



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER 2024

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(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)

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

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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Deputy Speaker	Hon. Vedasingam Vasudevachariar Baloomoody
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Mohamed Ehsan Juman
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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 04 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 17 December 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**NOTICE OF QUESTIONS – PQs ORDER – DRAWING OF LOTS**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, hon. Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Leader of the Opposition, hon. Members, during the Sitting of 10 December 2024, I informed the House that I had decided to maintain the system of first-come, first-served basis for the questions of that Sitting.

But I later informed you that during lunch time, the Chief Government Whip and the Opposition Whip had reached an agreement to adopt a system of drawing of lots for the purpose of determining the order in which questions would appear on the Notice of Questions. Same would be conducted in the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly in the presence of the hon. Chief Government Whip or any Government representative, Member of the National Assembly, and the hon. Whip of the Opposition or any Opposition representative.

I wish to inform the House now that I have received a written agreement dated 11 December 2024, co-signed by the hon. Chief Government Whip and the hon. Whip of the Opposition to the effect that Parliamentary Questions of which notice has been given for a particular Tuesday Sitting be the object of drawing of lots.

Copy of the said agreement is hereby being tabled.

I agreed to the implementation of the said agreement pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 77, which reads as follows –

“The Speaker shall have power to regulate the conduct of business in the Assembly in all matters not provided for in these Orders.”

The Notice of Questions for today’s Sitting contains Parliamentary Questions set in the order determined by the drawing of lots conducted on Wednesday last.

Moreover, hon. Members, should you have any further queries on the matter, you are welcome to see me privately in my office at any appropriate time.

Thank you.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry of Finance

Ministry for Rodrigues and Outer Islands

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):
 - (i) The Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill (No. XIX of 2024); and
 - (ii) The Special Allowance Bill (No. XX of 2024).
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Economic Development Board for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (c) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 4) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 248 of 2024)
- (d) The Economic Development Board (Smart City Scheme) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 249 of 2024)
- (e) The Economic Development Board (Property Development Scheme) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 250 of 2024)
- (f) The Economic Development Board (Invest Hotel Scheme) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 251 of 2024)
- (g) The Economic Development Board (Real Estate Development Scheme) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 252 of 2024)
- (h) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 5) Regulations 2024 (Government Notice No. 257 of 2024)

B. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 253 of 2024)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 254 of 2024)
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 24) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 255 of 2024)

- (d) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 256 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Research

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the University of Mauritius for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2020.

D. Ministry of Arts and Culture

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Conservatoire National de Musique François-Mitterrand for the year ended 30 June 2023.
- (b) The Islamic Cultural Centre Trust Fund (Pilgrimage) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 258 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

AGALÉGA ISLANDS – CYCLONE CHIDO – DAMAGES & RELIEF MEASURES

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the passage of cyclone Chido over the islands of Agaléga, he will state –

- (a) the nature and extent of damages caused to the infrastructure and households thereat, indicating the estimated cost thereof;
- (b) the number of casualties, indicating the overall medical conditions of those affected;
- (c) the number of families currently staying in the refugee centre and the measures being envisaged to address the housing needs of those without shelter;
- (d) the shortage of basic necessities on the island, if any, indicating the measures being proposed to prevent the depletion thereof, and
- (e) if Government proposes to declare a state of disaster thereat, indicating if relief will be sent and when.

Madam Speaker: I understand that Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will reply to this question.

The Prime Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, with your permission, I shall reply to this Private Notice Question, which was addressed to the Minister of Local Government, as I have, myself, been dealing with this.

Before 2015, a warning system was in place whereby the inhabitants of Agaléga and St Brandon were regularly informed of the evolution of tropical depressions and cyclones likely to affect the islands.

However, on 13 January 2023, new Warning Regulations 2023 - Government Notice 2008/2023 was made by the then Vice-Prime Minister, Dr. A. Husnoo, where only special

communiqués are issued for St Brandon and Agaléga in case a cyclone is likely to affect the islands.

The Meteorological Services issued 11 communiqués between 09 and 12 December 2024 relating to intense tropical cyclone Chido.

The Mauritius Meteorological Services first observed the formation of a tropical low pressure on Friday 06 December 2024 at around 16 00 hrs. It became a tropical disturbance on Saturday 07 December 2024. The depression intensified into a moderate storm and maintained its movement towards the West. The Meteorological Services issued a first special communiqué on Monday 09 December 2024 by which Chido was considered a potential threat to Agaléga.

A second special communiqué was issued on Tuesday 10 December 2024. At 10 00 hrs, Chido intensified into a severe tropical storm and a third special communiqué was issued at 11 30 hrs on the same day.

A heavy rain warning, a strong wind warning and a heavy swell warning was issued for Agaléga.

On 11 December 2024 at around 22 00 hrs, intense cyclone Chido made direct landfall on Agaléga, with the eye actually passing over both the North and the South islands. The highest gust recorded until 21 00 hrs was 115 km/hr.

In view of the intensity and strength of the cyclone, the equipment recording wind speed and direction was damaged. The Meteorological Services estimated that gusts could have exceeded 200 km/hr.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed of the following –

- approximately 95% of buildings, including homes, the hospital, and the Police and National Coast Guard facilities in the North Island, have been destroyed;
- around 98% of the infrastructure are completely damaged in the South Island. Many roofs have been torn off, and entire structures have collapsed;
- sea water has surged 30 meters inland on the South Island, flooding the surrounding areas;

- the cyclone has also severely disrupted food and water supplies. Many food items, including rice, have been contaminated with rain water and, therefore, unfit for consumption;
- several large water tanks, each holding 9,000 litres, were displaced by the high winds, leaving the island's water supply completely compromised;
- communication on the island was disrupted and was only possible through satellite;
- roads across the island were obstructed due to fallen trees and debris, and
- the Indian Tug of AFCON was grounded near Grande Caze. However, the crew was safely evacuated to the island and there was no oil spill.

At this stage, the financial estimate of the damage is still being assessed.

With regard to part (b) of this PNQ, I am informed by the Acting Resident Manager of Agaléga that there have been no casualties as a result of the passage of the cyclone. However, a total of 19 Agalegans who were not casualties of the cyclone, but needed medical treatment, were referred by the Medical Practitioner in Agaléga for treatment on the mainland. They were also accompanied by their immediate relatives. They travelled to Mauritius by the Indian cargo plane which effected two trips, one on Sunday 15 December 2024, and one trip yesterday, 16 December 2024.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Acting Resident Manager of the Outer Islands Development Corporation (OIDC) that there are currently 31 Agalegans in the Refugee Centre in the North Island. The necessary repair of the houses is being done by the Special Mobile Force (SMF) and a team from the Ministry of National Infrastructure.

With regard to part (d) of the question, on 13 and 14 December 2024, the Dornier left Mauritius carrying –

- Pulses;
- Water;
- Flour;

- Equipment Spectrum Analyser;
- Satellite Modem ;
- Tools, as well as
- Medical Supplies.

Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, Minister of Housing and Lands, went to Agaléga onboard the Dornier on Saturday 14 December 2024, and he reported back to us.

A technician from EMTEL, together with communications tools and equipment, was also conveyed to the island and the latter was able to successfully restore the communication. The House may recall, Madam Speaker, that it was under my Prime Ministership that on 19 November 2008 that EMTEL asked and was allowed to launch its service in Agaléga. Before that, we could only communicate through satellite.

On 15 December 2024, the Cargo plane P-8I effected a first sortie carrying 1000 kg of food items donated by the Government of India. Hon. Ameer Meea, Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives, and hon. Mohamed Ehsan Juman also proceeded to the island on the same plane to assess the situation, and to reassure the inhabitants that all required support would be provided to them.

On 16 December 2024, a third sortie of the cargo plane was effected to deliver basic food items, medical essentials, and construction materials. It also transported eleven Special Mobile Force officers, five maintenance personnel from the Ministry of National Infrastructure, and two sanitary officers from the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

With regard to part (e) of the question, in view of the prompt actions of the Government and supports provided by the Government of Mauritius and the Government of India to provide relief to the Agalegans, the declaration of a state of disaster is not warranted.

A technician from EMTEL, together with communications tools and equipment, was also, as I said, conveyed to the island and he successfully restored communication.

On 14 December 2024, the vessel Barracuda was dispatched to deliver construction materials for necessary repairs of the houses and other infrastructure. The vessel is expected to reach the island today.

On 15 and 16 December, three sorties of the Indian cargo plane were effected to deliver basic food items, medical essentials, construction materials, and also transported eleven Special Mobile Force officers, as I said, and five maintenance personnel from the Ministry of National Infrastructure and two sanitary officers.

Madam Speaker, I wish to seize this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the Government of India for having promptly extended their support by deploying a cargo plane for aerial reconnaissance, and also to deliver vital supplies to the island.

Madam Speaker, I also want to say that we are very sorry for what happened to our sister island Comoros, and there, the damage has been terrible. Hundreds of death apparently, from what I have seen on the television. Fortunately, no one has died, as there were no fatalities in Agaléga. But, Madam Speaker, I wish to express our solidarity with the Comoros Islands for the tragedy that they are living.

And, by saying that, Madam Speaker, I will personally monitor the situation in this context, and a Coordination Committee, comprising representatives of Government Authorities, is being set up at my Office in order to ensure the timely implementation of all the actions we have decided for the reconstruction of Agaléga.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I put my question to the hon. Minister of Local Government because National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management falls under his purview, but I am happy to note that the hon. Prime Minister replied to my PNQ, because it is a situation of utmost importance.

Madam Speaker, our thoughts are with our sisters and brothers of Agaléga, and not only with them - the hon. Prime Minister mentioned that - but also with the people of Mayotte and Mozambique, and we know how painful the aftermath of such a devastating cyclone can be, Madam Speaker.

Now, because he mentioned that in his reply at the very beginning, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister, in view of the extreme vulnerability of Agaléga Islands to cyclones and the intensity now of cyclones with regard to climate change and particularly in the aftermath of cyclone Chido, will the Meteorological Services consider reviewing its protocol with regard to issuing cyclone bulletin in the region of Agaléga Islands?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for this question. I mentioned that we are looking at the whole system. Before, there were no regulations and then regulations were issued, but we were giving warnings. Regulations were issued in 2023, and now we are relooking at the whole thing. One of the problems is communication, of course, but we are also looking at that.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether necessary directions and authorisations have been issued to competent authorities to ensure the release of available resources timely, including food items, non-food items, and equipment, and the release of human resources to provide emergency services, as is now, prior and after the cyclone?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, I did say in my answer that these are being provided.

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to confirm whether his Minister of Local Government chaired the National Crisis Committee in relation to cyclone Chido?

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, in fact, the Disaster Management Committee was always under the PMO when I was Prime Minister. I don't know why it was switched. We are switching it back; he will be part of the Committee.

Mr Lesjongard: We all know that under such situation, the National Emergency Operation Command is of vital importance, hon. Prime Minister. Can I know from you whether NEOC was activated prior and during the passage of cyclone Chido, and to which level it was activated?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure I quite followed the question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I also have a bit of difficulty.

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, we have the National Emergency Operation Command.

Madam Speaker: Okay, the National Emergency Operation Command.

Mr Lesjongard: My question is whether that body was activated prior and during the passage of cyclone Chido and to which level?

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, thank you. I can say that the new Commissioner of Police was practically awake all night. He was in command, of course, of all this and he was telephoning us at 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning, telling us what was happening. So, the command structure was there. It was probably not functioning as it used to in the previous ten years, but it was there.

Mr Lesjongard: So, Madam Speaker, I understand that NEOC was not activated at all during the passage of cyclone Chido over the Islands of Agaléga.

Madam Speaker: Well, the hon. Prime Minister explained that it is not the way that it used to be, if I understand well.

Mr Lesjongard: Now, with regard to reconstruction, can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House when the announced reconstruction works to the destroyed and damaged amenities and housing will be completed?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me correct a misunderstanding. I didn't say it wasn't activated; I said everything was under the command of the new Commissioner of Police who was coordinating all that had to be coordinated.

Secondly, I can't give an answer for that. All I can say is that we actually built houses, concrete houses, solid houses for Agalegans during my term of office.

Mr Lesjongard: During the passage of cyclone Chido over Agaléga, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he had regular contact with the General Manager based there and also with the Chairperson of Agaléga Island Council?

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I was dealing with the Commissioner of Police. As I said earlier on, there was no communication with Agaléga, everything had broken down; only through satellite communications, and that also, we had trouble with. But I was dealing with the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Lesjongard: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether communication has been restored with the southern Island of Agaléga? Because as at yesterday, there was no communication with the southern part of Agaléga.

The Prime Minister: I am told that communication has been restored. In fact, the inhabitants of the southern Island of Agaléga decided not to move. They were asked to move out of the area because of the height of the sea level that might increase, but they did not

move. But the communication was broken down in both parts of the Island. I am told that it is being restored. So, probably it is restored by the time we are speaking.

Mr Lesjongard: I understand from the hon. Prime Minister that elected Members from Constituency No. 3 proceeded to Agaléga after the passage of the cyclone. Was there a delegation? If yes, can I know the composition of the delegation that went to Agaléga?

The Prime Minister: So, I know there were three Members who requested to be allowed to go to Agaléga because it is part of their constituency and they did go. We had lot of things to carry to Agaléga as you must realise, but I also know the Catholic Church had asked for a representative to be allowed to go, and he was allowed to go.

Mr Lesjongard: We understand from the hon. Prime Minister that Dornier was sent to Agaléga. I believe that the hon. Prime Minister is aware that ATR 72 can land in Agaléga. Will ATR 72 be sent to Agaléga so that we can forward people there to help the people in Agaléga?

The Prime Minister: I cannot say technically whether this is actually possible. But, certainly, if it is, there is no problem.

Madam Speaker: You could look into it.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr Lesjongard: I believe it can, hon. Prime Minister, because the former Prime Minister went to Agaléga in an ATR 72.

May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will consider going on a special mission to Agaléga himself to take stock of the situation and bring his support to the Agalegans in this moment of distress?

The Prime Minister: I will, certainly. I also did go to Agaléga by the way. You mentioned the former Prime Minister; I also went to Agaléga. First of all, what we need to do is restore all these damages done, and do the reconstruction work, and then perhaps.

Mr Lesjongard: May I also ask the hon. Prime Minister to consider increasing air traffic to Agaléga in the meantime to ensure that Agalegans can obtain the help and support required to overcome such an event?

The Prime Minister: As I explained, Madam Speaker, the Dornier has been going as well as the Indian cargo plane, and I thank the Government of India for this. They made, I think, a couple of trips, and also the Barracuda is going there.

Madam Speaker: Yes! It is your time.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I know.

Madam Speaker: It is your time, you can carry on.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. The hon. Prime Minister stated that he sought help from friendly countries, and he mentioned India. We are all very grateful to India for helping us in this very difficult situation. Can I know whether the same help was sought from other friendly countries also?

The Prime Minister: We spoke to Reunion Island; we keep in touch with them on meteorological services, but India was already there and was helping.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you very much. Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ 1 B/59 and PQ 1 B/60 will be replied by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting, and PQ 1 B/53 has been withdrawn.

I will now, therefore, call the hon. Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka, Mr Venkatasami!

**FORMER POLICE COMMISSIONER – LEGAL SERVICES RETAINED – FEES
PAID**

(No. 1 B/40) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to barristers and attorneys of the private practice whose services were retained by the former Commissioner of Police, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) names thereof, and
- (b) amount of fees paid thereto.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, it has always, always been the practice before 2015 for the Police to be represented either by the Attorney General's Office in any court

proceeding or the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to undertake criminal proceedings before any court of law. That was always the case before 2015.

I am informed by the Commissioner of the Police that from August 2021 to November 2024, the former Commissioner of Police departed from usual practice and decided he would retain the services of five Counsels and one Attorney from the private practice in eight cases for an amount totalling Rs14,288,825.30, and the names are as follows, Madam Speaker –

- (i) Mr Amar Oozeer, Counsel received Rs34,500 inclusive of vat;
- (ii) Mr Desire Basset, Senior Counsel: Rs2,991,437.50 inclusive of vat;
- (iii) Mr Yashley Reesaul, Counsel: Rs86,250 again inclusive of vat;
- (iv) Mr Ravi Raj Yerrigadoo, Counsel: Rs603,750 inclusive of vat;
- (v) Mrs Shamila Sonah-Ori, Attorney: Rs4,330,000 inclusive of vat, and
- (vi) One King's Counsel from the United Kingdom: Rs5,521,447.56 plus an amount of Rs721,440.25 for his accommodation and air tickets.

I should also say, Madam Speaker, that previously, if ever, there was a Counsel from the UK, especially for cases that go to the Privy Council afterwards, he was put up under Government bungalows at no cost. Why were Rs721,000 spent here? I am a bit puzzled, to say the least.

Madam Speaker, our country has a well-established democratic system with clear separation of powers between the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislative. Institutions like the Attorney General's Office and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions operate in full independence and have always been providing legal advice to the Public Sector, including the Police, free of charge – absolutely free of charge – because this forms part of their professional duties.

The practice of hiring the services of private lawyers and bypassing the Attorney General's Office and the Office of the DPP by the former Commissioner of Police under the previous Government, as I said, cost the taxpayers Rs14,288,825.30 and this has been clearly done to undermine the professional integrity of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and relevant institutions, and this should be severely condemned.

Madam Speaker, it is clear, the previous Government had a problem with an independent Director of Public Prosecutions. Who can forget this unbelievable attempt trying to arrest the former DPP? He had to run away from his home; his wife had to pull the door because they were trying to force their way in to arrest him and he had to go through a back door, go to a Judge in Chambers to get protection.

This is what happened under the government of the MSM! This was unprecedented! It has never happened in any Commonwealth countries – never happened! But you know, with the MSM, everything is possible. This is why I speak of Murphy’s Law – what will not happen, will happen. This is Murphy’s Law.

It was, in fact, to my mind, a much broader Machiavellian strategy to undermine the independence and integrity of our institutions with the sinister motive of exerting absolute control over them.

Over the past decade, they undermined with ruthless propensity the credibility of all our institutions, just like tinpot dictators, hell-bent on transforming the country into a rogue state. This is what we call “*l’État voyou*”.

They planted their toadies in most of the important institutions of our country, and these toadies were at the beck and call of their masters doing their bidding.

Let me assure the House and the population at large that we will not condone such practices – nobody on this side! The public expects our institutions, including the law enforcement agencies, to act in total independence and transparency and remain accountable to restore the confidence of the people of this country in them, and to restore the respect of the international community as well.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Third Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or!

STATISTICS - ALLEGED FALSIFICATION - ENQUIRY

(No. 1 B/41) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to cases of alleged falsification of statistics in the recent years thereby projecting a different state of the

economy, he will state if consideration will be given for the setting up of an enquiry thereinto.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, indeed, it is abundantly clear that most statistics have been deliberately falsified in order to create an illusion of an economic boom in the country. This deliberate manipulation of the macro-economic figures has severely damaged the credibility of our institutions responsible for collecting and disseminating statistics in the country.

Madam Speaker, Moody's latest publication came out yesterday, 16 December, and it makes reference to this unprecedented practice.

The House would recall that the June 2021 Issue of Economic and Social Indicators on the National Accounts Estimates was published on 28 June 2021. Two days later, that is, on 30 June 2021, a revised Issue of National Accounts Estimates was published. So, between the two publications, the GDP growth figures was increased from 4.4% to 5.4%, a full one hundred basis points over just two days. This is evidence of manipulation!

The previous Chairman of the Statistics Board, a highly competent professional in the private sector, was asked to manipulate the figures. He refused! He refused to be part of the falsification of figures and he said he would rather resign, which he did. But he refused to do it, and he should be applauded for this.

After his resignation, Mr Charles Cartier was appointed as Chairperson of the Statistics Board on 29 November 2021 for a period of three years. He has just resigned on 18 November 2024.

Madam Speaker, the exercise we have carried out on the State of the Economy has unearthed some of the despicable falsehoods that the previous Government was propagating.

We have already initiated actions to repair the damage done by the previous Government.

Furthermore, we are envisaging a serious restructuring of Statistics Mauritius with a view to restoring its credibility and also its reputation and its independence. We must ensure that such blatant manipulation is not resorted to by any government.

As for the setting up of the enquiry, I must say I am looking at it very, very closely because I think this might be the best way to prevent such a despicable practice. That is what I had to say.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. First Member for Savanne & Black River!

PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME – FUNDS ALLOCATED – 2014 TO 2024

(No. 1 B/42) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Property Development Scheme, he will state the amount of funds allocated to social projects thereunder for the past 10 years as provided for in Regulation 10(1) of the Investment Promotion (Property Development Scheme) Regulations 2015.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the House will recall that in 2007, mandatory social programs were introduced for projects under the Integrated Resort Scheme.

These programs required developers to contribute Rs200,000 per residential property sold, in order to contribute for the social and economic upliftment of the neighbouring community where the project is implemented.

In 2009, following the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility, what we call CSR, IRS promoters were given the option to implement a CSR programme, finance an approved NGO or remit their contributions to the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF).

In 2015, when the Property Development Scheme was introduced to replace the previous schemes, a social contribution of Rs200,000 per residential unit sold was maintained. However, Regulation 10(1) of the Economic Development Board (Property Development Scheme) Regulations 2015 required that the promoters use their contributions for the financing of social programmes identified by a social needs analysis, carried out, unfortunately, by the promoters themselves for the neighbouring community.

But as from 20 April 2024, Regulation 10 was amended to provide for the contributions of promoters to be credited to the National Resilience Fund.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Economic Development Board that since the introduction of the Property Development Scheme, 63 projects have been issued with a

certificate comprising 3,006 residential units, of which 1,093 have been sold. This represents a contribution of Rs218.6 million.

I am also informed by the Economic Development Board that as of date, out of the social contribution of Rs218.6 million –

- (a) around Rs129.6 million has been spent on social projects by the promoters themselves, and
- (b) Rs9.7 million has been transferred to the National Resilience Fund.

Therefore, unspent social contribution of around Rs80 million is not accounted for at this point. There is no clear indication of where is the sum of Rs80 million. The Economic Development Board has been asked to look into it.

