far as we know! If you have received Rs10 m. from particular donor, hon. Uteem, fair enough, disclose it! This is also what was said by hon. Dr. Boolell. He repeatedly said 'disclosure, disclosure, and disclosure.' If we disclose...

Dr. Boolell: *Li pe dir twa disclose!*

Mr Gobin: Yes, we are going to disclose!

The Prime Minister: *To pena koff, to ena pantry!*

Dr. Boolell: ...would never disclose the pantry!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gobin: The MMM, why are you following this bandwagon? *En kreol apel sa rant dan enn kaless kasse! Prenez vos responsabilités !* We are taking ours! You will be judged; we will all be judged by history.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debates.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 05 July 2024 at 4.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 10.56 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned for Friday 05 July 2024 at 4.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**COMMISSIONER OF POLICE – VEHICLES ACQUISITION – MAKE, PRICE & RUNNING COST**

(No. B/494) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the acquisition of vehicles for official use by the Commissioner of Police, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof acquired since his appointment in August 2021 to date, giving details thereof, including the make, price and running cost thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MBC – ALLEDGED MOLESTATION CASE – ENQUIRY

(No. B/495) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the alleged case of molesting of employees of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation at a political gathering in Port Louis on 01 May 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate if any arrest has been effected as at date.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS – INDELIBLE INK USAGE

(No. B/496) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the forthcoming National Assembly Elections, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office of the Electoral Commissioner, information as to if consideration will be given for the use of indelible ink therefor to prevent a person from voting more than once and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE OFFICERS – SUNDAY – DOUBLE PAY

(No. B/498) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the payment of double pay to Police Officers working on Sundays, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of Police Officers having benefitted therefrom since January 2024 to date, indicating the criteria applied for the payment thereof.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE ENQUIRIES – 2020 TO JULY 2024 – STATUS

(No. B/499) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police enquiries initiated for more than four years ago, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof still awaiting completion.

(Withdrawn)

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE – MISUSE OF POLICE VEHICLES & FUEL

(No. B/502) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether he will state if he has been made aware of an alleged case of misuse of Police vehicles and petrol for personal use against the Commissioner of Police and, if so, indicate the actions, if any, envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

STC – MOGAS AND GASOIL – PRICE STABILISATION ACCOUNT

(No. B/527) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the price structure of

Mogas and Gasoil, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the amount of –

- (a) Value Added Tax and Excise Duty transferred to the Consolidated Fund;
- (b) funds transferred to the Price Stabilisation Account, and
- (c) other contributions charged on the consumers since 01 July 2023 to date.

(Withdrawn)

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY PROJECT – SECONDARY SCHOOLS – COST OF PROJECT

(No. B/530) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Internet Connectivity Project via WIFI-LAN to 162 secondary schools, he will state the number of schools connected therewith as at date, indicating –

- (a) the final cost thereof, and
- (b) if there has been any delay in the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MINOR DRUG-USERS – REPORTED CASES – REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES

(No. B/531) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to minor drug-users, he will state the –

- (a) reported number of cases thereof since 2019 to 2023 on a yearly basis and for the period January 2024 to date, indicating their respective age and sex;
- (b) number thereof having been successfully treated against drug addiction, giving details of the rehabilitation programmes therefor, and

- (c) number of deaths thereof resulting from overdose, if any.

(Withdrawn)

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, VACOAS-PHOENIX – SCAVENGING UNIT – LORRIES

(No. B/536) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the fleet of lorries of the scavenging unit of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number thereof, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof in running condition, and
(b) yearly costs of maintenance thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**DENGUE & CHOLERA OUTBREAK – PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY
OPERATIONS COMMAND**

(No. B/537) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether following the recent outbreaks of Dengue and Cholera in Africa and the neighbouring islands, he will state if the Public Health Emergency Operations Command in Mauritius has been activated for the surveillance thereof, giving details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

METRO EXPRESS LTD – LOANS & FINANCIAL SUPPORT

(No. B/539) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro Express Ltd., he will state the amount of loans and other financial support extended thereto by Government since its inception to date.

(Withdrawn)

CREMATION INCINERATORS – OPERATIONALITY

(No. B/541) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the cremation incinerators, he will state the number thereof that has been set up across the island, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof not in operation, and
- (b) reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

KREOL MORISIEN – HEADSHIP ALLOWANCE – APPLICATIONS

(No. B/542) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to Kreol Morisien, she will state if she has been made aware of applications for Headship Allowance from educators thereof from public and private educational institutions having been turned down and, if so, indicate the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

**LANDSCOPE MAURITIUS LTD – LA MARIE, GLEN PARK AND PLAINE
SOPHIE – LAND – BENEFICIARIES**

(No. B/543) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the 2000 arpents of land which are managed by Landscape Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of planters who have benefitted therefrom, indicating the number thereof in the regions of La Marie, Glen Park and Plaine Sophie.