Government is in the process of completely reviewing the operations of the Economic Development Board and this will include the way the Property Development Scheme has been implemented over the years.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Fourth Member for Rodrigues!

RODRIGUES, PLAINE CORAIL AIRPORT – NEW RUNAWAY CONSTRUCTION

(No. 1 B/43) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the construction of a new runway at the Plaine Corail Airport in Rodrigues, he will state –

- (a) the terms and conditions of the financing Agreement thereof signed with the World Bank, and
- (b) where matters stand, indicating the expected starting date thereof.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Acting Financial Secretary that the Rodrigues Airport Project has four components which is estimated to cost around USD 200 million.

The project will be financed by a loan of USD 184 million from the World Bank and a grant of Euros 15.7 million from the European Union.

The four components of the project are as follows –

- First, an amount of USD 170 million has been earmarked for infrastructure development, including the construction of a new airport runway, a new control tower, a meteorological building, and a rescue and fire-fighting station;
- Second, USD 10 million for technical assistance to support the project implementation and aviation sector development;
- Third, another USD 10 million for technical assistance and small investments to support Rodrigues' Sustainable Integrated Development with focus on access to water and food security, and finally
- Fourth, USD 10 million for technical assistance for the Sustainable Development of Rodrigues' Tourism Sector.

Madam Speaker, regarding part (a) of the question, it is a long answer; I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

As at date, no disbursement has been effected from the loan and the grant components.

As for part (b) of the question, Madam Speaker, I am informed that the draft tender documents were sent to the World Bank on 30 October 2024 for review. The World Bank has submitted its comments on 15 November 2024. Airports of Mauritius Ltd is presently working with GIBB (Mauritius) Ltd, the project consultant, to amend the tender documents to reflect the comments of the Bank. Once finalised, the document will be resubmitted to the World Bank for its consideration.

Thereafter, Airports of Mauritius Ltd would seek approval of its Board and subsequently of Government prior to the floating of tender for the construction works of the runway and other airport related facilities. Tender is expected to be launched around January next year with closing of bids around April 2025. Contract will then be awarded, hopefully, in July 2025 with a work duration of 42 months as planned to start in October 2025. The project is expected to be completed around April 2029.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil!

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - FORMER SPEAKER - OFFICIAL MISSIONS (19 JULY-04 OCT 2024)

(No. 1 B/44) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to official missions undertaken by the former Speaker of the National Assembly between 19 July 2024 to 04 October 2024, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof, and
- (b) related expenses incurred therefor.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the former Speaker of the National Assembly was elected on 18 July 2024. He submitted his resignation on 05 October 2024, that is, one day after the dissolution of the National Assembly. During that period of 78 days – I must say I was surprised it is only 78 days; he did so much damage in 78 days? – he chaired four sittings of the National Assembly and undertook three official missions –

- (i) A visit to the Lok Sabha, New Delhi, from 16 to 17 August 2024;
- (ii) The 2024 Interregional Seminar on the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for Parliaments of Developing Countries in China from 18 to 24 August 2024, and
- (iii) The 10th Inter-Parliamentary Union Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians held in Armenia from 12 to 14 September 2024.

Madam Speaker, as for part (b) of the question, the total amount spent was Rs748,112 for three missions in 78 days, as I said.

An hon. Member: Shocking!

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka, please.

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY – LEGAL ADVISER/S & SENIOR ADVISER, MR D. B. – FEES

(No. 1 B/45) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications,

Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Gambling Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the name of the legal adviser/s thereof from 2019 to date and fees payable thereto, and
- (b) if Mr D. B., former Senior Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office, was a board member thereof, indicating –
 - (i) the dates thereof, and
 - (ii) total amount of money paid thereto.

The Prime Minister: As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Gambling Regulatory Authority that since 2019, the services of legal advisers retained by the Authority and the fees paid to them are as follows –

- (i) Mr Ravi Yerrigadoo from May 2019 to date was paid Rs4,009,600 including a fixed monthly retainer fee of Rs46,000 that he was going to get anyway;
- (ii) Mrs Saya Ragavoodoo from May 2019 to date was paid Rs1,447,825, and
- (iii) Mr Krishnakantsing Auchoybur from February 2022 to November 2024 was paid Rs4,555,570 including again a monthly fee of Rs130,000.

I am further informed that he was assigned the duties of Head of the Horse Racing Division on a temporary basis by the Gambling Regulatory Board. In this capacity, he was also paid a total allowance of Rs2,339,992, that is, since February 2022, which makes for a total of Rs6,925,562. I am also informed that he has resigned on 10 December 2024.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) (i) of the question, I am informed that Mr Kreedeo Beekharry, also known as Mr Dev Beekharry, former Senior Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office was a Board Member of the Gambling Regulatory Authority since 13 March 2015. He was also appointed Vice-Chairperson of the Gambling Regulatory Board as from 14 January 2022.

I am further informed that Mr Dev Beekharry has resigned as a Board Member of the Gambling Regulatory Board on 12 November 2024.

Regarding part (b) (ii) of the question, Mr Dev Beekharry was paid a total amount of Rs3,334,000 including, again, a monthly fee of Rs60,000 as Board Member and Vice-Chairperson of the Gambling Regulatory Authority.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Second Member for Rodrigues.

**RODRIGUES – SMALL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (INDIAN GRANTS) –
PROJECT STATUS & COST**

(No. 1 B/46) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the amount of Rs19 million earmarked in the 2024/2025 budget under the Small Development Projects (Indian Grants) for Rodrigues, he will state where matters stand as to the works/projects carried out thereunder as at date, indicating in each case the –

- (a) contracts, if any, allocated thereunder;
- (b) cost thereof, and
- (c) expected completion date thereof.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, on 19 January 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Government of India and the Government of Mauritius for financial assistance amounting to Rs400 million for the implementation of community projects in Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Agaléga.

Out of the amount of Rs400 million, a budgetary provision of Rs19 million has been allocated under the Small Development Projects – Indian Grant for the implementation of several projects in Rodrigues for the infrastructural and sustainable development of the island.

Madam Speaker, as regards parts (a), (b), and (c) of the question, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member because it is a very long answer.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister!

Mr François: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am thankful to the Government of India for the Small Development Projects for Rodrigues and the disaster risk

reduction, renewable energy and especially community development. As we are in a cyclonic period and in Rodrigues, during the last cyclone Bheki, out of 90 community and refugee centres, only 33 were operational, and 10 of them have been removed the list.

My question is: will the hon. Prime Minister, also responsible for Finance, be agreeable to further negotiate with India for the extension of this Indian Grant for Rodrigues in relation to community development to upgrading, uplifting of additional community and refugee centres thereat as Rodrigues is in a situation of reckless non-construction of not a single housing unit for potential vulnerable persons for the past few years.

The Prime Minister: I am actually quite shocked by what you are saying, but I will certainly look into that.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Now, we have the hon. Fourth Member for Rodrigues.

SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – DEPARTURE LOUNGE FOR RODRIGUES – DROP OFF AREA

(No. 1 B/47) **Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Island whether, in regard to the domestic departure terminal for Rodrigues at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether access to the drop off at the external doors thereat is closed to passengers' vehicles and, if so, the reasons therefor, indicating if he will use his good office to request the relevant authority to extend accessibility to vehicles during drop off.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by Airport Terminal Operations Ltd that the area adjacent to the external doors of the Domestic Departure Lounge for Rodrigues was not designed as a drop off area. In fact, this area of an extent of about 2,560 m² was designed for use as a parking area with 44 slots, out of which 35 are rented to authorised tour operators. Seven parking slots are used by the airport authorities such as the Police and the Mauritius Revenue Authority, etc. The remaining two slots are reserved for vehicles transporting crew members.

I am also informed that passengers departing to Rodrigues can access the Domestic Lounge through either the elevated roadway at Departure Level 1 using either the

lift/staircase or the pick-up/drop-off platform. However, vehicles transporting individuals with disabilities are given direct access to the domestic lounge.

The request of the hon. Member is being referred to the Board of Airport Terminal Operations Ltd for them to reconsider.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the hon. Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central.

FORENSIC SCIENCE LABORATORY – STAFFING & CASE FILES

(No. 1 B/48) 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 of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Forensic Science Laboratory, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) current staffing thereof, and
- (b) number of cases referred thereto since the last 3 years, indicating the number which are –
 - (i) still pending;
 - (ii) related to drugs, and
 - (iii) awaiting DNA analysis.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that during the past 10 years, the Forensic Science Laboratory has been functioning in a very inefficient and ineffective manner. This has led to delays in the submission of FSL reports which has impacted, of course, on the submission of case files to the Office of the Director of the Public Prosecutions. The FSL has scientists who analyse evidence from scenes of crime, suspects and victims. They analyse DNA from fingerprints, human remains, and also suspicious substances. It has therefore an essential role to play in evidence-based criminal investigations.

The former Director who retired from the civil service in February 2023, was re-appointed on contract for a period of two years. Her contract was terminated as from

26 November 2024 and it is the senior most Chief Forensic Scientist who has been assigned the duties of Director.

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that following several complaints from various institutions, I undertook a project for the revamping of the FSL. In this respect, the support of a foreign expert was sought as Director in October 2010. As soon as she assumed duty, she was systematically harassed; she was threatened. She claims she thinks she was poisoned. Fearing for her security, she preferred to resign in October 2011. But she did tell me that the way this is being run, we won't get results; we will never get results.

Madam Speaker , for the post of Director, the incumbent will have to be a high-calibre professional, preferably with international exposure in the field of forensic science, together with a combination of leadership and administrative skills. He or she will have to be assisted by a Deputy Director.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Acting Director that the total current staffing stands at 71, including 51 who are technical staff.

As regards part (b) (i) of the question, the Acting Director of Forensic Science Laboratory has stated that from January 2022 to November 2024, out of a total of 44,710 cases referred to the Forensic Science Laboratory, 39,836 cases have been completed and 4,874 are still pending.

With regard to parts (b) (ii) and (iii) of the question, I am informed that 3,640 drug-related cases are still pending since December 2023 and 500 samples are awaiting DNA analysis since August of this year.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that we need to ensure that the institution is restructured to restore its credibility and professionalism as an independent one forming an integral part of the criminal justice system.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. I have five minutes left for this PMQT. Yes, hon. Dr. Aumeer, please!

Dr. Aumeer: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can inform the House if he has been made aware of very suspicious information of interference at very high level within

the FSL as to corroborate results of DNA to match those of suspects in police custody in what was termed as “cases of planting”, particularly Mr A.K. and Mr B.L.?

The Prime Minister: I heard about this from people, but we are going to have to look into this if that is so. That is a very, very grave accusation if that is actually what happened. But if you see what I was telling you about the lady whom I got from Staffordshire University from a Mauritian, Dr. Ram Gopal, who did not take any fees from us, as far as I remember. He wanted to help Mauritius and he advised that we take this lady, Mrs Maclean who came as Director of FSL. From what she told me, I am not surprised that this could well have happened, but we are going to investigate it.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac!

MAURITIAN RUPEE – DEPRECIATION/DEVALUATION – FOREIGN CURRENCIES INJECTION

(No. 1 B/49) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the depreciation/devaluation of the Mauritian Rupee since 2014, he will –

- (a) state the number of times the relevant Authorities have intervened thereon, and
- (b) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to the amount of foreign currencies injected in the market to regulate same, indicating –
 - (i) the source of such foreign currency reserve, and
 - (ii) if any shortage thereof is still prevailing in the market.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Bank of Mauritius that over the period December 2014 to November 2024, the Bank intervened in the domestic forex market on 142 occasions.

Concerning part (b) of the question, over the same period, the Bank of Mauritius has injected a total of USD 3.6 billion in the forex market.

As regards part (b) (i) of the question, the injection of foreign currencies was effected through the use of the official foreign currency reserves at the Bank of Mauritius. In other words, they depleted the reserves.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (b) (ii) of the question, one of the priorities of this Government is to have a stable rupee and an adequate supply of foreign currencies in the market.

The Bank of Mauritius is monitoring the situation on the domestic foreign exchange market closely and I am informed that it has already started to implement several measures to address the persisting distortions prevailing in the forex market in order to ensure adequate supply of foreign currencies.

Madam Speaker: I have just two minutes left. We can have a try.

Hon. Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or!

ECONOMIC SITUATION – DEBT BURDEN – REIMBURSEMENT MECHANISM

(No. 1 B/50) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the current economic situation, he will state the extent of debt burden on the economy in terms of interest and capital reimbursements for 2025 and 2026, respectively, indicating –

- (a) the proposed reimbursement mechanism being envisaged therefor, and
- (b) if any negotiations have been initiated with the International Monetary Fund for an eventual Stand-by Agreement.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as indicated in the 'State of the Economy' document which I laid on the Table of the National Assembly on 10 December, public sector gross debt stood at 559.1 billion rupees at the end of June 2024. This represents 83.4% of GDP. It has, of course, increased after that.

This is well above the statutory debt ceiling of 80% of GDP which the previous Government had itself set out in the Public Debt Management Act, which I must say itself is too high. 80% is too high. It used to be 60%, but nobody paid any attention to it. At the end

of 2014 when I left Government, it was actually 59.5% of GDP. So, they inherited a public debt situation which was fully sustainable, under 60%. And they have turned out to be one of the worst now in several decades.

On the basis of the state of public finances inherited from the previous Government –

- First, the borrowing requirements of Government during Financial Year 2024-2025 is estimated to be around Rs59.6 billion compared to the Budget Estimates which was Rs38 billion, that is, it is higher by some Rs21.6 billion.
- Second, for Financial Year 2024-2025, the interest payment on government debt is estimated to be Rs22 billion compared to the Budget Estimates whereby they said it was going to be Rs20.1 billion, again, whereas capital repayment is estimated to be Rs40 billion.
- Third, for Financial Year 2025-2026, on a no-policy change basis, preliminary indications are that interest payment and capital repayment will amount to Rs23.9 billion and Rs37.1 billion, respectively.

As regards part (a) of the question, Madam Speaker, the reimbursement mechanism will again entail new borrowings by Government since it already has a very high level of deficit. We will come up with remedial policies in a Fiscal Consolidation Plan to bring public sector debt back to the sustainable level that the previous Government had inherited. We will aim to put it on a downward path. It is not going to be done overnight obviously, but we want to bring it down to the level that it should have been: 60% of GDP.

Concerning part (b) of the question, at this stage, no negotiations for an eventual Stand-by Agreement is being done with the IMF, but we are looking at all options.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister. Time is over for the moment! We will now move to Questions to Ministers.

I am announcing that PQ I B/73 has been withdrawn. I think I have announced it already. PQs I B/54 and I B/59 have also been withdrawn. So, I will now call on the hon. Second Member for Rodrigues!

**RODRIGUES – SANDALWOOD EXPORTATION – PHYTOSANITARY
CERTIFICATE**

(No. 1 B/55) **Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to Santalum Album trees, commonly known as sandal wood, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Plant Protection Office and/or Conservator of Forestry Services, information as to –

- (a) if any phytosanitary certificate for the exportation thereof from Rodrigues have been delivered from 2022 to date and, if so, indicate the –
 - (i) conditions attached thereto;
 - (ii) persons and companies holding same, and
- (b) the volume of sandalwood to be or recently shipped from Rodrigues.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, hon. Second Member for Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the National Plant Protection Office of my Ministry that no phytosanitary certificate has been issued from 2022 to date for the exportation of sandalwood from Rodrigues.

As for the Forestry Service of my Ministry, I am informed that to date, no sandalwood has been imported from Rodrigues.

However, Madam Speaker, the Forestry Service has indicated that on 28 April 2024, it received an application from Timber Touch Ltd, a private company, for registration as a dealer in sandalwood.

An acknowledgement certificate was issued on 12 September 2024. On 25 October 2024, the Forestry Service received a letter from the Commission for Agriculture of Rodrigues informing that it had received an application dated 19 August 2024 from Timber Touch Ltd for the exploitation of sandalwood in Rodrigues as follows –

- 10 tons from private land belonging to Mr Jean Marie Allas at La Ferme, and

- 30 tons from the property of Mr Ithier Ivan at La Ferme.

On 26 November 2024, the Forestry Service informed the Commission that it has no objection to the application provided –

- (i) the sandalwood has been legally purchased from private lands and subject to the recommendation of the Commission of Agriculture;
- (ii) the company shall have to submit shipping documents to the Forestry Service once the transportation is effected;
- (iii) the clearance is only for transfer to Mauritius and is valid for single-use until 30 January 2025.

The Commission of Agriculture has informed that as at date, no approval to that effect has been issued. Sandalwood has, therefore, not been exported to Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, the Commission for Agriculture has informed that the Police in Rodrigues are conducting an inquiry to investigate possible infringement in the matter regarding the source of the timber.

I have, therefore, requested the Conservator of Forests to investigate into the matter to identify weaknesses, loopholes in the process or procedure with a view to further strengthening control and ensure the proper management of sandalwood in Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. You have a supplementary? Yes!

Mr François: Thank you. I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. In light of the answer given, will the hon. Minister be agreeable to amend the G.N. 238 of 2024 with regard to Rodrigues following his answers?

Dr. Boolell: I will certainly look into it and ask the State Law Office, if needs be, to do the needful.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

The hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

RIVIÈRE DES ANGUILLES DAM – CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

(No. 1 B/56) **Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Rivière des Anguilles Dam, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the –

- (a) amount disbursed for the construction thereof to date, and
- (b) timeframe for the completion of works thereof.

Mr Assirvaden: Madame la présidente, le sud de l'île Maurice dépend principalement des prélèvements d'eaux pluviales et du pompage des eaux souterraines, les principales sources étant les stations de traitement des eaux de Rivière du Poste et de Mont-Blanc.

Il n'existe pas de réservoir de retenue majeur dans cette partie de l'île, ce qui pose des problèmes de sécurité hydrique, en particulier pendant les saisons sèches et les pressions du changement climatique.

La construction du barrage de la Rivière des Anguilles a été recommandée dans le rapport d'étude de faisabilité du projet d'approvisionnement en eau du sud de l'île Maurice en mai 2009. L'étude avait également identifié l'emplacement du barrage. Je suis informé que des études géologiques et géotechniques, y compris une conception préliminaire ont été réalisées dans le cadre de la phase 2 de l'étude.

Le projet de barrage de la Rivière des Anguilles a été conçu pour répondre aux demandes en eau potable et d'irrigation jusqu'à 2050 et desservira les régions de Grand Port, de Savanne et la côte sud-ouest.

Le projet est mis en œuvre de manière intégrée et comprendra la construction d'un barrage, d'une station de traitement des eaux, d'un minicentral hydroélectrique. Et le projet intégré sera financé par un consortium composé de la Banque arabe pour le développement économique en Afrique, du Fonds saoudien pour le développement et du Fonds d'Abou Dhabi pour le développement.

Madame la présidente, je suis informé aussi qu'un exercice de pré-qualification pour la construction du barrage de la Rivière des Anguilles a été lancé le 21 février de cette année-ci,

en 2024, sous l'égide du CPB. À la date de clôture, le 3 avril 2024, neuf candidats avaient soumis des propositions. À la suite d'un exercice d'évaluation mené par le CPB, le ministère a été informé que huit entreprises avaient été présélectionnées.

Il convient de noter que conformément aux accords pré signés avec les organismes de financement, leur non-objection préalable à un exercice d'évaluation et des soumissionnaires présélectionnés est nécessaire avant de procéder au processus de notification aux soumissionnaires présélectionnés conformément à la loi du *Public Procurement Act*.

La procédure d'appel d'offres est toujours en cours et les travaux de construction du barrage de la Rivière des Anguilles n'ont pas encore commencé.

Par conséquent, en réponse à la partie (a) de la question, aucun déboursement n'a été effectué pour la construction de ce barrage.

Madame la présidente, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, je suis informé qu'une fois les organismes de financement auront fait part de leur non-objection à la liste restreinte de soumissionnaires établis, l'appel d'offres pour la désignation d'un entrepreneur de travaux sera lancé par le CPB. Les documents d'appel d'offres sont actuellement en cours de finalisation par les consultants et seront examinés par le CPB avant leur lancement.

Il est prévu que l'appel d'offres pour la désignation d'un entrepreneur et l'avis de non-objection des organismes de financement quant à la sélection des entrepreneurs pourraient prendre environ six mois. La durée de construction du barrage est environ 40 mois, ce qui fait 48 mois. Ce sera presque à la fin de notre mandat.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: *Merci, Monsieur le ministre.*

The hon. Third Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East!

**BEL AIR – CAMPS LA SERPE, CHEMIN LA FORGE, MCB ROAD & CHEMIN
COOPERATIVE – ROADS RECONSTRUCTION**

(No. 1 B/57) **Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to roads at Camps la Serpe, Chemin La Forge, MCB Road and Chemin Cooperative in Bel Air, he will state if any survey

has been carried out to assess the state thereof, indicating the estimated cost to be incurred for the reconstruction thereof.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am informed by the District Council of Flacq that a survey was carried on 12 December 2024 by its officers. It was observed that the *chemin* Cooperative in Bel Air is in good condition and does not require any reconstruction works. However, it was noted that for Camps la Serpe and MCB Road, the Central Water Authority has undertaken pipe laying works along the roads, but same have not been reinstated yet as the works are still ongoing.

The CWA has informed that the pipe laying works are expected to be completed by end of December 2024 while the resurfacing of the roads will be completed by January 2025. It should be highlighted that a way leave was granted to the CWA by the District Council of Flacq.

With regard to the cost estimates, the reinstatement of the two lateral routes at Camps la Serpe will amount to Rs2,275,000 while for the road at Camps la Serpe, Avenue Perle d'Or Beck, same will amount to Rs1,610,000. As regard to the MCB Road, the cost is estimated at Rs1,140,000.

Furthermore, with regard to *chemin* La Forge, the cost of resurfacing works is estimated at Rs875,000. As no budget has been earmarked, the District Council of Flacq will seek financial clearance accordingly prior to carrying out the works. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Your next question, please!

**SEBASTOPOL MITD CENTRE – STUDENTS ACCESSIBILITY (SEBASTOPOL,
MONT IDA & OLIVIA REGION)**

(No. 1 B/58) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether he will state if consideration will be given for the conversion of the Sebastopol MITD into a State Secondary School for the benefit of students in the regions of Sebastopol, Mont Ida and Olivia.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the issue of conversion of the Sebastopol MITD Centre into a State Secondary School does not arise.

The Sebastopol SSS is a full-fledged secondary school and the MITD Centre is situated within the compound of the Sebastopol SSS. In fact, the MITD Centre in Sebastopol exists only since the start of the academic year 2024.

Following the results of the NCE in 2023 whereby a high majority of the students of the Extended Programme did not meet the NCE pass criteria, the MITD implemented the NC2 Courses with Bright Up Programme to ensure the continuity of education to the students. The programme was meant to enable students to join the vocational sector, including the world of work, through National Certificate Level 2, and thereafter, leading to National Certificate Level 3.

In that context, the unused part of Sebastopol SSS was put at the disposal of the MITD to run NC2 Courses with Bright Up Programme for trainees in the eastern region, primarily from the Sebastopol, Mont Ida and Olivia regions. The area consisted of 10 ten classrooms, namely eight classrooms in the Block A, four on the first floor and four on the second floor, two classrooms from Block B, one classroom on the first floor and one classroom on the second floor, and two toilet blocks of Block A.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the Sebastopol SSS is a low-intake secondary school located at the foot of Montagne Blanche Mountain and catering for boys in Zone 2 region, Beau Bassin-Rose Hill and East. It commenced its operation in the year 2000 and its building consists of five blocks, A, B, C, D, E, with a total of 28 classrooms. Currently, only 18 classrooms, along with the administrative offices and Specialist Rooms, are in use by the staff and students of Sebastopol SSS.

For the Academic Year 2024, it had an overall total of 167 students enrolled in Grades 7 to 11, including students of the ex-Extended Programme.

I am also informed that the school population of Sebastopol SSS has been decreasing constantly over the past years. There is only one section of each grade and there has been no intake at Grade 12 level since 2019. For Academic Year 2025, requests for admissions stand at 19 comprising of only 11 students for Grade 7 and only 8 students for the first year Lower Secondary of the new Foundation Programme in Literacy, Numeracy and Skills.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that the MITD invested some Rs2.47 m. in its centre at Sebastopol SSS in terms of upgrading works, procurement of training and IT

equipment, and acquisition of furniture. The activities of the MITD and the Secondary School at the Sebastopol SSS building are well separated, including different break periods. All arrangements are in place so that there are no conflicting activities and both institutions operate in harmony.

Madam Speaker, the Sebastopol SSS will continue to remain a full-fledge secondary school to serve the academic needs of students in its surrounding areas and support equitable access to education for students in its vicinity, fulfilling the Government's mandate to provide quality education without discrimination based on foundational performance. The institution already has the required infrastructure including well-equipped laboratories, classrooms and other facilities to deliver academic training aligned with national educational goals.

However, the shared infrastructure with the MITD will continue to coexist to ensure learners in the neighbouring regions are given fair treatment in terms of access to vocational studies and training which is a fundamental pathway to education and skills development. I wish here to inform the House that similar arrangements already exist at La Gaulette SSS.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to inform the House that currently there are two State schools to cater for the need of education of girls at Secondary Level in zone 2, namely –

- (i) Quartier Militaire SSS, and
- (ii) Bel Air SSS.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry has the portfolios for education, human resource, training and skills development; there is a need for a holistic approach and better linkages and synergies among the various partners to provide a wide array of services to our diversified learners for them to grow into productive and resilient citizens.

PORT MATHURIN PORT DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. 1 B/59) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to Port Mathurin Port Development Master Plan, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Yes, Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

**STATE SECONDARY ACADEMIES & REGIONAL SCHOOLS GRADE 10 –
INTAKE UP TO 2024**

(No. 1 B/61) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to State Secondary Academies and Regional Schools, he will state the yearly intake of boys and girls at Grade 10 level, respectively, since the implementation thereof to date, indicating if his Ministry proposes the phasing out thereof and, if not, why not.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, I am informed that in the wake of the implementation of the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education reforms, provision was made for successful candidates at the National Certificate of Education (NCE) to be provided with the option of either pursuing their studies in Grade 10 in their respective regional schools or being admitted in one of the twelve designated academies.

The criteria for admission to academies are provided under regulation 18B of the Education (Amendment) Regulations 2018 which *inter alia* states that –

“ (2) Priority of admission to Grade 10 in an Academy shall be determined on the basis of the grade aggregate and the relative performance of the eligible pupil in the best 8 core subjects, including English, French and Mathematics, at the NCE assessment and the choice of the responsible party (...)”

Madam Speaker, as is the case for each tier where admission is made on the basis of relative performance of students, candidates have to strive very hard to achieve the best results to secure a place in a good academy.

I am informed that those who have applied for a seat in an academy but have not been able to secure a seat in the school of their choice are also given the opportunity of applying for a transfer to another academy. In all the cases of allocation of seats that are carried out by the MES, Madam Speaker, the determining criteria remains the relative performance of the student in the eight best subjects.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that the yearly intake in Grade 10 in the 12 Academies for the academic years 2021-2022, 2023-2024 and 2025 for boys and girls are as follows –

- 2021-2022 – boys: 1,084, girls: 1,084;
- 2023 – boys: 1,018, girls: 1,056;
- 2024 – boys: 1,000, girls: 1,069, and
- 2025 – boys: 1,003, girls: 1,062.

As regards the Regional Schools, I am informed that the yearly intake in Grade 10 for the Republic of Mauritius for the academic years 2021-2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 for boys and girls are as follows –

- 2021-2022 – boys: 3,548, girls: 4,335;
- 2023 – boys: 3,973, girls: 4,662;
- 2024 – boys: 3,966, girls: 4,997, and
- 2025 – boys: 3,381, girls: 3,973.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I am tabling the Statistics for the yearly intake of boys and girls in Grade 10 for both academies and regional schools.

Madam Speaker, we espouse the philosophy that higher ability students should be provided with ample opportunities to unleash their full potential and develop their talents. However, no structured survey has been carried out over the years to assess the degree to which academies have been able to achieve the initial purpose of operating as centres of excellence.

In fact, it has been noted that there has been a number of problems, challenges, associated with a mixed school environment being offered in academies as well as with the disruption that is caused in the pedagogical pathway of the student when he or she frequently shifts to another school depriving him or her of a sense of belonging to a school and imbibing himself or herself with the school ethos.

Moreover, a vacuum is left behind in the regional school when the best students join academies resulting in the school environment and these regional schools being affected and

the morale and motivation of those left behind adversely impacted. In fact, these problems result in social, psychological and cultural factors that influence the student behaviour and interaction thus affecting the momentum and synergy at all levels due to the perception that there are better performing schools or even teachers who are posted in academies while in reality the facilities and the services offered are the same in all secondary schools.

Madam Speaker, those who joined academies are not in a better situation either. After joining a secondary school at Grade 7, they are again made to join an academy in Grade 10 and then they are provided with an additional opportunity to change school in Grade 12 where they get their SC results. Also they have to adapt to the co-educational environment. The staff of academies have also reported a decrease in academic performance of students mainly related to adaptability problems.

Moreover parents and staff have also raised concern about the security of children in the co-ed environment in these schools. All these elements will have to be looked into and an assessment carried out. On the basis of the findings of this exercise, a review of the orientation for academies will accordingly be carried out for implementation as from intake of 2026.

Madam Speaker, in this regard I wish to inform the House that my Ministry had on Monday 09 December 2024 and Monday 16 December 2024 organised the preparatory meetings with all concerns stakeholders in the Education Sector to receive their inputs which will culminate on the holding of the *Assises de l'éducation* scheduled to be held in April 2025. The outcome of this exercise will pave the way forward for a review of the present educational system and formulation of new policy direction as from the year 2026 including that of upper secondary education. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister! The hon. Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

You wanted to have a go? Okay?

Mr Jhummun: Madame la présidente,....

Madam Speaker: Catch my eye!

Mr Jhummun: *Permettez-moi de faire une petite réflexion.* Never in the history of this country so much harm has been done in so less time.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member! You are putting a question or making a statement?

Mr Jhummun: Before putting my question, I just want to make a small statement being from the educational sector myself.

Madam Speaker: No! I am sorry, I will not be able to allow you because if I do this, I will be setting up precedent and everybody will want to make a statement. I can understand. I do not speak; I also listen because it is a very interesting subject of course. Please put a question! No statement!

Mr Jhummun: Thank you. So, after so much harm has been done to the school community, can the hon. Minister tell this House and the population at large whether, a proper study was carried out prior to the implementation of such a project by the so called pedagogue? Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you hon. Member. Definitely, this Government is going to repair, to make amend for the harm the children of this Republic. Rest assured this Government will take into consideration the views, the opinions of all stakeholders before deciding the way forward.

Madam Speaker: There is Member who is very good at catching my eye. Hon. Mr François!

Mr François: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With regard to the *Assises de l'éducation*, which is due for next year, will the hon. Minister extend consultation in Rodrigues with all stakeholders thereat?

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you hon. Member. There is a consensus that a delegation from the Ministry of Education moves to Rodrigues in order to listen to the stakeholders in Rodrigues because they have specific problems which are there for Rodrigues. Rest assured that this will be done hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Now, I think we move to the hon. Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil.

SIR ANEROOD JUGNAUTH HOSPITAL - COMPREHENSIVE AUDIT – ISSUES & REMEDIAL ACTIONS

(No. 1 B/62) **Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Sir Anerood Jugnauth Hospital at Constance, he will state if his Ministry has carried out a comprehensive audit of the hospital and, if so, indicate the issues identified and the remedial actions being envisaged therefor.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, as a newly appointed Minister, I am visiting all hospitals to enquire on the state of affairs thereof. Accordingly, I carried out a site visit at Flacq hospital on Wednesday 11 December 2024. Many shortcomings were identified in terms of public safety, management of patients flow within the hospital, infrastructural issues and logistics as follows –

- 1) No provision has been made for a pedestrian crossing in front of the hospital;
- 2) Parking slots provided for patients were inexistent;
- 3) Taxi slots were provided some 800 meters away from the entrance of the hospital;
- 4) Visitors from different parts of the district are in general encountering difficulties in obtaining public transport to access the hospital;
- 5) There was a lack of signages inside the hospital to direct out patients and visitors;
- 6) The pharmacy department is located far from the outpatient departments and no proper provision has been made for endoscopy and ophthalmology services;
- 7) The cardiology services were operational but interventional cardiology services comprising angiography and angioplasty are yet to be established;
- 8) There is also a delay in delivery of critical equipment such as city scan and X-ray machines for radiology department;
- 9) MRI equipment have been received but not yet installed;

- 10) The existing electrical generators have short autonomy duration and needs refueling every six hours;
- 11) Lack of bathroom facilities and mess rooms for staff;
- 12) No provision has been made for a canteen tuck shop in the vicinity of the hospital;
- 13) The triage section has to be relocated with sufficient attendants, wheelchairs and patient trolleys for timely convenience of patients who cannot walk;
- 14) Limited number of power points, telephone sockets, wash hand machine, sinks at different wards and units;
- 15) Lack of partitioning at the physiotherapy department and several other departments;
- 16) The occupational therapy and physiotherapy units to be relocated;
- 17) The laboratory stalls and dental services have not been fully relocated to the new hospital, and
- 18) No leachate treatment plant for disposal of treated wastewater.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that immediate action has already been taken to address the issues faced by the public and taxi operators. To this end, 50 parking slots are being made available to patients and visitors at the entrance of the hospital.

Moreover, three taxi slots have been allocated nearer to the main entrance of the hospital. I am also informed that five parking slots have been reserved for ambulances in front of the accident and emergency unit at the entrance of the hospital for drop off and pick up patients including dialysis patients.

Madam Speaker, as regard the inhale nitric oxide apparatus which is currently lying idle at the hospital, I am informed there is a nitrogen cylinder that had been procured two weeks ago and a breathing circuit is awaited. Training will be conducted in January 2025 by a team from the US and thereafter, the equipment will be used for children suffering from persistent pulmonary hypertension.

Madam Speaker, a technical committee has been set up to look into the remedial actions that have to be taken on a short to medium term with a view to improving the health services at the hospital. This technical committee will meet on a weekly basis and will report progress to me accordingly.

I am pleased to announce that the services of one imminent vascular Surgeon from Chennai has been secured to assist our team in complex cases of arteriovenous fistula that is, those who need dialysis. Moreover, as from next year, an eye and a vascular surgery department as well as a renal transplant unit will be operational at Flacq hospital. Two teams have already been set up for that purpose.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Is that a supplementary or your next question?

Mr Beehook: Supplementary.

Madam Speaker: Okay, that will probably be the last!

Mr Beehook: Will the hon. Minister please inform the House whether prior to his visit, a huge stock of new equipment was left unused, owing to the *coup riban* ceremony culture of the previous Minister which ultimately never happened?

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, there were certain equipment which have not been utilised and that is why they have mentioned that – let us say within the next few months, all these equipment will be operational but there is no need for any *coup riban* business in the Ministry.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Yes!

Mr Prayag: Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I humbly suggest the hon. Minister to even consider, among the 14 measures that he will be implementing, maybe we could suggest to move the medical superintendent office and administrative cadres that have contact with the public to lower floors for ease of services? Thank you.

Mr Bachoo: I will look into it.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Dr. Aumeer! Last question.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I ask the hon. Minister, having paid a visit to the hospital only last week, whether there could be an improved signage system

within the hospital which will help both patients and visitors because going there with huge corridors and so many wards and department, you can get lost very easily? Thank you.

Mr Bachoo: I have mentioned that in my statement that we will be having signages.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. I think we can break for one and a half hour. We will be back at 2.30 p.m.

At 1.00 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.31 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil!

DRAIN PROJECTS – COSTS BREAKDOWN

(No. 1 B/63) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to drain projects undertaken by the Land Drainage Authority and the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd., since 2018 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the respective date thereof and the associated costs therefor in each case.

Mr Gunness: Madam Speaker, the Land Drainage Authority Act 2017 was proclaimed on 22 May 2018 and the Land Drainage Authority became operational on 01 June 2018.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight that the LDA does not implement drain projects. Rather, it is the spearheading body of the National Flood Management Programme. As such, it allocates drains projects to implementing agencies, which are the National Development Unit, the Road Development Authority, the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd and local authorities.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the DICL, I am informed that a total number of 58 drain projects had been allocated to it by the LDA. A status on the project is as follows –

- (a) 4 projects for a total amount of Rs281,735,292.99 have been completed;
- (b) 10 projects for a total amount of some Rs1.4 billion are under construction;
- (c) 11 projects estimated at Rs2.4 billion are at bidding stage;

- (d) 20 projects estimated at Rs2.1 billion are at design stage, and
- (e) the remaining 13 projects, financial clearance of approximately Rs2.1 billion is awaited from the Ministry of Finance.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Beechook: *Merci, Madame.* I would like to ask the hon. Minister, whether he is satisfied with only 4 projects completed to date since the inception of the LDA, and the structure that has been established for executing the drain projects?

Mr Gunness: Obviously, I am not satisfied with only 4 projects. But we have to realise also that it is quite complex. There is a complexity in the designing and the bidding process because we are talking of billions of rupees. We have a land drainage master plan, which the Land Drainage Authority based itself to prepare all the plans and where we are going to construct the drains. So, obviously, I am not satisfied and we will review things.

Mr Beechook: Hon. Minister, I would humbly request you, whether it is possible to speed up, especially in terms of allocation of resources to executing bodies like the NDU, RDA, DICL and the local authorities, which very often, tend to rely on financial resources from the LDA to execute the projects?

Mr Gunness: I must say they do not rely on financial clearance from the LDA. They rely on financial clearance from the Ministry of Finance because we must get finance first to undergo projects. But we must also say to be fair, at times, we get many complexities, like right of entry on the lands and the acquisition of lands. All these take time. At times, you get owners who are reluctant to put their land at the disposal of government. So, all these make that the project is delayed.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Next question, hon. Third Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central!

CWA – CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR & OTHER STAFF – RESIGNATION CAUSES

(No. 1 B/64) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central

Water Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the

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- (a) reasons for the resignation of the Chief Internal Auditor in June 2024, and
- (b) number of staff who –
 - (i) have resigned, and
 - (ii) are on leave without pay, since January 2023 to date, indicating if any case of constructive dismissal has been lodged against the Authority.

Mr Assirvaden: Madame la présidente, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, je suis informé que Madame Y.L, ancienne auditrice interne en chef de la CWA, a soumis sa lettre de démission au directeur général de l'époque, Monsieur P.M., le 3 juin 2024.

Dans sa lettre de démission, Madame Y.L. a informé le directeur général de l'époque, Monsieur P.M., qu'elle avait été victime d'abus verbaux, d'intimidation, de harcèlement et d'acte de représailles depuis qu'elle avait été chargée d'effectuer un audit de conformité sur le programme interne de remplacement des tuyaux, mené par la CWA pour l'année 2023-2024. Elle a également fait référence aux accusations sans fondement, discriminatoires, diffamatoires portées contre elle par l'ancien directeur général de la *Central Water Authority*, Monsieur P.M. et le directeur général adjoint de la CWA dans deux mémos qui lui ont été adressés.

Ces actions ont été entreprises, selon l'auditrice en chef, dans le but de faire taire ces rapports ou de la punir pour avoir rempli ses responsabilités vis-à-vis de la CWA. La dame en question a également déclaré que le plan d'audit interne de l'autorité centrale de l'eau pour 2023-2024 n'avait pas été approuvé par le *board* sur la base d'affirmation inexacte faite par le directeur général de l'époque, Monsieur P.M.

La dame a aussi ajouté dans sa lettre de démission que malgré ses tentatives de régler les problèmes susmentionnés par les voies appropriées, aucune mesure significative n'a été prise pour les raisons susmentionnées. L'auditrice en chef a déclaré qu'elle n'avait d'autre choix que de démissionner de son poste d'auditrice interne en chef de la CWA.

La Chambre se souviendra, Madame la présidente, que les malheurs de Madame Y.L. ont commencé après qu'elle a soumis son rapport sur le programme de remplacement des

tuyaux internes, ce qu'on appelle les *in-house Pipe Replacement Programme* – ce fameux scandale – qui doit être entrepris par la CWA d'avril 2023 à décembre 2024, qui prévoyait un financement de R 700 millions en deux tranches de R 350 millions chacune de mon ministère.

Le plus intéressant, le rapport de l'audit de la dame a relevé un catalogue d'acte et d'omission coupable de la part de la CWA, du *management* et de Monsieur P.M. qui a recommandé que la deuxième tranche de R 350 millions ne soit pas déboursée par mon ministère jusqu'à que les mesures correctives et les recommandations contenues dans le rapport soient mises en œuvre par la CWA.

Pour la transparence, je dépose, Madame la présidente, avec votre permission, une copie du rapport de l'audit datée du 9 janvier 2024 à l'attention de la Chambre.

Madame la présidente, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, la CWA m'informe que depuis janvier 2023 à ce jour, tenez-vous bien, 128 membres du personnel ont démissionné et neuf en congé sans solde, deux cas de licenciement déguisés pour vous dire.

Merci, Madame la présidente. Le dossier est là.

Madam Speaker : Je vous remercie, Monsieur le ministre. *Yes !*

Dr. Aumeer : Merci, M. le ministre, pour ces réponses tant attendues à la Chambre. Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire s'il y a eu une enquête au niveau de son ministère pour voir si toutes ces démissions et congés sans solde, dont il vient de mentionner 128 et 9 au niveau de la *Central Water Authority*, qui sont liés directement à la façon de faire de l'*ex-General Manager*, Monsieur P.M., comme vous l'avez dit, qui était de surcroît, un ancien *Senior Adviser* au bureau du Premier ministre?

Mr Assirvaden : Madame la présidente, bien sûr, il y aura une enquête. C'est sûr ! J'attends la constitution du nouveau *board* de la *Central Water Authority* pour pouvoir demander au *board* de faire une enquête concernant les 128 membres qui ont démissionné depuis, mais aussi de demander une enquête en ce qui concerne le rapport de l'audit.

Mr Assirvaden : Le rapport de l'audit, si vous me le permettez, Madame la présidente, ce rapport de l'audit – les membres de la Chambre auront l'occasion de voir ce que l'auditrice en chef a écrit, comment pour R 700 millions le management, l'ancien directeur général, a divisé, subdivisé un projet de 700 millions pour contourner les règlements. Ce que vous allez

lire dans ce rapport, Madame la présidente, est glaçant, inquiétant, scandaleux. Clairement, ce rapport fera l'objet d'une enquête. Clairement, ce rapport d'audit montre comment R 700 millions ont été volatilisés dans une opacité totale. L'ancien directeur général et le management auront tôt ou tard à répondre pour ce rapport.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Dr. Aumeer.

Dr. Aumeer: M. le ministre, est-ce que votre ministère a-t-il pris les mesures nécessaires pour confirmer la véracité des pratiques subterfuges internes auxquelles l'auditrice en chef a fait référence dans son rapport ? Je répète la question.

Mr Assirvaden: Oui, s'il vous plaît oui.

Dr. Aumeer: Est-ce que votre ministère a-t-il pris les mesures nécessaires pour confirmer la véracité des pratiques subterfuges internes par l'ancien directeur auxquelles l'auditrice en chef a fait référence dans son rapport ?

Mr Assirvaden: Madame la présidente, je vais dire que l'enquête déterminera en temps et lieu qui a fait quoi.

Madam Speaker: Oui.

Mr Assirvaden: L'enquête déterminera en temps et lieu et le *Board* décidera en temps et lieu et qui va enquêter sur ce rapport et les mesures qu'on va prendre. Mais, entre-temps je voudrais préciser à la Chambre que j'ai rencontré personnellement l'auditrice en chef. Je l'ai rencontré et je peux dire que cette personne, cette auditrice, c'est une professionnelle et cette personne est encore traumatisée par ce qu'elle a vécu entre les mains de Monsieur P. M. Donc, oui, une enquête va être...

Madam Speaker : Diligentée.

Mr Assirvaden : Pardons, exactement merci pour le mot pour le mot. Mais j'attends la constitution du *Board* de la *Central Water Authority* pour faire le nécessaire. Merci.