(Withdrawn)

**MORCELLEMENT CHAPMAN VIEW, COROMANDEL – DAMAGED ROADS –
RECONSTRUCTION**

(No. B/544) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the five roads at Morcellement Chapman View in Coromandel damaged during the passage of cyclone Belal, he will state where matters stand as to the reconstruction thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**NATIONAL BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE – BLOOD DONOR COORDINATOR –
ALLEGED HARASSMENT**

(No. B/546) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the National Blood Transfusion Service, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if any case of alleged harassment has been reported against the Blood Donor Coordinator and, if so, indicate the actions taken in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIUS MARITIME TRAINING ACADEMY – INSTRUCTORS –
VACANCIES FILLED**

(No. B/549) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy, he will state when the existing vacancies of Instructors thereat will be filled.

(Withdrawn)

**ALBION – INACCESSIBLE ROADS – HEAVY RAINFALL – REMEDIAL
ACTIONS**

(No. B/550) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the two main roads leading to Albion which become inaccessible during heavy rainfall, he will state the remedial actions envisaged therefor.

(Withdrawn)

VACOAS-PHOENIX MUNICIPAL COUNCIL – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/551) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the financial situation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MR G.M – FOOTBALL TEAM’S COACH – WORK PERMIT APPLICATION

(No. A/34) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, in regard to the application for a work permit for Mr G. M., a French national acting actually as Coach for the Mauritius National Football Team (Club M), he will state if same has been issued and, if so, give details thereof, indicating if his Ministry is in presence of a request therefor by the Mauritius Football Association.

Reply: As at date, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has not received any application for work permit in respect of Mr G.M.

However, based on information from the Economic Development Board (EDB) on 24 May 2024, the Mauritius Football Association has submitted, on the National E-Licensing Platform, an application for Occupation Permit under the Professional Category for Mr. G.M as National Football Coach. Occupation Permit is granted under the Immigration Act.

The EDB has further informed that, on 26 June 2024, an approval in principle has been issued to Mr G.M. who is expected to submit the required documents and effect the necessary payment. Thereafter, the Passport & Immigration Office would issue the Occupation Permit under the Professional Category to Mr G.M. after necessary verification.

**MAURITIUS RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY & ENERGY EFFICIENCY
MANAGEMENT OFFICE – MERGING**

(No. A/37) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the proposed merging of the Mauritius

Renewable Energy Agency (MARENA) and the Energy Efficiency Management Office (EEMO) into a single institution, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: In my reply to PQ B/1600 at our Sitting of 28 November 2023, the House was informed that my Ministry was in the process of recruiting a consultant who would undertake a seamless integration of MARENA and EEMO, including an assessment of the current energy landscape and challenges ahead, the roles and responsibilities and strengths and weaknesses under each legal and institutional frameworks, with a view to coming up with a fresh legal framework for the new institution.

My Ministry with the support of the SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency had drafted the Terms of Reference for the recruitment of the consultant.

Bids were invited through an Open Advertised Bidding exercise on 20 February 2024 where only one bid was received. After evaluation, the bid was found unresponsive and therefore, was not retained. My Ministry is currently revising the bidding document and tender would be launched anew. Funds have been provided in the budget for Financial Year 2024/2025.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 3 – CHILDREN’S PLAYGROUND – FACILITIES & STREET LIGHTING

(No. A/41) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the children’s playground in Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to –

- (a) the current state thereof, indicating the facilities available thereat, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the provision of street lanterns thereat in replacement of the bollards to prevent damages arising from acts of vandalism.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that there are 11 children’s playgrounds in Constituency No. 3, Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that mowing and cleaning of the gardens are carried out regularly. However, some of children playgrounds need to be upgraded.

A copy of the list of the current state and facilities in the different children's playgrounds is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

I am further informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that, on 21 June 2024, the National Development Unit has indicated that it has a project for the upgrading of the following children's playgrounds –

- (i) Jardin Cocos, Plaine Verte (Near Mtius Telecom);
- (ii) Robert Surcouf street, Roche Bois;
- (iii) Maharatta Street, Garden, Port Louis, and
- (iv) St Francois (Opposite Velore Street) Port Louis.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it will consider replacing the bollards with street lighting as these gardens are found in residential areas, which may cause some inconveniences to the nearby residents.