Madam Speaker: *Merci*, okay. I now call for the hon. First Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE.

BEL AIR – NEW MARKET FAIR – ALLOCATION OF STALLS

(No. 1 B/65) Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the new market fair in Bel Air, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Flacq, information as to –

- (a) the mechanism put in place for the allocation of stalls thereat;
- (b) the number of stalls not yet allocated, and
- (c) why priority was not given for the allocation of stalls thereat to existing vegetable sellers who have been operating in the old market fair for more than forty years.

Mr Wochit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am informed by the District Council of Flacq that the old market fair in Bel Air was a private one which does not fall under its control and is operating more than 30 years. Around 340 sellers were working in this market fair. In the year of 2014, the District Council decided to construct a new market fair to accommodate a total of 515 stalls. Madam Speaker, following the construction of the new market fair, the District Council invited an expression of interest in accordance with section 57 of the Local Government Act on 19 April 2024 for allocation of the 515 stalls at the new market fair.

The eligibility criteria for allocation of stalls were as follows –

- (i) Applicants should be over 18 years;
- (ii) Applicants should reside within the administrative area of the district Council of Flacq. This condition was not applicable for applicant operating at the private market fair as per survey record from the public health department of the Council.
- (iii) Applicant should be unemployed;
- (iv) Applicant should not already be a holder of any stall, booths, shops, space or other place inside a market or fair, and last
- (v) Applicant should not be already be a holder of any trade fee receipt, business registration card or any license from any other authority.

The expression of interest exercise was launch for the 515 available stalls where 339 stalls were allocated in the new market fair while 176 stalls were not allocated. Subsequently,

13 stalls were surrendered by the stallholders. Therefore, there were 189 vacant stalls to be allocated.

Madam Speaker, as regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the District Council that a survey was carried out by Health Department and it was observed that 340 stallholders were operating in the old market fair. Only 145 obtained a stall in the new market fair while the remaining 195 stallholders either did not show interest or did not obtain a stall due to the following reasons –

- (i) The applicant was holder of business registration card to carry out business in other places;
- (ii) The applicant was holder of a stall in the market or fair in other local authorities;
- (iii) The applicant was holder of an employment;
- (iv) The applicant had not sign the application form and had not submitted the required document.

Following representations from many of the sellers who were not found eligible, the criteria for the reallocation of stalls were reviewed by the District Council and a second expression of interest was launched on the 01 October 2024 whereby the fifth criterion was amended as follows –

“Applicant should not already be holder of any trade fees through receipt, business registration card or any license from any other authority, save and except for persons already found in the survey list of the Public Health Department for being holder of a business registration card for distributor of general merchandise, owner of goods vehicle having a and/or carrier license or owner of any business registration card or activities in relation to the existing private fair including growing of vegetables.”

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the District Council that they evaluation of the application is in progress by the Bid Evaluation Committee. Priority will be given to the existing stallholders operating at the private market fair provided that they meet the eligibility criteria for allocation of stalls. My Ministry is following the matter closely. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Savanne & Black River.

NTC – FINANCIAL STATUS – FLEET

(No. 1 B/66) **Mr S. Jugurnauth (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the financial status thereof from January 2020 to 30 June 2024, indicating the total amount of subsidy granted by Government thereto for the same period, and
- (b) current state of the fleet thereof.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I am sure that the House will be stunned to note that the last approved audited accounts of the National Transport Corporation relate to financial year ending 31 December 2015. However, I am informed by the NTC that the audited accounts for the financial year 2016/2017 was received on 29 October 2024 that same will be considered by the Board for approval. What is more disturbing, Madam Speaker, is that accounts in respect of financial years 2017/2018, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 were approved by the then NTC Board on 11 September 2024 and thereafter sent to the National Audit Office for audit purposes on 16 September 2024. One would wonder the compulsion of having the above accounts which have been pending for several years to be approved some three weeks before the issue of writ for last general elections. I leave it to the hon. Members to draw their own conclusion.

As regards financial statements for financial year 2020/2021, same are expected to be completed by end December 2024. To add insult to injury Madam Speaker, I am informed that even the management accounts for years 2021/2022, 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 are not available and are now being prepared. Same are expected to be completed by end of February 2025, seemingly.

Madam Speaker, it is utterly unconceivable for a government-owned entity, generating billions of rupees, to have such a backlog of outstanding accounts. This situation is totally unacceptable as in the absence of final accounts; it might be difficult to gage the true financial position of the corporation which has been the recipient of billions of rupees of subsidies over the past few years. In fact, the Director of Audit raised serious concerns on the non-finalisations of the annual reports of the NTC in his previous management letters.

Madam Speaker, the House will surely conquer that we cannot condone the inordinate delay in finalising the accounts of the corporation, the more so that the latter has to comply with the provisions relating to the Statutory Bodies (Accounts and Audit) Act relating to

finalisation of annual reports and financial statements within the applicable statutory delay. In fact, even before the question was addressed to me, I had instructed my Ministry to urge the NTC to finalise the pending accounts just like I did for the Metro Express Ltd and that same have to be audited as a matter of priority.

Madam Speaker, this situation cannot be allowed to recur and there is need for persons who had been at the helm of organisations for several years to be made accountable for the current state of affairs. It would appear that dereliction of duty would be way too mild to explain the tardy and non-finalisation of the accounts. Against this backdrop, the newly reconstituted Board of the NTC took the bold decision on 14 December 2024, to terminate the appointment of the General Manager and this; I need to stress, in accordance with the terms and conditions of his contract. An Officer-in-Charge, Dr. Ramakrishna Permal Naidoo, has been appointed pending the recruitment of a new General Manager who will be designated following an open advertisement process.

Madam Speaker, as regards the subsidy part of the question, in order not to be lengthy in my reply, I am tabling the total amount of subsidy granted by Government to the NTC from January 2020 to June 2024 and as communicated to me by the NTC.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, the NTC owns a fleet of 499 buses with an overall average age of 11 years and the fleet comprises of various makes and models including Ashok Leyland, Tata, Yutong and Nissan. With a view to improving the services, the NTC is in the process of replacing its ageing buses with the procurement of 100 new diesel buses while discussions are ongoing for the sourcing of 200 additional buses.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Third Member for Port Louis South! I am sorry, Dr. Aumeer. He tried to catch my eye.

Mr Jugurnauth: Madam Speaker, please.

Madam Speaker: ... which is not ...

Mr Jugurnauth: May I ask the hon. Minister if he is aware of an NTC bus that caught fire in my Constituency on Sunday and what will his Ministry do to ensure that this type of incident does not occur again?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I thought that the hon. Member would ask this question because Chemin Grenier where the incident occurred is in his Constituency and that of the former Minister of Land Transport, Mr Alan Ganoo.

Madam Speaker, Members of the House – at least those who were here during the 2019-2024 session – would recall that the state of the NTC buses was subject of a Parliamentary Question on 7 November 2023, namely, PQ B/1405, wherein I queried the then Minister on the maintenance aspects. Unfortunately, I was rudely denied from fulfilling my parliamentary duties by the then Speaker and could not put additional questions as regard the servicing of Yutong buses, the make of the bus that caught fire in your Constituency and was completely burnt.

The officer in charge of the NTC reported that a semi-low floor bus of make Yutong with immatriculation number 2674 AP 16 caught fire on 15 December 2024, the next day that the General Manager was asked to leave by the Board, around 12 30 hours, at Chemin Grenier. According to information provided to me by the NTC, the driver observed thick smoke emanating from the rear of the bus. He immediately stopped the bus and passengers were evacuated. So, fortunately there were no casualties. The driver could not, however, extinguish the fire with the onboard fire extinguisher, leading to the fire spreading to other parts of the bus. Despite the efforts put in by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services, the bus was completely burnt. Fortunately, no passengers were injured like I said, though the driver sustained minor burns while attempting to put out the fire.

The bus was towed to the Forest Side depot of the NTC. In the meantime, a preliminary report has been submitted to my Ministry on the matter. However, with a view to having an independent inquiry on this issue, my Ministry has requested the mechanical engineering division of the Ministry of National Infrastructure to carry out a detailed investigation on the causes and circumstances of the fire outbreak. I rely on my colleague, the Minister of National Infrastructure and on his officers to promptly look into the matter. The maintenance strategy of the NTC buses will have to be redressed in the light of the findings of the above

independent investigation and we cannot and will not allow the lives of our fellow citizens to be put at risk.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Luckily I allowed the question. Yes, now Dr. Aumeer!

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS – GENERAL WORKERS –
RECRUITMENT EXERCISES**

(No. 1 B/67) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the General Workers at his Ministry, he will state the date for the holding of the last three recruitment exercises thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) date of advertisement thereof;
- (b) number thereof recruited, and
- (c) conditions of service thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, the post of General Worker falls under the Workmen's class and is filled generally delegated powers conferred by the Public Service Commission.

The recruitment is made by selection from a list of registered unemployed candidates obtained from the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. Whenever there are vacancies in the grade, a list of registered and unemployed candidates is sought from that Ministry.

Madam Speaker, the main responsibilities of a General Worker are amongst others –

- to carry out excavation works;
- loading and transporting stacked materials;
- effecting general cleaning works, and
- carrying out weeding and cleaning works.

Officers in the grade of General Worker are also called upon to provide replacement in the grades of Handy Worker, Tradesman, Driver and Attendant amongst others to palliate the lack of staff in those grades.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that prior to the first two of the preceding three recruitment exercises, the number of funded vacancies was 342 in July 2021. Upon the request of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a list of 500 registered and unemployed candidates was submitted by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. Following the recruitment exercise which was conducted between the period 23 August to 13 September 2021, 297 candidates were offered employment. Out of these, 282 candidates assumed duty and 260 were confirmed in their appointment. The confirmation of 22 outstanding candidates is pending due to either poor attendance or unavailability of medical report.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that the number of funded vacancies was 225 in April 2023 prior to the second recruitment exercise. At the request of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a list of 300 registered unemployed candidates was submitted by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. Following the recruitment exercise which was carried out from 18 to 23 May 2023, 210 candidates were offered employment. Out of these, 189 candidates assumed duty and have completed one year casual basis in October 2024. Their confirmation is under process.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the last recruitment exercise, I am informed that the number of funded vacancies were 300 in April 2024. Again, at the request of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a list of 600 registered unemployed candidates was submitted by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. Following the recruitment exercise which was carried out from 9 to 17 May 2024, 284 candidates were offered employment. Out of this, 257 candidates assumed duty with effect from 08 July 2024 on a one year casual basis.

With regard to part (c) of question, the conditions of service for the post of General Worker are as follows –

- Candidates were offered employment on a casual basis for a period of one year as from the date of assumption of duty.

- They draw wages at the rate Rs10,250 monthly, plus salary compensation at approved rates, plus the minimum wage increase.
- They are placed on the permanent and pensionable establishment after having completed one year satisfactory service subject to them being favourably reported regarding work, conduct and attendance, and found medically and constitutionally fit for employment in the service.
- They are required to make a contribution towards their pension at such rates as may be prescribed by law.
- They are granted leave entitlement as per the provision of PRB Report.

Madam Speaker: Thank you Minister. Yes!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Madam. Approximately 800 General Workers have been recruited over a three-term recruitment service. Will the hon. Minister, for the sake of good governance and transparency, table a copy of the recruitment of General Workers, indicating in each case the regions where the new recruits hail from?

Mr Bachoo: I will do it.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle!

INSURANCE INDUSTRY COMPENSATION FUND – HIT AND RUN SUB FUND – FUNDS AVAILABLE & DISBURSED

(No. 1 B/68) Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the Insurance Industry Compensation Fund, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the amount of funds available under the Hit and Run Sub Fund, indicating the total amount disbursed for the year 2023-2024 –

- (a) to victims of accidents as compensation, and
- (b) as expenses.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Madam Speaker, 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 Industry Compensation Fund Regulation 2015 with effect from 01 January 2016.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that as at 13 December 2024, the total amount of funds available under the Hit and Run Sub Fund was Rs357,209,827. The total amount of funds comprising contributions received from insurance companies, ranging from Rs25 to a maximum of Rs200 per insurance policy of vehicle as per the First Schedule of the Insurance Industry Compensation Fund Regulation 2015 and interests received.

With regard to part (a) of the question, in the year 2023-2024, the IICF has received 34 claims, out of which, 26 were approved for compensation, five were rejected and three are under consideration. The total amount disbursed for payment to the victims of hit and run accidents for the year is Rs3,100,000.

With regard to part (b) of the question, expenses incurred by the IICF, which involve administrative, salaries, allowances, rental and board fees, the fund is managed by a management committee and it has a technical committee, it amounts to Rs5,588,431. So, Rs3 m. paid to victims and Rs5.5 m. incurred in expenses.

I would like to state to the House that clearly there is an issue with this fund, Madam Speaker. At a time when our households, up and down the country, are struggling to make ends meet, where household bills are ever increasing, including car insurance premiums, the management of this fund and the functioning of this fund raise serious questions. There are funds of Rs357 m. sitting in this fund, but only Rs3 m. disbursed to victims and Rs5.5 m. in expenses.

Secondly, I was appalled to learn that the Rs357 m. is sitting in current accounts with zero interest rates. Can you imagine the amount of money? Just a back of envelope calculation at 3% interest gives you 10 million in a year. People have put that money in zero rated current accounts!

So, given the above concerns, I will propose to review the functioning and the fundamental of the IICF, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr Seeburn: Madam Speaker, now that we know that there are some malpractices, will the hon. Minister be able to take the appropriate measures to restore those funds in the deposit account, for the benefit of the House?

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Madam Speaker, there is a board of the FSC happening today and I have already spoken to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry to raise this at the level of the board because this fund sits under the FSC Board.

Madam Speaker: Very good! Thank you.

Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

MAURITIUS DIGITAL HUB – INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION 5.0

(No. 1 B/69) Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to digital innovation/transformation towards Industrial Revolution 5.0, he will state the measures being envisaged to harness the full potential of Mauritius as a digital hub in the region of Africa to achieve same.

Dr. Ramtohol: Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that Industrial Revolution 5.0 represents the next transformative phase in global technological advancement, where the focus shifts to a more human centric approach. It acutely emphasises collaboration between humans and intelligent systems to address critical societal challenges while ensuring as well sustainability and inclusivity.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry has embarked on a resolute journey to align Mauritius with the transformative principles of Industrial Revolution 5.0.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to now enumerate the measures taken. On December 11 2024, my Ministry successfully convened a workshop with ICT operators, uniting key leaders and innovators of the sector. This important gathering was more than just a discussion; it was focused on identifying critical challenges and unlocking opportunities that will propel the ICT sector into a new era of growth and innovation.

As a result, a task force, which is dedicated, has been established to ensure the swift and strategic implementation of proposals that we received from the ICT operators. The task

force operates with a clear mandate to deliver results that meet the specific needs of our nation and contribute to its digital transformation.

Madam Speaker, beyond just the ICT sector, my Ministry is also expanding its engagement to encompass education, health, tourism, agriculture and industry at large. Through targeted sectoral meetings, the aim is to deeply understand the unique challenges and opportunities within each of these domains. These engagements will be followed by specialised workshops that would be modelled on the earlier workshop and the insights gathered will form a foundation for a comprehensive blueprint that will be finalised by the first quarter of 2025.

Madam Speaker, the previous government came up with an Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2018-2022, which was more of a document than anything else. The said strategy comprised some 38 comprehensive recommendations. However, the only recommendation that was implemented was the establishment of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council that was meant to spearhead AI initiatives and oversee their implementation. The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council (METC) hardly met any of its objectives. Therefore, there was no progress achieved.

We understand, Madam Speaker, that it is imperative to highlight the previous government's lack of commitment to technological advancement and contextualise the vision of this newly formed government. In fact, only 0.41 per cent of the national budget was allocated to this critical sector. No wonder the quality of the laptops were pretty poor!

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is dedicated to rectifying past oversights and propelling Mauritius into a future where technology serves as the cornerstone of economic growth and societal advancement.

By allocating appropriate resources, fostering public understanding and ensuring ethical AI integration, my Ministry aims at positioning Mauritius as a beacon of technological innovation in Africa and globally as well.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, Mauritius stands ready to embrace the transformative potential of IR 5.0 and AI. By addressing past shortcomings, strengthening institutions like the METC and leveraging partnership with the African Union, UNESCO and global

platforms like the G20 which actually run an initiative on AI for Africa. So, this Government is laying the foundation for inclusive and sustainable progress.

Our commitment is to position Mauritius as a leader in technology, ensuring AI and emerging innovations drive tangible benefits across all sectors of the economy. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle.

**BOIS DES AMOURETTES – FOOTBALL GROUND – ONGOING
RENOVATION – COMPLETION**

(No. 1 B/70) Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the ongoing renovation of the football ground in Bois Des Amourettes, he will state where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) scope of work thereof, and
- (b) expected completion date thereof.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am informed by the District Council of Grand Port that it has no renovation project for the football ground at Bois des Amourettes.

I am further informed that the National Development Unit (NDU) is presently undertaking renovation works thereat. The NDU has apprised that Phase 1 of the project of upgrading of works at Bois des Amourettes football ground consisted of returfing works. The contract was allocated to Sotravic Ltd on 17 February 2023 by the NDU under its framework agreement for amenities for an amount of Rs6,715,349.80, including of VAT.

With regard to the scope of works, the project consisted of excavation of the soil up to a depth of 0.95 metres, provision of spalls 200 to 300 mm thickness up to a depth of 0.5 metres, laying of geotextile, construction of 135 metres of French drains, provision of engineering fill-up, up to a depth of 0.25 metres, provision of topsoil up to a depth of 0.20 metres, leveling the football pitch and grass planting of an extent of 4,250 m².

Although the project started on the 06 March 2023 and was expected to be completed by 27 July 2023, the completion date was eventually extended to 07 September 2023 due to the implement weather, causing the site to be unpractical due to the muddy condition, as well as the change in design due to the fact that the existing topography and ground conditions

required spalls (200 to 300 mm) to be used to stabilise the ground condition, and geotextile had to be used for the whole area of the site.

Madam Speaker, with regard to Phase 2 of the project “Upgrading of Fencing at Bois Des Amourettes Football Ground”, it consists of upgrading of frontage fencing and the contract was allocated to Sotravic Ltd on 30 January 2024 by the NDU under its framework agreement for amenities for an amount of Rs4,113,109.55, including of VAT. The works started on 04 March 2024.

The project includes –

- (i) the demolition of an existing blockwall over a length of 84.29 metres;
- (ii) excavation and laying of blinding concrete erection of block wall;
- (iii) fencing up to a height of one metre above existing ground level;
- (iv) supply and fixing of heavy duty galvanised fencing up to a height of 4.5 metres;
- (v) supply of one main gate and one pedestrian gate.

Madam Speaker, as per part (b) of the question, I am informed that Phase 2 which was supposed to be completed on 22 July 2024, it is now scheduled for 20 December 2024.

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

Mr Seeburn: Madam Speaker, now we know that for Phase 2 the works began on 04 March 2024 and which were set for completion on 22 July 2024.

However, same will now be completed on 20 December 2024 as informed by the hon. Minister. Were there any liquidated damages applied by the National Development Unit and also, if the hon. Minister can...

Madam Speaker: You can't both stand at the same time! Let him finish, hon. Minister!

Mr Wochit: Yes.

Mr Seeburn: And also if the hon. Minister can give a special attention for the project to be completed in the nearest delay?

Madam Speaker: Did you get his question? I didn't! It's alright.

Mr Wochit: Yes, Madam Speaker. Due to the late completion of the outstanding works by the contractor without justification, liquidated damage amounting to Rs245,000, excluding of VAT, were applied by the NDU and we will follow the works closely to complete the work timely.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Your next question!

**GRAND PORT COASTAL ROAD – CWA – NEW WATER PIPES
INSTALLATION – COMPLETION DATE**

(No. 1 B/71) Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the new water pipes being currently installed along coastal road of Grand Port, Anse Jonchée and Bambous Virieux, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to where matters stand, indicating the expected completion date thereof.

Mr Assirvaden: Madam Speaker, the project to renew the old defective distribution network along coastal road of Grand Port including Anse Jonchée et Bambous Virieux is in two phases –

- Phase 1 of the project, over the section from Anse Jonchée to Bambous Virieux and Petit Sable, pipes are being replaced of a length of 6.4 km and works have commenced on 10 June 2024. The scheduled completion date is on 10 February 2025. As at date, 5.4 km of pipes have already been laid of which 3.9 km have been tested and commissioned. Temporary road reinstatement has been completed over 4.5 km.
- Regarding Phase 2 of the project from Ferney to Anse Jonchée, the total length of pipe replacement is 6.7 km and works have started on 07 October 2024 with an expected completion date of 06 June 2025. As of now, 2.5 km of pipeline has been laid and temporary road reinstatement has been completed for 1.8 km.

Madam Speaker, following the completion and commissioning of the above 13.1 km of new pipeline by June 2025 next year, *dans six mois*, it is expected that water distribution for approximately 1,800 households in the region would be considerably improved. Thus, the village of Bambous Virieux which is currently being provided water through CWA water tankers on alternate days will be supplied with water through the newly laid pipe with adequate pressure.

In addition, the villages of Grand Port, Anse Jonchée *et* Bambous Virieux will benefit from 18 hours of supply daily instead of 12 hours currently. *J'espère que la réponse est satisfaisante. Merci Madame.*

Madam Speaker: He is doing his best.

Mr Seeburn: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Third Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 10 – WATER SUPPLY – PONT LARDIER – DAM CONSTRUCTION

(No. 1 B/72) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the regular interruption in water supply in several areas in Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the measures being envisaged to alleviate the burden of the inhabitants thereof, and
- (b) state if consideration will be given for the construction of a dam in the region of Pont Lardier as a long term solution.

Mr Assirvaden: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that to improve water supply in the region of Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, we are currently engaged in the following projects –

1. Upgrading of the distribution network through the replacement of 6.82 km of pipeline along several lateral in the region of Bramsthan and Bel Air. The Central Water Authority has identified another 9.7 km of pipeline to be renewed in the coming years, and
2. Preliminary investigation in connection with the proposed drilling of new borehole at L'Etoile to harness additional ground water to supply the region.

Madam Speaker, with regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Central Water Authority proposes to abstract water from Deep River to Pont Lardier via a river intake structure to be treated in a new water treatment plant.

The project at Pont Lardier comprises three components, namely –

- (i) The construction of a river intake structure on Deep River;
- (ii) a water treatment plant, and
- (iii) a service reservoir.

The water treatment plant will have a capacity of 15,000 m³/day while the reinforced concrete service reservoir will have a capacity of 4000 m³. I am informed that financial clearance for the project has been obtained and the Central Water Authority will be notified of the relevant clearances shortly. It is expected that the construction works at Pont Lardier would start by December 2025.

In the light of the above, Madam Speaker, the construction of a dam at Pont Lardier would not be warranted. *Merci*, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Vous ne vous êtes pas planté!

Mr Assirvaden: Heureusement.

Madam Speaker: Happy? Okay. So, next is the hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, Mrs Savabaddy.

Mrs Savabaddy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Do not touch it! Do not touch it!

Mrs Savabaddy: I B/74, please!

SMK NAVIN SOONARANE GYMNASIUM - VOLLEY BALL TOURNAMENTS

(No. I B/73) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to SMK Navin Soonarane Gymnasium located at Ebène, he will state if same is still homologated for volley ball tournaments and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

MONTAGNE LONGUE HOSPITAL - FACILITIES & SERVICES

(No. I B/74) Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Montagne Longue Hospital, he will state the –

- (a) operating hours thereof;
- (b) facilities available and services provided thereat, and
- (c) number of patients treated thereat over the last two years.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, the Long Mountain Hospital is classified as a district hospital falling under SSRN regional hospital and caters for a population of 28,233.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the hospital is open seven days a week. The sorted outpatient department and dental services operate from 09.00hrs in the morning to 16.00hrs on weekdays and 09.00hrs in the morning to noon on Saturdays. The haemodialysis unit operates from 08.00hrs in the morning to 09.00 p.m. during weekdays and from 08.00hrs in the morning to noon on Saturdays. The accident and emergency department and the Nénuphar Rehabilitation Centre where patients of 18 years and above, suffering from drug addiction are catered for operate only 24/7 basis.

Madam Speaker, in regard to part (b) of the question, the following facilities and services available at the hospital are –

- (i) Accident and emergency;
- (ii) Ambulance services;
- (iii) Dietician clinic;
- (iv) Endocrinology clinic;
- (v) Haemodialysis;
- (vi) Metadone clinic;
- (vii) The outpatient department serves chronic and stable patients referred to from SSRN for follow-up care in these departments which include Cardiology, Chest Diseases, Dermatology, Diabetology, ENT, General Medicine, General Surgery, NCD, Obstetrics, Orthopaedics, Paediatrics, Physical Medicine,

Psychiatry, eight pharmacy services, 9 Rheumatology clinic, 10 tobacco cessation clinic, 11 vaccination for child and adults and 12 well baby clinic. In 2022 and 2023, the hospital treated 54,358 and 66,378 patients respectively.

Madam Speaker, we have noted that the pharmacy department has been operating from 08.00hrs in the morning till 10.00hrs for a long period. Patients who arrive after 08.00hrs in the evening either obtain their medicines from SSRN or return the next morning. The option of providing 24/7 pharmacy services is being looked into. Madam Speaker, I am further apprised that the following shortcomings were noted during a site visit carried out recently –

- (a) The yard requires proper upkeep and the regional health services administrator has been urged to address this matter urgently. Road markings, curb painting and parking works are in progress. Additionally, there is a need for lopping and trimming of branches for which approval has already been granted by the conservator of forest and funds have accordingly been earmarked.

The Parking facilities are being looked into – these 47 additional new parking slots and the reinstatement of 20 existing parking spaces. A survey has been completed and funds will be allocated once the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development provides its recommendation.

- (b) The exterior painting of the hospital has been completed while interior painting is on-going and is expected to be finished by the end of December.
- (c) Roof leakages at the Nénuphar Detoxification Centre and haemodialysis unit are being repaired and works are expected to be completed by the end of the month. There is a defective air conditioning unit in the pharmacy store as well as in the consultation room No. 1 which are currently under evaluation.

Additionally, there are no air conditioning units in three other consultation rooms, which is being looked into by the concerned head of units.

- (d) The wooden old building housing the linen room needs to be demolished. The construction of a new linen shed had been included in the list of projects submitted to the Project Implementation Unit.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Caserne: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Do not touch! Do not touch!

Mr Caserne: La région de Montagne Longue qui fait souvent face à des coupures d'électricité et l'hôpital de Montagne Longue n'étant pas équipée d'un générateur, *may I ask the hon. Minister whether he will look into the matter so that improvement can be brought to this hospital?*

Mr Bachoo: Okay, I will look into the issue.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Maybe I shall guide you as to the use of the mic. Even I did a mistake. It cannot cross in my case. You should not touch the mic; you just speak. *C'est très très performant.* Just speak.

Hon. Members: C'est sensible!

Madam Speaker: Sensible, mais ça peut être pire si vous touchez. Je sais c'est très tentant de le faire, mais ne le faites pas s'il vous plaît.

Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

Ms Daureeawo: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. | B/75.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I do not know what is going on, on this side. We did not hear you. Say it again.

PUBLIC PLACES - LIFT & ESCALATORS' SAFETY – INSPECTION & MAINTENANCE

(No. | B/75) **Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac)** asked the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations whether, in regard in regard to escalators or lifts placed in public places, he will state if consideration will be given for –

- (a) the regulation thereof to ascertain the safety of such facilities in public places, and
- (b) regular site visits or inspections to be effected thereon to ascertain the safety of the users thereof.

Mr Uteem: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the safety of hoist and lifts at places of work is governed by Section 53 of the

Occupational Safety and Health Act 2005 (OSHA) as well as the Occupational Safety and Health of Lift at Work Regulation 2012 while the safety of escalators at places of work is governed by Section 54 of the same Act.

As per the provisions of Section 53 and 54 of OSHA, every lift and escalator should be examined by a registered machinery inspector who is a registered professional engineer registered at my Ministry and at least once every six months, he has to file an original report with the National Occupational Safety and Health Department of my Ministry. In accordance with Section 62 of OSHA, it is the duty of a registered machinery inspector to inform in writing the employer or self-employed person or owner as the case may be, immediately after having completed an examination that such equipment is unsuitable for use if the nature of any defect is likely to adversely affect the continued safe use of that equipment.

Madam Speaker, following the very unfortunate incident at Grand Baie, La Croisette involving a travelator, my Ministry is considering measures to be taken to improve the safety in the use of escalators, lifts and travelators and we are considering a review of the existing Occupational Safety and Health of Lift at Work Regulation together with the Occupational Safety and Health Safety of Escalators at Work. Regulations will be made, we are setting up a technical committee and we will hold discussion with the various stakeholders.

I would here like to point out that one of the shortcomings that my Ministry has detected while carrying out these investigation in the inquiry in Grand Baie, La Croisette is that some of these escalators and the travelators because it was a travelator, not an escalator – *tapis roulant* – they did not have automatic sensors, sensors that will stop the machine automatically throughout the travelators. They have it at the beginning; they have it at the end they do not have it all along.

They have a manually operated switch, an emergency switch at the beginning and at the end of the travelators, but they do not have it throughout the travelators. So, this is one thing that we are also going to take up with the representative of the manufacturers to see how they can improve the safety of these travelators/escalators.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that for the period of 25 November to 12 December of this year, officers of my Ministry carried out 29 visits in relation to the use of lifts and escalators at places of work, including shopping

malls, where they issued 19 notices and established 10 contraventions. Inspection regarding the use of lifts and escalators at other places of work are ongoing.

I further wish to inform the House that a total of 3,855 visits at workplaces have been carried out by officers of my Ministry for the period from January 2023 to November 2024. During visits at places of work, officers of my Ministry have ensured that employers are complying with the provisions of current legislation, including provision pertaining to lifts and escalators.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

The hon. Fourth Member of Port Louis North and Montagne Longue is not here. I suppose he will get a written reply.

Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

MOLNUPIRAVIR CAPSULES – ENQUIRY

(No. 1 B/77) Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the procurement of 1,000,000 Molnupiravir capsules at Rs79.92 each, he will state if –

- (a) an inquiry is being conducted thereinto by his Ministry and, if so, indicate if the report will be made public, and
- (b) any Police enquiry has been initiated thereinto and/or case lodged before the court in relation thereto.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, I am informed that on 07 December 2021, the Ministry awarded a contract to CPN Distributors Ltd. through emergency procurement method for the supply of 999,000 capsules of Molnupiravir at a total price of Rs79,840,000.80, that is, at Rs79.92 per unit.

I am also informed that no enquiry was conducted at the level of the Ministry in this case. As of mid-December 2021, the then Independent Commission against Corruption had started an investigation on contracts awarded for the procurement of Molnupiravir tablets for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Police is not enquiring into any case relating to the procurement of Molnupiravir capsules. However, there is an ongoing investigation at the level of the Financial Crimes Commission, formerly ICAC. At this stage, no formal charge has yet been lodged before any law court.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – DRAINS MAINTENANCE

(No. 1 B/78) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the maintenance of drains in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand therefor in view of the upcoming rainy season, indicating the amount disbursed since January 2020 to date.

Mr Gunness: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, covers an extent of some 150 kms of drain network, out of which, some 69 kms fall under the purview of the District Council of Savanne and about 36 kms under the purview of the Road Development Authority for cleaning and maintenance.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed for the financial year 2023-2024, funding allocated to the District Council of Savanne for cleaning of drains and disilting of rivers was as follows –

- Rs2.5 m. allocated for cleaning of drains;
- Rs28 m. for disilting of rivers, and
- Rs6.7 m. for cleaning of drains post cyclone Belal.

Madam Speaker, a maintenance plan was submitted by the LDA to the District Council of Savanne on 29 July 2024. As at date, 19 kms of drains, out of the 69 kms, have been cleaned and disilting works along 11 kms river water courses have been carried out by the Savanne District Council.

With your permission, Madam Speaker, I am tabling a copy of the maintenance plan.

Madam Speaker, the RDA on its part has already cleaned some 7.5 kms of drains and around 800 metres are left to be cleaned as per its programme for the current financial year. The total amount spent by the District Council and the RDA since January 2020 to date for cleaning of drains and disilting of rivers in Constituency No. 13 is to the tune of some Rs24 m.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that together with my colleague, the Minister of Local Government and the Junior Minister of Local Government, I chaired a meeting with representatives of all the local authorities and other implementing agencies on 05 December 2024 to take stock of the cleaning and disilting of canals, rivers and drains undertaken so far. These agencies have been pressed upon to give due attention to complete the remaining works in view of the ongoing raining season. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

Mr Jhummun: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister inform the House, whether he is happy with the way the works have been done since billions of the public money has been drained in the drains by the previous government? Thank you.

Mr Guinness: Madam Speaker, as I said, we are never satisfied. Obviously, we spend a lot of money on drain projects, but follow up for the cleaning of drains, I must tell you, is not done properly. What is the use of constructing drains when afterwards, there is no cleaning of the drains? So, now, we will ensure that proper cleaning of the drains is carried out regularly. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Hon. Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka!

CITÉ MYOSOTIS, ST PIERRE – PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE – RECONSTRUCTION

(No. 1 B/79) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the pedestrian bridge used by the inhabitants of St Pierre Centre and Cité Myosotis to go to the St Pierre Roman

Catholic Aided School and which was damaged during the passage of cyclone Belal in January 2024, he will state –

- (a) where matters stand as to the reconstruction thereof, indicating the reason for the delay therefor, and
- (b) if a risk assessment has been carried out whereby pedestrians in particular, children who have to cross the river without any security protection to attend school.

Mr Gunness: Madam Speaker, I am informed that Cité Myosotis is cut off from St Pierre Centre and St Pierre RCA School by River Profonde. At present, in order to get access to the school and other facilities in the village, the inhabitants need to travel around 1 km through an existing bridge as the pedestrian bridge being referred to in the question was damaged since 2017. The reconstruction of same was included in NDU's list of projects for the financial year 2017-2018.

With regard to part (a) of the question, following completion of design and geotechnical investigation, a bidding exercise was carried out by the NDU in November 2023 for the appointment of a contractor for the reconstruction of the foot bridge at Cité Myosotis, Saint-Pierre.

Following evaluation of bids received, the exercise was cancelled as the amount quoted by the lowest evaluated responsive bidder was substantially higher than the cost estimated by 33 %. Subsequently, the cost estimate was reviewed and a second bidding exercise was undertaken by the NDU in July 2024. Again, the amount quoted by the lowest evaluated responsive bidder was higher than the cost estimate by 38 %. The exercise had to be cancelled once again.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that in January 2024 with the passage of cyclone Belal, the pedestrian bridge has been almost demolished causing more hardship to the inhabitants. The new bridge to be constructed will be 27 metres long having a width of 2 metres and will be raised to a height of 4.5 metres from the riverbed. In view of the rise of the cost of materials and the volatility of the market, the cost estimate of the project is being reviewed anew, following which, financial clearance will be sought prior to launching of bids.

Madam Speaker, as regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that no risk assessment has been carried out by my Ministry. In fact, the pedestrian bridge is damaged to the extent that it cannot be used to cross the river.

Nevertheless, I have already requested my colleague, the Minister of Local Government to inform the District Council of Moka to ensure that the public has no access to the damaged bridge.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

**MELLE JEANNE, MADAME AZOR, MELVILLE & POUFRE D'OR VILLAGE –
IRREGULAR TRANSPORT SERVICES – MEASURES**

(No. 1 B/80) **Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to irregular transport services in the regions of Melle Jeanne, Madame Azor, Melville and Poudre D'Or Village, he will state the measures being envisaged to remedy same.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that buses plying along Routes 187 and 178 serve the regions of Melle Jeanne, Madame Azor, Melville, and Poudre D'Or Village.

Accordingly, a shuttle service is currently being provided by one individual bus operator along Route 187, that is, from Melle Jeanne to Goodlands and back from 6 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the afternoon at an interval of 30 minutes during peak time and one hour during off peak time.

As regards Route 178, that is, Melville to Goodlands via Madame Azor with extension to Poudre D'Or, there are six individual bus operators licensed to operate thereat. However, two of these buses are off-road since approximately three months now due to serious breakdown and this could be the source of prompting this Parliamentary Question from the hon. Beejan. However, I have to stress that the remaining four buses are presently operating at an average interval of 30 minutes from 6 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the afternoon.

Madam Speaker, with a view to alleviating the hardship of commuters in these regions, a shuttle service has recently been introduced and same is being provided by a 32 seater bus from the National Transport Corporation from Madame Azor to Goodlands between 6 o'clock in the morning and 6 o'clock in the evening during weekdays only.

I am also informed that a temporary Road Service Licence has been to an individual bus operator in accordance with section 77 D of the Road Traffic Act since 19 September 2024 to increase the fleet of buses along Route 178 and same should be implemented before the end of this month. So, this should somehow bring some relief. It is believed that this... So, I rely on the hon. Beejan for feedback if this is not working at the end of this month. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Beejan: Could the Minister inform the House whether consideration will be given for officers to effect regular surprise checks so as to ensure that there is no abuse by transport operators in the region of Melle Jeanne, Melville, Madame Azor and Poudre D'Or Village?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I can certainly ask the National Land Transport Authority inspectorate for maintain regular checks and to see whether the situation is okay.

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

CYCLONE BELAL – DAMAGED MOTOR VEHICLES – COMPENSATION

(No. 1 B/81) Mr M. Seeburn (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to motor vehicles damaged during the passage of cyclone Belal, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Financial Services Commission, information as to the criteria used to determine the extent and cost of repairs thereof, indicating –

- (a) the total amount of funds disbursed therefor;
- (b) other type of compensation paid, if any, and
- (c) if insurance companies were involved in the assessment of all individual claims prior to payment being effected to the victims and, if not, why not.

Dr. Mrs Jeetun: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that following damages sustained by several motor vehicles during flooding caused by Cyclone Belal on 15 January 2024, the then Government, on 19 January 2024, decided to compensate vehicle owners whose vehicle were affected through the FSC. This was an exceptional situation for the Commission which as a regulator does not normally make payment with respect to insurance claims.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by the FSC but the eligibility criteria for the payment of compensation to beneficiaries was determined by the FSC in consultation with the Insurers Association of Mauritius and officers of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. Initially vehicles owned by private individuals which were present on roads, at workplaces or at public places were eligible for compensation which was further extended to micro and small enterprises having turnover not exceeding Rs30 m.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed by the FSC that compensation paid for cases of comprehensive insurance cover represented the depreciated amount, that is, the gap between the market value and the sum assured, and the policy excess for vehicles classified as total loss by insurance companies whereas for cases where the vehicles could be repaired, the policy excess only was compensated.

As for cases of vehicles classified as total loss under third-party insurance cover, the difference between pre-accident value and salvage cost, that is, the residual value of the scrap vehicle as determined by independent motor surveyor and Government Valuer was paid as compensation. For cases where the vehicles could be repaired, the cost of repairs as determined by the motor surveyor and Government Valuer was compensated.

Madam Speaker, with respect to part (a) of the question, the total amount of funds disbursed by the FSC as per the aforementioned criteria as at to date is Rs58,640,344 representing 1163 flooded vehicle cases.

With respect to part (b) of the question, Madam Speaker, I am informed by the FSC that no other type of compensation was paid to the beneficiaries.

As regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that for those vehicles under comprehensive insurance cover, the onus was on the insurance companies to assess individual claims prior to payment being effected to victims as per the established criteria whereas in the case third-party insurance cover the services of independent motor surveyors

and Government Valuers from the Ministry of Infrastructure were also returned by the FSC to reassess surveys done by independent motor surveyors as a control mechanism. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. I have now the hon. First Member for Savanne and Black River.

SMART CLINICS LTD – STATE LAND LEASE – BLACK RIVER

(No. 1 B/82) **Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if the company Smart Clinics has obtained the lease of two arpents of *Pas Géométrique* at Colonel Dean Street in Black River and, if so, table the conditions of the lease agreement therefor.

The Minister Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Dr. A. Ramtohol): Madam Speaker, I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Smart Clinics Ltd. Madam Speaker, I am informed Smart Clinics Ltd was in May 2018 granted a 60 years industrial lease over a plot of State land of an extent of 1 arpent 75 perches being part of the *Pas Géométrique* at Grande Rivière Noire for the setting up of a wellness medical clinic and residential care home for retired persons.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that following an application from Smart Clinics Ltd for a change in purpose to dental and wellness medical clinic, restaurant and apartments for sale under *vente en état future d'achèvement* through *règlement de copropriété*, the lease was accordingly amended in September 2021.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I am tabling a copy of each of the two lease agreements. Thank you.

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

Mr Babajee: Madam Speaker, is the Minister aware of a court case against the Ministry of Housing and Lands where the previous owner is seeking damages for Rs1 billion and whether he will review the process of terminating the previous owner's lease as a precautionary measure as we all know that the previous government has been terminating contracts and leases, and dilapidating public funds?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Dr. Ramtohul: In reply, Madam Speaker, to the supplementary question, I shall arrange to have a list of the court case rulings to be laid in the Library of the National Assembly. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

The hon. Third Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'Or.

CONSTITUENCY NO.6 – FOOTBALL & OTHER PLAYGROUNDS – PENALTY FEES

(No. 1 B/83) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to football pitch and other playgrounds, in particular, in the regions of Grand Bay and Petit Raffray falling under the purview of his Ministry, he will state if consideration will be given for the waiving of fees payable to access same.

Mr Nagalingum: Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that upon assuming Office, I have requested officers of my Ministry to consider the waiving of fees payable by users of football pitches and other playgrounds falling under our purview. This will be in line with our objective of encouraging more of our citizens to engage into the practice of sport and physical activities. In this context, officers of my Ministry are actively looking into the implication of such a measure and consultation will thereafter be held with the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle!

CONSTITUENCY NO.11, ROUTE 87 – IRREGULAR BUS SERVICES – MEASURES

(No. 1 B/84) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the irregular bus services in the regions of St Hubert, St Hilaire, Beau Jardin and Deux Bras, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to whether consideration will be given for the provision of a regular bus service along Route No 87 St Hubert/Curepipe and Route No 11 St Hubert/Mahebourg, respectively.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that there are six buses owned by individual bus operators which are

licensed to operate along Route 87, that is, St Hubert-Curepipe via St Hubert, Beau Jardin and Deux Bras. However, only four of them are providing their services. One bus has attained the age of 20 years since April 2023 and has not been replaced while the licence of the second bus has been revoked since 09 March 2023 following several recurrent charges, including 'failing to observe timetable and performing special road trips without permit', and the case is at the level of the Appeal Committee.

In order to ensure an adequate level of service thereat, three buses of the National Transport Corporation are supplementing the service along the said route. Buses are being released at intervals of 20 minutes during peak time and 40 minutes during off-peak time. Additionally, one school service is performed by the NTC in the morning at 06.55 hrs from St Hubert and 14.10 hrs in the afternoon from Curepipe.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that since the introduction of NTC buses along Route 87, the number of complaints pertaining to the said route has decreased. With regard to bus service along Route 11, that is, St Hubert-Mahebourg via St Hubert, Beau Jardin and Grand Bel Air, I am informed that six individual-owned buses are licenced to operate thereat and all of them are providing service. It is to be noted that one of them is operating on a temporary basis following approval conveyed on 30 April 2024 in accordance with section 77(d) of the Road Traffic Act to improve the level of service thereat.

Buses along Route 11 are currently being released at an interval of 20 minutes during peak time and 30 minutes during off-peak time. A short service is also provided every morning from Grand Bel Air to Mahebourg at 7.20 in the morning and on school days to cater for the needs of students attending secondary institutions in Mahebourg. As far as specific complaints along Route 87 and 11 are concerned, I am apprised by the NLTA that disciplinary actions have already been taken against some bus operators while investigations and enquiries are ongoing for other cases.

Furthermore, the NLTA has informed that the demand along the concerned localities is concentrated only during peak hours and the number of travelling passengers during the rest of the day is marginal. The NLTA has been requested to closely monitor the operation of buses thereat and to come up with additional remedial measures to improve the situation of commuters.

With your permission, Madam Speaker, and in order to save time of the House, I am tabling the details of the timetable in respect of Routes 87 and 11, please.

Thank you.

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

Mr Ramdass: Madame la présidente, ces deux routes 11 et 87 respectivement – de ce que je comprends – sont desservies en partie par la *NTC* et en partie par les opérateurs d'autobus privés. Et de ce que je comprends, à ce jour, le plus gros souci, qui dure depuis des années déjà, demeure relatif aux opérateurs privés et qui, de loin, ne fournissent pas un service régulier comme convenu.

Would the hon. Minister – of course, I have taken note of the reply given by the hon. Minister – consider the possibility or the advisability of taking up the matter with the NLTA so that regular inspection is carried out in order that the inhabitants of St Hilaire, St Hubert and Beau Jardin are provided with a decent regular service?

Madam Speaker: I am sure he will!

Mr Osman Mahomed: I certainly will and I also rely on the hon. Member that after the NLTA has carried out the inspection, should he still not be satisfied, to get back to me. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Third Member for Rodrigues!

RISING COST OF COMMODITIES – FINANCIAL RELIEF – VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

(No. 1 B/85) **Mrs D. Henriette-Manan (Third Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the high increase in average prices of selected commodities, he will state if –

- (a) his Ministry proposes to introduce any new policy, subsidy or financial relief package aimed at supporting vulnerable populations, such as low-income households and small businesses, and
- (b) consideration will be given to extend same to Rodrigues due to the high freight rate resulting in higher increase in prices.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to apprise the House that my Ministry is presently working on a new policy to address the issue of rising costs of commodities. To that effect, I have already chaired several meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders with a view to define the new policy. Discussions are still ongoing. This new policy will also include extending the present range of products commercialised by the STC.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to reassure the House that the new policy will also extend to Rodrigues, along with the new range of products.

Madam Speaker: Thank you Minister. Yes, the hon. Third Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central!

NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE – UNUSED MEDICAL EQUIPMENT – ACTIONS

(No. 1 B/86) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the diagnostic and therapeutic equipment lying dormant at the National Cancer Centre, he will state if –

- (a) a report on the status thereof was carried out in July 2024 and, if so, by whom, indicating the actions taken, if any, at the material time, and
- (b) the recent visit effected thereat revealed any progress as to the use thereof, indicating the number thereof found defective.

Mr Bachoo: Madam Speaker, in reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that no site visit was effected in July 2024. Instead, a preliminary site visit was carried out by a team of specialists and technicians on 4 October 2024. It was then observed that there were several unused medical equipment at the National Cancer Centre comprising motorised beds, ICU ventilators, syringe pumps, high-end central monitoring system, multi-parameter patient monitor, amongst others.

Subsequently, an extended team of officers comprising the Consultant in charge, anaesthesia; the Neonatal and Paediatric Respiratory Therapist; the Superintendent Healthcare Technology Workshop; two Biomedical Engineers; three Senior Healthcare Technologists, and a Procurement and Supply Officer carried out a detailed survey and drew a list of unused therapeutic and diagnostic equipment at the National Cancer Centre, indicating functionalities to date. The survey was carried out from 19 to 22 November 2024

and the report was submitted on 28 November 2024. A list of the unused medical equipment is being tabled accordingly.

Madam Speaker, in reply to part (b) of the question, I carried out a site visit at the National Cancer Centre along with officers of my Ministry on 2 December 2024 to take cognisance of the unused medical equipment. I was apprised that some of these unused medical equipment were faulty and needed calibration. Action has been initiated to draw a list of equipment that would be utilised at the National Cancer Centre while the remaining unused medical equipment will be redistributed to the regional hospitals as per their respective requirements. Additionally, some major equipment were not operational, namely –

- one PET Scan;
- one brachytherapy, and
- one LINAC machine.

The PET scan requires alignment and calibration. Moreover, there was reported delay in delivery of consumables. The brachytherapy will be functional shortage with operationalization at the operations theatre. As for the LINAC machine, one has already been installed while the other is being installed. Both these machines will be functional by mid-January 2025.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that due to scarcity of anaesthetists and other specialised staff to run the operations theatre, the diagnostic and therapeutic equipment were not being utilised. Active consideration is being given to launch the new onco surgery operations theatre with a new multidisciplinary team of local experienced specialists as from January 2025.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the multidisciplinary team at the National Cancer Centre will be assisted by a foreign oncosurgeon team, headed by Dr. Sriprakash Duraisamy from Chennai, India. He is a renowned consultant with more than 10 years of experience in oncology.

Madam Speaker: I will call the next question which is the last one. Time is almost over. Sorry, hon. Dr. Aumeer.

Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac! That is the last question!
Hon. Ms Daureeawo!

POLICE AND CRIMINAL EVIDENCE BILL – DUE INTRODUCTION

(No. 1 B/87) Ms R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Attorney General whether, in regard to the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, he will state if consideration will be given for the introduction thereof on a priority basis at the National Assembly and, if so, the expected date thereof.

Mr Glover: Madam Speaker, I have taken cognizance of the draft Police and Criminal Justice Bill which was prepared in 2019 under the previous government. I understand that in 2019, the draft Bill was circulated to the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Forensic Lab for their views and comments. It was then proposed that the final version of the Bill would be circulated and given due publicity for the views of the judiciary, law practitioners and the public at large. Unfortunately, this was not done.

Furthermore, during the last legislature, my predecessor had informed the House that the reconceptualization of that draft Bill was being undertaken. However, I have seen nothing of the sort.

Madam Speaker, I wish to reassure the House that the introduction of a Police and Criminal Evidence Bill or a derivative thereof is indeed on the list of priorities of this Government. You will recall, under the previous leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill was introduced in the National Assembly on 16 April 2013 for First Reading. However, the National Assembly was then prorogued and that Bill never went through.

To achieve an effective and modern reform of our criminal justice system, Madam Speaker, we shall, once again, seek the collaboration of and have meaningful consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including the all-important Law Reform Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Commissioner of Police and the Forensic Lab. All stakeholders must work together in close coordination in view of preparing that important piece of legislation.

We shall not only address the needs of our society, but also uphold and safeguard the rights of every citizen in the country. It is imperative that all strive to establish a robust, comprehensive legal framework for our criminal justice system. One that embraces emerging

technological advancements, but also ensures the harmonisation of all relevant legislations and their effective implementation.

Madam Speaker, to develop a new draft of the Bill, one that meets the highest standards and serves the nation effectively for years to come, the extensive collaboration of all relevant stakeholders is primordial. This process, by its very nature, will require careful deliberation and time. So, it would be presumptuous to give a timeline. The House will have to be indulgent to give me and my office the time needed to produce what will become one of the most significant pieces of legislation for our criminal justice system, this side of the millennium.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. *Nous allons donner le temps au temps.*

Now, time is over for questions! I have been advised that two Parliamentary Questions have been withdrawn: I B/91 and I B/92.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

(4.06 p.m.)

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – SOVEREIGNTY – DRAFT AGREEMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with your permission, I have a short Statement to make on Chagos Archipelago.

Madam Speaker, further to my Statement on 29 November 2024 whereby I informed the House that I had asked for an independent review of the draft agreement which was proposed by the UK and agreed by the former Government on the exercise of sovereignty

over the Chagos Archipelago, I wish to inform the House that the independent review has been completed and that the opinions submitted by the legal advisers have been considered by an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by me, which included the Deputy Prime Minister, the Attorney General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Madam Speaker, following the letter which the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom addressed to me on 12 November 2024, and the meeting which I had with Mr Jonathan Powell, who is the UK National Security Adviser, on 25 November 2024, a delegation of senior officials from the United Kingdom came to Mauritius last week for further discussions with the Mauritian authorities.

Apart from meetings which were held between senior officials from Mauritius and the United Kingdom, the Head of the UK delegation called upon me.

During the discussions, Mauritius made it clear that while it is still willing to conclude an agreement with the United Kingdom, the draft agreement which was shown to us after the General Elections is one which, in our view, would not produce the benefits that the nation could expect from such an agreement.

Therefore, Mauritius accordingly submitted counterproposals to the UK so that an agreement which is in the best interests of Mauritius can be concluded.

The response of the United Kingdom to our counterproposals was received yesterday afternoon, and is now being currently considered.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

- (a) The Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill (No. XIX of 2024)*
- (b) The Special Allowance Bill (No. XX of 2024)*

*Second Reading***THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL****(NO. XIX OF 2024)***Order for Second Reading read.*

(4.09 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Madam Speaker, I move that the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill (No. XIX of 2024) be read a second time.

Madame la présidente, j'ai l'honneur et le privilège de présenter le premier projet de loi de l'Alliance du Changement après notre victoire historique aux dernières élections générales. La très grande majorité des électeurs et la population dans son ensemble ont placé leur espoir en notre équipe, et nous ferons de notre mieux pour être à la hauteur de leurs attentes.

Et c'est tout un symbole, Madame la présidente, que les deux premiers projets de loi à l'ordre du jour visent à améliorer les conditions de vie des travailleurs de ce pays. Tout un symbole, car tout d'abord, le Parti travailliste, *Labour Party*, comme ce nom l'indique, a pris naissance en 1936 précisément pour défendre la cause des travailleurs. Un combat repris par le Mouvement militant mauricien, le MMM, qui a beaucoup œuvré pour la reconnaissance et le respect des droits des travailleurs, tout comme *Rezistans ek Alternativ* qui a toujours milité comme syndicaliste pour le bien-être des travailleurs. Et aujourd'hui, nous sommes rejoints dans notre combat par les Nouveaux Démocrates.

Madame la présidente, le projet de loi devant la Chambre, aujourd'hui, consiste à amender *the Employment Relations Act* afin de donner au ministre du Travail le pouvoir de régler le paiement de salaires additionnels suite à l'introduction ou à la révision du salaire minimum. Le ministre pourra, dès lors, à travers des *regulations*, rendre obligatoire le paiement d'un salaire additionnel pour rétablir la relativité salariale dans le secteur privé.

À chaque fois qu'on fixe un nouveau salaire minimum, il faut aussi ajuster les salaires des autres employés pour maintenir la relativité salariale, notamment pour prendre en considération le temps de service des employés existants et leurs grades.

Sous les lois existantes, il y a deux façons de procéder pour l'ajustement des salaires suite à l'introduction du salaire minimum. Dans le premier cas, le *National Wage Consultative Council* peut faire des recommandations au ministre du Travail, c'est l'une de ses fonctions prévues expressément à l'article 5(b)(v) et 5(b)(vi) du *National Wage Consultative Council Act* de 2016.

Dans le deuxième cas, le ministre peut sous l'article 93 de l'*Employment Relations Act* demander au *National Remuneration Board* de recommander une nouvelle grille salariale.

Suite à l'introduction du salaire minimum en janvier 2018, le ministre avait demandé au *National Remuneration Board* de lui proposer des ajustements au salaire des employés du secteur privé et suite aux recommandations du NRB en 2022, 17 *Remuneration Regulations* ont été amendées.

Cependant, lorsqu'en janvier 2024, le salaire minimum passe à R 16 500, le gouvernement sortant choisi de faire fi aux dispositions de la loi et d'adopter une toute autre procédure. Au lieu de demander aux *National Wage Consultative Council* ou au *National Remuneration Board* de venir avec des recommandations pour les ajustements salariales, le 3 juillet 2024, un comité ministériel présidé par le Premier ministre d'alors, décide d'instituer un *Technical Committee* sous la présidence de l'*Acting Financial Secretary*. C'était le 3 juillet et deux jours après, seulement deux jours après, le 5 juillet 2024, le comité a recommandé une augmentation de R 4 925 par rapport au salaire de 2023. Pas de grille salariale, pas d'études approfondies, pas de consultation avec les représentants des travailleurs et du patronat.

Le 13 septembre 2024, 32 *remuneration regulations* fut amendées pour donner effet aux recommandations du *Technical Committee*. Ces *regulations* étaient faites supposément sous l'article 106 de l'*Employment Relations Act*.

Madame la présidente, les réactions n'ont pas tardé, que ce soit du côté de *Business Mauritius* ou de certains syndicalistes, tout le monde a déclaré que le ministre d'alors n'avait pas le pouvoir d'amender les *Remuneration Order* dans les conditions qu'il les avait faits. Je me souviens très bien, l'honorable Ashok Subron en ce temps, simple syndicaliste de

Rezistans ek Alternativ lors d'un rassemblement à Triolet, demandait au gouvernement de rappeler le Parlement d'urgence car selon lui, et il avait raison, les ajustements salariaux auraient dû être fait à travers un projet de loi et non à travers des *regulations*. Mais au lieu de rappeler le Parlement, le 24 septembre, le ministre a tout simplement révoqué les 32 *remuneration regulations* seulement pour les remplacer par d'autres *regulations* identiques mais cette fois-ci faits supposément sous les articles 94 et 106 de l'*Employment Relations Act*.

Madame la présidente, ce qui devrait arriver arriva et le 9 octobre, quelques jours plus tard, *Business Mauritius* entra une action en Cour suprême pour contester la légalité des 32 règlements. Le lendemain une entreprise privée Akhtar Anver Toorawa Ltd entra aussi une action pour contester la légalité du *Distributive Trades (Remuneration) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2024*.

En conséquence, plusieurs entreprises du privé ont choisi de ne pas payer les salaires additionnels tant que la Cour suprême n'aurait pas tranché sur ces deux affaires. Les deux affaires sont appelées pro-forma à nouveau en mois de janvier de l'année prochaine. Et ces affaires comme vous avez, Madame la présidente, risquent de prendre plusieurs mois, voire des années, avant qu'on ait un jugement final.

Madame la présidente, dès ma prise de fonction j'ai rencontré plusieurs syndicalistes de même que les représentants de *Business Mauritius* et tous deux m'ont demandé de trouver une solution pour que les travailleurs du secteur privé puissent obtenir le paiement de leurs salaires additionnels sans avoir à attendre la délibération de la Cour suprême. Je me suis entretenu avec les représentants du *State Law Office* et à mon grand étonnement, Madame la présidente, j'ai pris connaissance d'un avis légal du bureau du *Solicitor General* en date du 2 septembre 2024. Le 2 septembre 2024, c'était une dizaine de jours avant que le ministre vienne de l'avant avec ces *remuneration regulations* et que dit cet avis légal ? Je cite un extrait –

“Accordingly it seems that there is at present no legal basis expressly provided for the enactment of regulation to reflect wage relativity adjustment following the review of the National Minimum Wage.”

No legal basis.

“Additionally, it also appears that there is no legal basis for regulation to be made in respect of employees who are not governed by any remuneration regulation nor for the making of regulation to provide for national minimum wages for jobs warranting the possession of a diploma or degree as entry requirements.”

Therefore, Madam Speaker, the former Government was well aware that there was no expressed legal basis for the Minister of Labour to make the 32 remuneration regulations which he made back in September 2024. And today, with this Bill, Madam Speaker, we are correcting all this so that eligible employees in the private sector can finally get their additional remuneration.

Now turning to the provisions of the Bill, clause 3 repeals and replaces the existing Section 94 of the Employment Rights Act. The new Section 94 subsection (1) is similar to the existing subsection (1) and empowers the Minister to make regulation to reflect payment of additional remuneration or national minimum wage or wage adjustment arising from the introduction or review of the national minimum wage in the salary of employees prescribed by remuneration orders.

Subsection (2)(a) of clause 3 gives the Minister express powers to make regulations for the payment of wage adjustment to address the issue of wage relativity, not only with respect to remuneration regulations made under section 93 of the Employment Relations Act, but also in respect of industry or sector activity not covered by the remuneration regulation and I pause here to add this, Madam Speaker, that this is an extremely important amendment that is being proposed and it is an amendment that has been requested time and again by the trade unionist because up to now, only employees working in industries and sectors that were governed by remuneration regulations were eligible to get salary adjustment. But with this amendment, the Minister will be also able to provide for the payment of additional salary to those employees in the private sector that are not covered by remuneration regulations.

However a word of caution, such wide powers should be used judiciously and not arbitrarily. In practice, the Minister should rely on recommendations of the National Remuneration Board or the Wage Consultative Council before making any regulations.

Subsection (2)(b) empowers the Minister to make regulation to provide for a monthly minimum basic wage for employees holding a diploma or post HSC first degree where the

entry requirements for the job so require. You will recall that such provision was not provided for in the law as per the advice tendered by the State Law Office.

The proposed minimum monthly basic wage will be Rs23,000 for a job requiring an employee to possess a diploma and Rs25,000 for a job requiring an employee to possess a post HSC first degree. Subsection (4) provides that the 32 remuneration regulations that were passed in September shall be deemed to have been made under this Act thereby eliminating any doubt as to their legality.

Clause 5 of the Bill provides for the coming into operation of the above provisions with effect as from 01 July 2014. With the coming into force of this Bill, eligible employees in the private sector will be paid an additional salary retrospectively as from 01 July 2024.

Madam Speaker, it was necessary for Government to come with this Bill first before passing the Special Allowance Bill which is also on today's Order Paper, because we want to make sure that the Special Allowance that which will be based on a worker's basic salary should include the adjustment to that basic salary as per the amendment that is being brought today in this House.

With these words, I commend the Bill to the House. Thank you.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: I think at this time, we can move for a break for tea. We can come back unless, is that alright? Is it okay? We all go for tea and then come back?

Mr Lesjongard: You decide, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, but I like consensus. Since you are here, I like consensus. Alright let's break for tea for half an hour.

At 4.22 p.m. the Sitting was suspended.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(5.01 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de vous féliciter, permettez-moi de le faire cet après-midi.

The Deputy Speaker: Merci!

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, comme l'a dit le ministre qui a présenté ce projet de loi, c'est le tout premier projet de loi de ce nouveau gouvernement ; un projet de loi certes qui est simple mais nécessaire dans le sens qu'il découle des décisions prises par l'ancien gouvernement à la suite de l'introduction du salaire minimum qui remonte à 2018 et cela fait suite je comprends, des représentations syndicales que le gouvernement avait introduites en réajustant des salaires des employés qui ne touchaient pas le salaire minimum mais qui avaient plusieurs années de service tout en ayant un salaire identique avec les nouveaux employés.

M. le président, l'histoire retiendra que c'est sous un gouvernement MSM que le salaire minimum a été introduit. Le parti Travailleiste, le MMM qui, à une certaine époque, on doit le reconnaître, M. le président, ont lutté pour les droits des travailleurs mais n'ont pas eu le courage de venir de l'avant avec une telle décision quand ils étaient au pouvoir. Ces derniers temps, M. le président, on parle des énormes pressions exercées sur le gouvernement actuel par le patronat concernant le 14ème mois et tout à l'heure, on viendra dans ces discussions mais imaginez-vous la pression à l'époque quand il fallait introduire le salaire minimum mais il faut le reconnaître cette mesure a permis à une centaine de milliers de familles de sortir de la misère et de vivre une vie plus décente.

M. le président, l'introduction du salaire minimum a permis à réduire l'écart entre les différentes classes sociales de notre pays et *de facto* les inégalités dans notre société. C'était la vision de l'ancien gouvernement, une politique sociale pour une société plus juste et aujourd'hui, ce projet de loi il faut le reconnaître va dans ce sens. Avec la relativité salariale, nous allons diminuer davantage ces inégalités dans la société mauricienne.

M. le président, j'espère que le ministre du Travail veillera à ce que chaque entreprise applique cette loi à la lettre afin justement de réajuster les salaires de leurs employés dans les délais prescrits par la loi. M. le président, à l'annonce de la nouvelle crise salariale en septembre dernier aux différents secteurs, les syndicats avaient demandé la publication des

Remuneration Orders par le *National Remuneration Board*. C'est-à-dire, ces *Remuneration Orders* pour plusieurs secteurs, non-couverts par le NRB et concernent des dizaines de milliers d'employés.

M. le président, je comprends qu'un travail a déjà commencé et que le NRB a proposé des recommandations dans ce sens et je comprends aussi que l'ancien ministre du Travail envisageait de préparer une première ébauche de ce projet de loi afin de qu'il n'y ait pas de contestation légale et on a écouté ce que le ministre avait à dire à ce propos. L'ancien gouvernement proposait d'apporter des amendements au *National Wage Consultative Council Act* afin de permettre à cette instance de faire des recommandations sur la relativité salariale. L'amendement proposé permettrait au ministre de faire des règlements par rapport à la relativité salariale à l'avenir. Ce projet de loi, dans sa forme actuelle, je pense ne prend pas cela en considération, M. le président.

M. le président, le revenu minimum garanti comporte deux aspects, c'est-à-dire et je vais essayer d'élaborer dessus pour avoir plus de renseignements de la part du ministre. C'est-à-dire qu'il y a deux composants – le salaire minimum et les allocations de la MRA. Il y a eu une révision du revenu minimum garanti de R 9000 en 2018 à R 20,000 en juillet 2024 et par la suite, une augmentation du salaire minimum à R 16,500 en juillet 2024. Toutefois, M. le président, il y a un flou et le ministre concerné, je pense, devrait nous éclairer sur l'indexation de la compensation salariale. Est-ce que le revenu minimum garanti passera à R 20,610 en janvier 2025 ou est-ce que les R 610 payées comme compensation seront incluses dans le montant actuel du revenu minimum garanti? Je pense qu'il est important de nous donner ces informations.

Comme j'ai dit je ne vais pas être long dans cette intervention, M. le président. Permettez-moi de conclure sur cette note politique et peut-être qui ne va pas plaire tout le monde. L'alliance du changement a obtenu une large victoire aux dernières élections générales et cela grâce aux travailleurs de ce pays. Ces mêmes travailleurs qui ont connu, il faut le dire il y a quelques années de cela la crise du COVID, qui craignaient de perdre leurs emplois et qui ont bossé jour et nuit, M. le président, pour redresser l'économie de ce pays et beaucoup d'entre eux ne bénéficieront pas de la compensation salariale malheureusement. Ce que j'ai à dire au gouvernement c'est qu'il faut honorer les promesses, respecter des engagements prises envers les travailleurs de ce pays et donner leur dit....

(Interruptions)

Je vais terminer. M. le président, merci.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your speech. Hon. Mr Subron!

(5.10 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron): Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had to change my speech because it was modelled for the Madam Speaker.

First, allow me to start by saying that history will retain that the first Bill to be presented by the new Government of *L'Alliance du Changement* to this Assembly is directly related to the living conditions of the working class of the country. This is not a matter of coincidence; it only confirms the deep commitment of the present Government to the working people who labour and toil for this country.

Indeed, it was the Labour Party which in 1936, put the issue of national minimum wage on the agenda of the working class struggle in its manifesto on 23 February 1936. It was the MMM which put the sectorial minimum wage on the agenda in the 1970s struggle and the struggle for the national minimum wage, I am replying to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that has been inserted in our law is the product of the workers' struggle and the union movement.

It's not the product of any other struggles!

As stated in our manifesto, les travailleurs représentent la principale force sociale de notre république et constituent le moteur essentiel de la création de la richesse. L'Alliance du Changement leur accordera la reconnaissance qu'ils méritent tout au long de son mandat, pas seulement à l'approche des élections !

Ms Anquetil : Bien envoyé !

Mr Subron: Secondly, it is an honour for me, as newly elected member of Constituency No. 4 in the National Assembly, under the banner of *l'Alliance du Changement* and coming both from the trade union movement and *Rezistans ek Alternativ* – a party deeply rooted in the working class, to make my first input in this Assembly on a central issue concerning the working class.

Thirdly, before the election, having been a spokesperson of *l'Alliance du Changement*, *Rezistans ek Alternativ* and spokesperson of the trade union movement, I publicly raised the issue of incompatibility of the present remuneration regulations on salary readjustment with law. I cannot, but commend the presentation of this Bill by the hon. Minister of Labour.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill which is proposing to amend Section 99 of the Employment Relations Act concerns directly some 300,000 employees of the private sector. It aims at legally ensuring and guarantying the payment of wage relativity adjustment of up to Rs2,925 to workers of the private sector, to partially reestablish their salary relativity, following the increase of the National Minimum Wage in January 2024.

The irresponsibility and lack of respect of the previous government, confining the issue of wage relativity adjustment payment to a mere electoral weapon, has opened the door for the jeopardy of the very payment of the salary readjustment. The previous government mismanagement on the issue since the increase of the national minimum wage in January 2024 finally led to the wrongly enactment of 32 remuneration regulations in August and September 2024.

It is this irresponsibility that has enabled Business Mauritius, the body representing the employers, to challenge the very legality of the payments of wage relativity readjustment in the Supreme Court. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is now an established fact from document available from the SLO that the previous government went as far as dismissing the legal advice tendered by the State Law Office on this issue.

My colleague, the hon. Minister mentioned clauses of this letter dated 02 September. Without the enactment of the present Bill, the payments of salary readjustment already effected to thousands of workers of the private sector are at the risk of being nullified given the legal challenge raised by employers' organisation in the Supreme Court.

In addition, the projected payments of salary readjustment to some 40,000 workers not covered by the 32 remuneration regulations will be uncertain without the present amendment of Section 99 of the Employments Relations Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is in the public interest that this Assembly understands the series of events which have led to the present crisis facing some 300,000 workers. This Assembly should be informed that as soon as the national minimum wage was officially announced in November 2023, major trade union confederations of the country, in which I

was part of, insisted that the then government should in parallel cater for salary relativity differential and to pay a salary readjustment to all private and public sector workers accordingly.

On 07 December 2023, the previous government announced that the National Wages Consultative Council would produce a report on same by the end of March 2024. There was no such report as the National Wages Consultative Council was never requested to address the issue of wage relativity. As stated by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Labour, under the National Wages Consultative Council Act 2016, it is the statutory object of the National Wages Consultative Council to be responsible for making recommendations to the Minister on wage relativity.

The Act stipulates that *inter alia* the object of the Council should be to make recommendation on the approach to be adopted to address the issue of wage relativity in the private sector that may arise from the introduction of the national minimum wage in remuneration regulations made under the Employment Relations Act. It states to make recommendation for the introduction of a master conversion table to address the issue of wage relativity in the private sector. No official consultation ever took place under the previous government with the trade union movement to discuss the issue of wage relativity.

It was only when the electoral dynamics started to unfold that out of the blue, on the 22 August 2024, the then government through the GIS published unofficial remuneration orders on wage relativity adjustment. A few days later, on 13 September 2024, the 32 remuneration regulations were officially made under Section 99 of the Employment Relations Act. After public outcry, from various workers, including the trade union movement and Opposition parties, the then government revoked the previous 32 remuneration regulations and came with another set of 32 remuneration regulations on the 24 September 2024. Now, made under Section 94 and 106 of the Employment Relations Act.

As predicated by many in the union movement, the employers' organisation didn't take long to challenge the very legality of all the remuneration regulations made on 24 September 2024. They decided to enter a Judicial Review in the Supreme Court. It was at this point in time that the *l'Alliance du Changement* undertook publicly to amend the Employment Relations Act to ensure the legality of all wage relativity adjustment payment.

I am pleased today that this commitment ensuring up to Rs2,925 wage relativity adjustment payment to some 300,000 workers is being addressed by this Government in its first legislative act of the National Assembly. I call on all hon. Members to support this historical amendment to be brought to the Employment Relations Act.

May I stress that this amendment for the guarantying of wage relativity adjustment is not an ad hoc nor a one-off issue, but a permanent, a lifelong measure where this wage relativity adjustment payment will now be legally secured, integrated and consolidated in the basic salary of all private sector workers, thus, also impacting on other benefits such as the overtime payment or retirement benefits. I understand that as soon as this Bill is voted and enacted the Minister will make a new remuneration regulation to ensure that all employees not covered by the 32 existing remuneration orders get their wage relativity adjustment payment in due course. I also understand that the PRB will look more deeply into the wage relativity adjustment for all public sector employees in its coming report.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude I want to make three general comments -

- (i) I want to conclude by reassuring the working people of this country that despite the disastrous economic legacy and blunders of the previous government, this, the present Government of *Alliance Changement* including *Rezistans ek Alternativ*, is deeply committed to the safeguard of the interests of the whole of the working people throughout our five years mandate.
- (ii) In parallel with, we do also welcome any dissenting views on any policy measures this Government is taking or might take in the future. This is what a vibrant democratic society is all about. It is within the expression of these social contradictions and dissenting voices that we can also shape our common future.
- (iv) On a more philosophical level, in the context of in the on-going debate and concerns in our country and the world, one thing is for sure, there is no economy without the labour of the people and there is no economy without nature and its ecological services. These are the social and ecological boundaries, limits any economic model or policies are bound to stay within. COVID-19 and the climate crisis paradoxically reminded the whole humanity these two obvious facts.

I wish to thank all hon. Members for their attention and patience. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister, I did not want to interrupt you during your speech but I am the Deputy Speaker. Thank you, hon. Mr Uteem.

(5.24 p.m.)

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. First of all let me thank the hon. Leader of Opposition and my colleague, hon. Ashok Subron, for intervening on this Bill.

I don't have much, yes and congratulate him for his speech, his maiden speech. I don't have much to add by way of summing up, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because there is clearly consensus on this Bill to rectify a decision taken by the former government which was tinted with illegality. The hon. Leader of Opposition seem to suggest with the coming into force of this Bill, the hon. Minister of Labour will no longer have the power to refer the matter to NRB for advice especially as regard those employees which are not covered by remuneration regulation. This is not correct, what we are doing is, we are giving a special power to the Minister to come by way of the regulation to regulate any sectors, occupation, industry not covered by the remuneration regulations.

But, we are not doing away with Section 91 of the Employment Relations Act which allow the Minister to refer to the NRB any issue for their reconsideration. And in fact, I can tell you that the former, my predecessor had already on 03 September referred to the National Remuneration Board. They made a reference for the creation of regulations concerning employees not covered by the existing 32 remuneration orders. We will wait to see those recommendations before we come up with the regulation to enable all employees which are not covered in the remuneration regulations to be able to get this additional salary with retrospective effect.

The hon. Leader of Opposition also spoke about indexation of salary compensation. This is something that our Government will look into. We have received representation from trade unions to that effect. We will have a technical committee which will look at this because there are also representations by some trade unionists who think that if you issue index the salary compensation automatically on the inflation rate, they may not be get sufficient compensation. So, it is a tricky situation, we are open to suggestions. The minimum

wage of Rs610 is in addition to the basic salary which all workers earning less than Rs50,000 earn in Mauritius in private sectors.

So, with these words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I commend, once more, this Bill to the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seconded? Seconded? Motion needs to be seconded!

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

The Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill (No. XIX of 2024) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair, the Deputy Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, The Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill (No. XIX of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE SPECIAL ALLOWANCE BILL (NO. XX OF 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

(5.30 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the Special Allowance Bill (No. XX of 2024) be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present this historical Bill to the House. Historical because no government before has legislated for the provision for a special

allowance for employees drawing monthly salary basic salary not exceeding Rs50,000. I say no government before!

Even last year, in November, when there was a formal request from the Opposition for the payment of a 14th month bonus in December 2023 to all employees of the private and public sectors earning less than Rs50,000, the then Government refused to do so.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the population has been suffering from the disastrous economic policy of the MSM Government with its deliberate policy to depreciate our rupee. Between December 2014 and November 2024, our rupee has depreciated by around 46% relative to the US dollar. This has resulted in a steady increase in price of goods and services, eroding the purchasing power of our population. The increase in the price of essential commodities, foodstuff, medicine, has particularly affected the working class and the pensioners. As a caring Government, we had to do the maximum that we could to alleviate the suffering of the population but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before we can give, we need to ascertain how much we have. We have to act responsibly because if we do not have the money, then we will have to borrow and if we borrow, we must have the ability to repay or else we would be burdening our children and grandchildren.

This is why the first thing that the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did was to assess the status of the economy. And last Tuesday, he made a statement to this House with regard to the state of the economy and he tabled a copy of the document. We were all stunned, appalled, shocked and angry. We knew that the figures published by the former Government were unreliable and we had said so in this House and outside but we never expected the magnitude of the economic mess in which the MSM Government has left us. *L'ancien ministre des Finances parlait de boom économique, mais c'est plutôt une bombe économique qu'il nous a léguée.*

I will just give you one example, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and it relates directly to the workers of this country: *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. Hon. Members who were here would recall that the then Minister of Finance abolished contribution which used to be made to the National Pension Fund and instead, compelled workers and employers to contribute up to 9% of the salaries of workers to a fund called *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. We were told at that time – and I remember very well – the then hon. Minister of Finance saying that this contribution to CSG was meant to pay the pension of workers when they retire. And he told the House and the population at large that what he was proposing was better than the

National Pension Fund which enabled people from the private sector at the age of 65 to benefit from an additional pension.

Contribution Sociale Généralisée is nothing more than sweat, a tax on the sweat of labour which is supposed to finance their retirement. However, when we look at the document ‘The State of the Economy’ that was tabled last week, for the Financial Year 2024-2025, the State is expecting to collect Rs12.9 billion through *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. Rs12.9 billion, that is a lot of money taken from the salary of workers of this country. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, do you know out of these Rs12.9 billion, how much the MSM Government has earmarked to spend from that fund? Out of Rs12.9 billion? They had earmarked spending of Rs21.8 billion. Not only have they completely wiped out all the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* which we are supposed to pay for the retirement, for the pension of workers but now we also have to provide the finance for up to Rs9 billion because of the reckless decision of the former Minister of Finance and the former MSM Government, under the former Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth.

Irresponsable ! Irresponsable ! Et comme l’a si bien dit le Deputy Prime Minister, c’est un crime économique. Un crime économique envers les mauriciens, envers les enfants de notre pays. Our public sector debt has reached almost Rs560 billion, representing 83.4% of GDP. 83.4% of GDP when according to law, our public sector debt should not exceed 80% of GDP and by comparison, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the MSM Government took office in December 2014, our public sector debt at that time was only Rs237 billion, representing slightly less than 60% of GDP. They have more than doubled our debt. The population needed the truth and the Prime Minister took the bold decision of telling the whole population what the reality of the economic situation in Mauritius is but now that the truth is out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what would international rating agencies do? Now that they know that the former Government has been manipulating figures, overstating growth, understating debt, understating budget deficits, what would the international rating community do?

And, Moody’s was quick to react. Yesterday Moody’s published a communiqué under the heading “Government of Mauritius: Discrepancies in economic data will challenge fiscal consolidation efforts”. While congratulating our Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam for Government’s commitment to transparency and fiscal reforms, Moody’s expressed concerns about the current state of the economy and Moody’s stated something which is of great concern to us. Moody’s said –

“The audit’s finding will slow the pace of fiscal consolidation, leaving Mauritius’ debt burdened and debt affordability metrics weaker than other Baa3-rated peers.”

In encoded terms, Moody’s is warning us. Moody’s is warning us. It is telling us that based on the new data that we have been providing them, our economic situation is worse than other countries which find themselves in the same rating band as ours, Baa3. And as expected, Moody’s ended by telling us that we need to implement reform aimed at debt reduction. And I have to add, Moody’s statement came before the Bill was presented to this House. So, Moody’s is not aware of what we intend today in terms of the payment of a special allowance.

So, we are going to face a tough time convincing Moody’s not to downgrade us, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and we are already at the last threshold of investment grade. If we are downgraded by Moody’s, we will become junk status and if we become junk status, it will be very difficult for Mauritius to raise finance on the international market. And even if we are able to raise finance on the international market, it would be at a premium, at a higher interest rate and downgrading Mauritius to junk status will have a direct impact on our bank, on our banking system and on the image of Mauritius as a serious financial centre.

We should not, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, take the threat of being downgraded lightly. Just a few days ago, Moody’s downgraded France’s rating just hours after President Macron appointed his new Prime Minister, Mr François Bayrou. So, it is against this backdrop, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we are bringing this Bill before the House.

The payment of special allowance that we are proposing through this Bill is part of a larger package which Government is introducing. Through this Bill, we are providing for the payment of one month basic salary to 420,200 employees from both the private and public sector, representing some 90% of total employees in this country. So, after passing of this Bill, 90% of workers of this country would be getting an additional month of basic salary.

The second measure that we are introducing as part of the package is to give one month allowance to every pensioner, our senior citizens, widows, orphans, disabled persons. They will also get an additional Rs1,000 as from January next year. This alone, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will represent a funding of more than Rs5 billion from the State.

The third measure that we are proposing is to grant a salary compensation of Rs610 per month for all workers whose basic salary is less than Rs50,000. We decided to give this

salary compensation, which represents the official inflation rate multiplied by the minimum wage, despite representations to the contrary by the business community, and in particular, Business Mauritius.

The fourth measure in this package is to reduce the price of petroleum products by Rs5 per litre. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is just the beginning. We will do more as we implement our structural changes, as we install fiscal discipline, as we cut down wastage of public funds and as we boost our economy.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now talk about the salient features of this Bill. Clause 2 of the Bill defines basic wage or salary and specifies that the basic wage and salary include additional remuneration payable for the year 2024 and the wage relativity adjustment payable as from 01 July 2024. This is why it was very important that we pass the first Bill, which we have just done, amending the Employment Relations Act to provide for the payment of this additional salary compensation with effect from 01 July 2024. So, now, the basic salary will also include that adjustment to the basic salary.

The definition of “employee” is in line with the general definition of worker under the Workers’ Rights Act and includes part-time employees. Now, you will note from the definition in the section that ““employee” does not include a public officer, a local government officer, an employee of a statutory body who is, or has opted to be governed by the terms and conditions of the Pay Research Bureau.”

Now, this provision of the Bill has caused a lot of confusion. I am very disappointed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I see trade unionists of great experience, having worked in the civil service, who have full knowledge of how things are done in the government sector, come and do a press conference and spread lies about this Government not going to pay the special allowance to all the public officers of this country. This is not the case!

The Government has taken a commitment and will abide by its commitment to pay a basic one month salary to all public officers in government service, in Municipal Councils, in parastatal bodies who earn less than Rs50,000, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The reason why it is not in the Bill is because this Bill concerns employees of the private sector.

With regard to employees in government and those governed by the PRB, when we have to increase the salary compensation or any additional salary, it is done every year by

way of a circular issued by the Financial Secretary, by the Ministry of Finance, addressed to the Head of Departments, the Supervising Officers of each Ministries and Departments. Those Supervising Officers then in turn inform all the Municipal Councils, the local authorities, the parastatal bodies, the other public bodies which fall under their responsibility and direct them to effect the payment of compensation.

This time also, it is the same methodology that is going to be applied. So, we do not need any amendment to the law to provide for the payment of a special allowance to public officers. Just like we do not need any amendment to the law to pay the pension to the senior citizens, orphans, widows and disabled persons. This has already been taken care of by the hon. Minister of Social Security, and I understand that they are going to be paid before the year ends. They have started to be paid as from this week in the post office and in banks. So, even before the passing of this Bill, pensioners are being paid their additional one-month pension.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides the eligibility criteria for employees to be entitled for the special allowance. Provision is made for the payment of special allowance to employees who have in employment for the whole or part of the year.

Sub section (3) sets out the different circumstances where an employee having worked for part of the year would be entitled to special allowance.

Sub section (4) clarifies that where an employee has been in the employment of more than one employer, then each employer will pay his pro rata share of the special allowance.

Sub section (5) provides for the payment of special allowance in two instalments. The first instalment must be paid on or before 31 December of this year, before the year ends. The second instalment must be paid before the end of January. Now, why two instalments? Simply because we have received representations from the workers and trade unionists who told us to make the payment in two instalments because they want to have cash in January to pay for school materials and school uniforms. That is why we are not paying all the special allowance in one go in December.

Provision is also made in this Bill where the employer and the employee so agrees for the payment to be made up to four equal instalments, but it is strictly where the employer and

the employee agree. If there is no agreement, then the default rule is still payment has to be made half before the year ends and half by 31 January.

Sub section (6) clarifies that the special allowance that is being paid is on top of all bonuses that the employee may have been entitled, whether under collective agreement, whether under contract with his employer. You know, some people receive a bonus for attendance.

This special allowance is on top of that. Even where a private company is able to pay more than 13 months of salary, this special allowance will be payable on top of that bonus otherwise payable to the employee.

Clause 4 of the Bill empowers an authorised officer to enter any work premises, inspect books and records, and request the employer to furnish such information as the authorised officer requires for the purpose of complying with the Bill.

Clause 6 of the Bill makes it an offence for any person to contravene the Bill or obstruct an authorised officer in the exercise of his power, punishable by a fine, not exceeding Rs5,000 on conviction and I need to point out Rs5,000 is per employee.

I would be moving, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to amendment at Committee Stage to clause 8 of the Bill which will be circulated shortly because we have been working closely with the State Law Office and the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

Essentially, clause 8 of the Bill deals with the criteria for certain enterprises, special and medium enterprises and other enterprises that may be prescribed by regulation to get financial assistance from Government. We do recognise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it will not be easy for all enterprise, especially in the Export Processing Sector and the Small Enterprises, to absorb the full amount of the special allowance, the payment of the 13 month's basic salary that is proposed as special allowance. This is why we have come up with a mechanism whereby those eligible employers, they will have to pay the salary of the employees, half of it by year end, the other half in January and then they can claim the money back from the Director General of the MRA if they satisfy the criteria set out in the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we wish that we could have done more but our hands were tied because of the disastrous state of the economy which we have inherited. But I am making a solemn appeal to all enterprises in the private sector who have the means to pay the special

allowance to also pay that allowance to all workers of their enterprise including those who earn a basic salary exceeding Rs50,000.

With these words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Guinness rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The Speaker will resume the seat.

At this stage, Madam Speaker took the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated!

Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(5.55 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, toute la république est concernée par le Special Allowance Bill, un projet de loi qui concerne la classe travailleur mais aussi le patronat et je suis sûre qu'ils nous suivent avec beaucoup d'attention.

Madame la présidente, ce projet de loi découle d'une promesse électorale annoncée dans un premier temps par l'Alliance Lepep et par la suite l'Alliance du Changement. Il y a unanimité sur le fait que les travailleurs obtiendront un boni de 14^{ème} mois grâce à l'ancien Premier ministre parce que c'est lui qui a annoncé ça en premier mais malheureusement...

(Interruptions)

...ce gouvernement a décidé que seulement une partie des employés vont obtenir ce boni de 14^{ème} mois.

(Interruptions)

Permettez-moi de faire la chronologie des annonces parce que c'est important pour comprendre là où nous en sommes aujourd'hui. Je l'ai dit le leader de l'Alliance Lepep, Pravind Jugnauth avait fait cette annonce lors d'un rassemblement à Phoenix le 3 novembre et par la suite les dirigeants de l'Alliance du Changement lui ont emboîté le pas lors d'une

conférence de presse quelques jours plus tard et l'actuel Premier ministre avait confirmé cette promesse lors d'une émission sur une radio.

Pour en revenir à ce que le ministre avait dit un peu plus tôt et la remarque que j'ai eu, il faut aussi souligner que c'est en novembre 2023 que le Leader de l'opposition d'alors avait évoqué cette proposition et à travers une *Private Notice Question* ce à quoi le ministre d'alors avait répondu qu'il faudra faire des consultations avant de prendre une telle décision, Madame la présidente.

Un an après cette *PNQ* et un mois après les élections générales soi maintenant, le gouvernement vient de l'avant devant cet auguste Assemblée pour l'introduction d'un paiement d'un boni de 14^{ème} mois mais seulement pour les employés touchant un salaire moins de R 50 000. C'est la première trahison de ce gouvernement envers son électorat et envers la population. Je dirais une première étape de '*ser sintir*' pour la population. Un gouvernement qui montre déjà, malheureusement, qui se soumet au dictat du gros capital...

An hon. Member: *Aler do ta!*

Mr Lesjongard : Au fait, si...

An hon. Member: *Taler to pou kone ki kantite...*

An hon. Member: C'est ça!

An hon. Member: *Zot ine fer consta ki zot in fer!*

Mr Lesjongard : Si j'évoque cela, Madame la présidente, c'est suite aux déclarations de l'honorable *Deputy Prime Minister* lors d'une conférence de presse samedi je pense, où il a évoqué que le gouvernement avait subi des fortes pressions pour fixer le seuil salarial à R 30 000. Est-ce que ce gouvernement a cédé aux pressions du patronat pour ne pas payer ceux touchant des salaires de moins que R50,000 ?

Madame la présidente, une des raisons de ce vote massif lors des dernières élections en faveur de l'Alliance du changement était évidemment la promesse de ce boni de 14^{ème} mois...

Mrs Savabaddy: *Li pe rakont zistwar...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard : Un vote qui comporte...

(Interruptions)

...sûrement ceux ayant un salaire plus de...

An hon. Member: *Met sa deor !*

Mr Lesjongard : R 50 000....

Ms Babooram: *60-0 la sa!*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, he has the floor!

Mrs Savabaddy: *Li pe rakont zistwar !*

Madam Speaker: One moment! He has the floor. Let us respect please. Remember: rights, respect, responsibility. Please, you have the floor.

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Et c'est pourquoi, Madame la présidente, j'ai élaboré la chronologie des événements avant les élections parce que sans cette promesse, je le dis, les résultats auraient pu être autrement.

(Interruptions)

What was clear, Madame Speaker, to both...

(Interruptions)

What was clear, Madame Speaker, to both the outgoing Government and the incoming one as well as *lepep admirable* was that the 14 month bonus pledge far from being a political gimmick or a hot air promise had become a critical vote winner and a necessity in the minds of voters to alleviate the cost of living crisis and restore some of their purchasing power before the end of this year. It was seen, Madam Speaker, by both alliances as vital to restore a feel good factor among the Mauritian people before the start of the New Year.

The outgoing government made it clear that they had the capacity to pay and to honour that pledge. That is where comes the motto –

“Parole donnée, parole sacrée.”

Similarly...

An hon. Member: *Kokin.*

Mr Lesjongard: Similarly, the actual Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, in a press conference, on 05 November, as the Leader of *Alliance du Changement* made the following statement and I quote –

« *Nou gard nou parole. Seki nou p dir nou pu fer. L'Alliance du Changement prend l'engagement que le paiement du 14ème mois sera belle et bien effectué en cas de victoire* »

Now, Madam Speaker, Government has changed its tune saying only those earning less than Rs50,000 will receive a 14 month bonus. Pour moi, c'est une promesse à demi-tenue, Madame la présidente.

Mrs Savabaddy: *Rane tou sa kass zot inn kokin avan, lerla nu gete.*

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, I cannot hear such words in this House. May I ask that these words be withdrawn?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I do not think we should make remarks on an honourable member. Be very careful on comments, please. Be very careful! Please, carry on hon. Leader of the Opposition, but also, do not invite.

Mr Lesjongard: I am not inviting, Madam Speaker. I am stating facts.

Madam Speaker: Well!

Mr Lesjongard: Let them have their way when they will take the floor. I will sit down and listen to what they have to say. Le débat que nous tenons aujourd'hui, Madame la présidente, doit prendre en considération la publication d'un rapport sur l'état de l'économie. Selon la version du gouvernement actuel and *I will get back to the Report on the State of the Economy later.*

Now, the Government has been saying in their defence, Madam Speaker, that they did not know that the outgoing government had left the country in such an economic mess thereby impairing their ability to honour the 14th month pledge.

Now, let me remind the House, Madam Speaker, when as late as June 2024, Mr Rama Sithanen, the new Governor of the Bank of Mauritius stated the following about the state of the Mauritian economy in an interview he had given in Mauritius Times, and I quote –

“The economy is already in dire straits if we consider the true figures of GDP, budget deficit, public debt, export of services and foreign exchange reserves and the money illusion effect. These key macro indicators are being cynically doctored to hide the reality.”

Now, if it is to be believed, one can only assume, Madam Speaker, that the Leaders of l’Alliance du Changement were being reckless in making that promise to pay the 14th month bonus in full knowledge of their capacity to pay, thus prepared to sacrificing the trust of voters at the altar of political expediency, Madam Speaker.

Indeed, I know many, if not all of them on the other side of the House, will revere on the resounding victory of the alliance during the recent general elections. We have to accept the decision of the population as we have in the past. People voted for a change and so be it. After one month, I am much tempted to ask where the change is but I will come to that much later, Madam Speaker.

Madame la présidente, la chronologie des événements à la suite des élections générales démontre clairement que le gouvernement préparait l’opinion publique sur la révision de leurs promesses électorales. La présentation du rapport sur l’état de l’économie va dans ce sens et comme je l’ai dit un peu plus tôt, le projet de loi qui est présenté à cette Chambre aujourd’hui est étroitement lié à the *State of the Economy Report*.

Maintenant, laissez-moi venir sur le projet de loi et permettez-moi de soulever certaines sections de ce projet de loi que je qualifierai d’injuste. La première, Madame la présidente, c’est le non-paiement aux travailleurs bénéficiant plus que R 50,000. Sur ce point, la population, je pense, attend par exemple, des explications de l’honorable Subron qui est syndicaliste et qui je pense dois venir expliquer, Madame la présidente et le fait de pénaliser une catégorie des travailleurs de ce pays, le gouvernement débute son règne en créant une frustration parmi son électorat mais aussi parmi la population, Madame la présidente.

Let me get to Clause 3, subsection 5(a) of the Bill where it is stipulated that –

“every employer shall pay the Special Allowance in 2 equal instalments where –

- (i) the first instalment is paid not later than on the last working day of December 2024; and
- (ii) the last instalment is paid on the last working day of January 2025.”

Madam Speaker, it is all too clear that the above proposed provision is a mandatory section imposing a positive duty on every employer to pay the Special Allowance in two equal instalments. It is our firm contention that the employer should instead have had an obligation imposed on him to pay the Special Allowance in one full and final instalment in December and that, well before the last working day so as not to defeat its purpose.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, clause 3 (5) (a) leaves no doubt that it is to read subject to clause 3 (5) (b). Now, if I may, it is both my firm and reasoned opinion that (5) (b) is loosely drafted and this may possibly create some practical difficulties or confusions, and more importantly, Madam Speaker, open floodgates for potential abuse by unscrupulous employers. I say so for the following reasons and I will explain.

First, by allowing an employer and employee to agree on the payment of a special allowance in not more than four equal installments on the condition that such a payment starts on the last working day of December 2024 and the remaining installments are paid on such dates as they may agree.

Madam Speaker, therefore, on a literal interpretation of this first part of the clause, an employer and an employee may agree to straddle the payment across four equal installments and there is not mention of a specific timeframe within which the four installments should be paid.

I am of the view, Madam Speaker, that there are not sufficient safeguards in the present Bill to ensure that any agreement reached under this section is through a transparent and documented process and done in a fair and honest manner to effectively rule out any real possibility of undue influence, intimidation, threats or any form of coercion in the mind of the worker to secure such an agreement. This is why I believe that in its current form, this section does not provide adequate guarantee to the working class and is dangerous in the hands of some inconsiderate employers.

Now, these two distinct rules will also create two categories of workers –

- i. one who gets paid in two installments and by not later than the end of January 2025, and
- ii. others who because of an agreement which has been reached, payment will be made in four equal installments without a specific timeframe.

As highlighted in situations where there will be no proper supervision or adequate control by the State.

The hon. Minister mentioned that and I also wish to add that there is no offence specified under clause 6 in relation to acts and doings or omissions on the part of an employer who may fraudulently, intentionally, negligently, recklessly or carelessly mislead the employee into an agreement under clause 3 (5) (b). Therefore, justifying the apprehension which an employee may have. Anyway, at any rate, the penalty imposed “should a person be found to have committed an offence under the Act shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding only Rs5,000,” which is relatively, Madam Speaker, a weak penalty and unlikely to have a meaningful punitive effect to force compliance.

Now, the last part of clause 3 (5) (b) is to the effect that where there is no agreement, payment will be effected at the end of each successive month following the month of December. Madam Speaker, this part is most vague and imprecise. One is left wondering whether there is any legal need to have this part. For if there is no agreement, then it means technically that the provision of clause 3 (5) (a) should prevail. Clause 3 (5) (a) which specifies the time period to pay in two installments not later than the last working day of January cannot be made subject to this link to clause 3 (5) (b) where there is no agreement and no clarity so as to by when the payment should be completed.

Having this on the second part in the Bill, Madam Speaker, cannot be reconciled with clause 3 (5) (a) which becomes of no purpose. In the light of the foregoing arguments, I propose that this be removed completely to avoid any confusion, that is, where no agreement is reached, as it is not in order, Madam Speaker.

Now, let me comment of the report of the state of the economy which has been widely commented upon since it has been tabled at this House. But before, I would like to refer the House to the IMF Report where it is stated and I quote –

“The 2024 Article IV Consultation discusses that Mauritius has rebounded strongly from the pandemic on the back of buoyant tourism, social housing construction and financial services. The outlook for growth remains favourable. Headline inflation is projected to ease further and public debt is projected to continue moderating over the medium term.”

Another report, Madam Speaker, the second one from OECD which dates back to 04 December, only two weeks ago, and I quote –

“Mauritius’ economy continues to grow strongly, supported by strong momentum in tourism and investment. Tourist arrivals in 2024 are on track to surpass the record set in 2018 (...).”

Cela m’emmène à poser des questions, Madame la présidente, et je pense que pas mal de gens se posent les mêmes questions. Qui sont ceux qui ont travaillé sur les chiffres avancés dans le rapport sur l’état de l’économie ? Est-ce que ce sont les mêmes personnes qui ont préparé les différents rapports sous l’ancien gouvernement ?

Do we know who wrote it? How was it done and which methodology was used? In fact, Madam Speaker, I believe that the figures were revised just to show negativity and scare the population. They say that it is Statistics Mauritius who has revised these figures. The same Statistics Mauritius, which, quarter after quarter, and the latest one being in September, had predicted a growth of 6.5 % for this year and confirmed the growth rate of 7% for last year!

An hon. Member: *Manipulé !*

Mr Lesjongard: Are you now telling us that the same team at Statistics Mauritius has suddenly decided that the previous regime had manipulated figures and they now have decided to revise the GDP figures downwards?

(Interruptions)

Are you telling us that? Are you telling the population that?

(Interruptions)

This is a joke, Madam Speaker! One which we will pay dearly on the international seal!

Madam Speaker, I ask that question again: who has done the state of the economy report?

We have to know! This is why I am putting that question. Was it baited by those around the hon. Prime Minister? Those who believe that scaring the population and removing all social gains will make the hon. Prime Minister popular?

Je pense qu'il y a des questions légitimes que tout le monde et la population sont en droit de se poser. Un mois après les élections, ce gouvernement a brossé un tableau noir de l'économie de notre pays.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Prime Minister has been talking about 'Voodoo Economics.' But he should remember the days when in this country, we were talking about the infamous '*trou Bheenick*' and some years later, *l'imposition des taxes sur la classe moyenne de ce pays*. Today, the Voodoo experts have strapped again, Madam Speaker.

The Voodoo experts have this time deliberately downsized the contribution – and that is true – of GBCS to our economy. The figures have been almost half; from Rs84.5 billion, it has been reduced to Rs40 billion. That is my question: why this treatment to GBCS companies, Madam Speaker? That has resulted in the estimated GDP growth for 2023 and 2024 being reduced respectively from 7% to 5.6% and 6.5% to 5.1%. Similarly, public sector debt figures have been revised upwards. This might have pleased certain egos, Madam Speaker. But the damage of the Voodoo document cooked *avec de mauvaises intentions* will have far-reaching implications, Madam Speaker.

Now, let me get back to the threshold that has been put forward in the payment of 14th month bonus. I believe it is not fair on the part of the Minister to state that the payment of the 14th month bonus necessitates further borrowing by Government and that it will put Mauritius at the risk of being downgraded. As I said earlier, the revised figures by this Government of the economic and public finance fundamentals have already placed Mauritius on the downgrade trail when I refer to the report mentioned by the hon. Minister in his speech. We are going in that direction.

Therefore, do not try to put the blame on the most deserved 14th month bonus for the workers of this country! Let me say it more particularly: had the MSM been in power, we would have paid the 14th month bonus as promised and at one go!

(Interruptions)

We would not have invented excuses as this Government is doing!

An hon. Member: *Dollar ti pou vinn 60 roupies !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, we, as a country, have successfully rebounded from the COVID pandemic and managed an economic crisis initiated by the war in Ukraine. *Nous ne sommes plus auprès de la vague, Madame la présidente.* The tourism sector is thriving and foreign investments have reached record numbers. Our country – and this is a fact – has witnessed unprecedented infrastructural transformation. So much so that we will witness the impact of existing, but also of new projects that have been initiated during the past two years over the next coming two years!

Madam Speaker, I understand the political game!

(Interruptions)

Do not make the mistake of suggesting that nothing has been done during the past ten years. The country has taken a giant leap over the past decade.

(Interruptions)

It is the same civil servants currently working in your Ministries who have made this possible! It is thanks to their constant effort, courage and resilience that we have managed to deliver what we have delivered.

(Interruptions)

You want to bring disrepute to the previous regime? Fair enough, hon. Mr Bhagwan!

(Interruptions)

But be careful not to offend the very talented and dedicated individuals who have given us, for example, the SAJ Bridge, the Victoria Urban Terminal, the Metro Express, the sport complexes and thousands of social housing units!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Come back to the Bill, please!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I will get back to the Bill, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Le gouvernement doit respecter ses engagements pris auprès de ce peuple ! And I am not talking only about the 14th month, Madam Speaker. Now, as Leader of the Opposition, I have the responsibility to raise question in this House.

Madam Speaker: Of course!

Mr Lesjongard: I will do so, Madam Speaker. Autant de questions qu'il en faut parce que la population, Madame la présidente, veut avoir des réponses.

(Interruptions)

It is indeed, Madam Speaker, my first intervention in this House as Leader of the Opposition. I am being very fair. I understand that it is a new Government with many newcomers, but also seasoned politicians sitting on the other side of the House and running a Ministry for the first time.

Like I said, *il y aura une période de grâce et je vais respecter cela, Madame la présidente.* But come the next parliamentary session next year, this will not be the case!

(Interruptions)

Je vais conclure, Madame la présidente.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Pe gagn per ! Pe tremble la !*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Madame la présidente, je vais terminer. Nous avons un nouveau gouvernement, qui, à travers son manifeste électoral, a présenté ses intentions. Mais il y aura sûrement un programme gouvernemental. Certes, ce qui est vrai, c'est que vous avez gagné avec une large majorité...

(Interruptions)

...qui vous permet d'apporter des changements aux niveaux constitutionnels et institutionnels. J'espère qu'il n'y aura pas d'abus !

(Interruptions)

Malheureusement, les premiers pas de ce gouvernement sont inquiétants pour la population – une promesse que j’ai qualifiée un peu plus tôt de demi-teinte. Le peuple ne mérite pas une politique économique d’austérité, comme cela avait été le cas entre 2005 et 2010 !

J’en ai terminé, Madame la présidente.

An hon. Member: Enfin! Enfin!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Merci. *Yes!*

(6.30 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, usually, the Member who speaks after the Leader of the Opposition spends the first part of his or her speech replying to the Leader of the Opposition. There is nothing to reply to!

I have listened to the Leader of the Opposition. We respect him. We were all present when he put his PNQ, when he made his speech – if we can call that a speech – but we were all present. There is nothing to reply to. There are two of them and the Leader of the Opposition speaks on such an important Bill and the second one is not even present. Do I need to speak?

(Interruptions)

In itself, this speaks for everything...

An hon. Member: *Li fatigue*, happy hour!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Good one! Good one! And I will take just one example. He stands up and says ‘*nou pe soutir bann employeurs*’. If an employer does not respect the law, Rs5,000 only. He is not even aware that it is Rs5,000 for every worker. It is Rs5,000 for every time that the law is not abided to! Even that, he has not managed to understand, Madam Speaker. So, I will not waste more time. With due respect to the Leader of the Opposition without any ... There are two of them and already one has vanished?

(Interruptions)

Enfin, let me get to more serious things. It is true that we have to talk about the package. The Bill is about *le 14^{ème} mois* but we are all aware that we have to talk about the package – *14^{ème} mois, compensation salariale, les salariés, la baisse du prix de l'essence et du diesel*. We have to do that because we have had a look at what they left behind and we have taken the best decision that we could take to preserve the future of this country. Therefore, let us rapidly look at this package, Madam Speaker.

I will not come back to what was said last week, recently in the State of the Economy. It speaks for itself but what we are discovering is worse than what is in the State of the Economy. I will take just one example and there will be dozens of examples like this. *Le Metro Express, leur grande fierté*. Allow me, Madam Speaker, to illustrate that what we are finding out is worse than what is in the State of the Economy. Metro Express, as at date, they have Rs17 billion *de dettes*. *R 17 milliards, ils ont perdu en cinq ans en terme de foreign exchange loss, trois milliards de roupies*. We all know that what you spend in a business, in an operation, you must earn.

Madam Speaker, the operating expenses, *catastrophe!* The annual deficit is about Rs300 million. Operating expenses: *R 300 million de pertes chaque année! Et ce n'est pas fini*. We all know that trams, they do not last forever. In the near future, we will have to start replacing. It has been calculated that major overall cost for the light rail vehicles are to be incurred in financial years 2026-2027 and so on. With the inclusion of the overall and final cost, Metro Express would face an average deficit of some Rs2 billion yearly for the next 10 years. That is just one example. For Metro Express to break even, it would require its fares to be increased up to *R 213* as compared to the current maximum fare of *R 55*. These are real facts and figures. What we are discovering *c'est pire que ce qui est dans le State of the Economy*.

It is all over the place like that. You talk about the CEB? Name it! State Trading Corporation, name it! Air Mauritius, worse than everything! Worse! Even worse than Metro, the billions and billions which they took from the Bank of Mauritius through MIC, *R 24 milliards* if I am not mistaken – *R 24 milliards dilapidated!* So, I do not want to spend too much time but it is all over the place, the mess. *Que le peuple comprenne bien*, we have done the maximum and according to the IMF, the World Bank, the private sector, we should not have given what is in this Bill, in the package.

Je demande à la population, aux salariés, aux travailleurs, aux cadres de bien comprendre. Nous avons fait le maximum. Maintenant quand on regarde les rapports etc., il est clair que Moody's se préparait à nous *downgrade*. Et la menace est là ! Je n'ai pas besoin

de rappeler à la population que Moody's nous avait *downgraded* le 28 juillet 2022. Cela nous pend au nez économique. Un *downgrading* ! Bon, on a fait le maximum. Mon collègue, le ministre du Travail, faisait référence à un communiqué de Moody's datant de quelques heures à peine. Tout récent. Allons bien réaliser que c'était flatteur pour le gouvernement, oui. Mais, c'est parce qu'on a dit notre intention d'aller dans une direction. On n'a pas le choix, il faut réduire la dette. Il faut redresser le budget. On n'a pas le choix. Donc, le Premier ministre est venu avec des chiffres. *We mean to do what we said.*

Mais, ce communiqué de Moody's est venu juste avant qu'on ne vienne avec ce *package*. Juste avant ! Ils sont sûrement en train de refaire tous les calculs etc. Ils doivent croire qu'on les a couillonnés. On ne les a pas couillonnés comme on le dit en créole. Non ! On a considéré que c'était le minimum, qui est en même temps le maximum que nous pouvions faire. Mais seulement, il y a des mesures qui ont été annoncées dans le *State of the Economy*, que nous avons répétées quand nous avons offert ce *package*.

Il faut redresser l'économie, et il n'y a pas mille façons de faire cela. S'attaquer à la dette publique, s'attaquer au déficit budgétaire, mais il n'y a même plus de déficit budgétaire. Il y a un désordre budgétaire total ! En vérité, il n'y a plus de budget. Il y a des fonds spéciaux partout, il y a une banque centrale qui n'était plus une banque centrale, qui était devenue une planche à billets. Nous n'avons pas le choix, et franchement quand on regarde cette menace de *downgrading*, mais, même si Moody's nous dégrade, il faut regarder au-delà, parce que le *mess* qu'ils ont laissé derrière-eux, cela ne va pas prendre un mois pour redresser cela. Cela demande un an, deux ans, trois ans, quatre ans, cinq ans ! *We mean it and we will do it, Madam Speaker. It is going to be difficult.* Il y a des mesures qu'il nous faudra prendre très vite. Par exemple, le Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC), vraiment, je ne parle pas à la légère.

Le Premier ministre d'avant – son père n'aurait jamais commis des crimes comme ça ! J'ai connu son père pendant des années et on n'était pas d'accord sur beaucoup de choses, mais les crimes que Pravind Jugnauth et son complice Dr. Padayachy ont commis, son père n'aurait jamais commis de tels crimes ! Voilà la situation dans laquelle on est.

On aura des décisions difficiles à prendre. Mais à quoi pensons-nous ? À l'avenir, aux enfants de ce pays, aux petits enfants. *Aret badine avek tou enn pei ! We mean what we say and we are going do it!* Mais nous allons continuer, comme l'a dit mon ami, Ashok Subron, le Premier ministre et les autres, nous allons continuer de faire le maximum que nous pouvons. C'est pourquoi on a été obligé de limiter le paiement du quatorzième mois aux

salariés qui touchent moins que R 50 000. Il n'y a pas d'argent ; ils ont défoncé la caisse. Ils n'ont pas défoncé la caisse ; ils ont volé la caisse et sont partis avec ! Enfin, il y a des moments difficiles devant nous.

Et je vois, probablement *genuinely wrong*, venir dire que les fonctionnaires n'auront pas de quatorzième mois. Mon collègue l'a bien expliqué. Je préfère croire que c'est de l'ignorance. Je ne suis pas sûr, mais allons faire semblant de croire que c'est de l'ignorance qui fait dire une chose pareille. C'est terrible !

Certaines mesures, ce n'est pas nous qui avons à les prendre s'il faut les prendre, comme une augmentation des *interest rates*, les taux d'intérêts de la Banque centrale. On a rendu son indépendance à la Banque centrale. On a mis quelqu'un et on peut ne pas être d'accord avec lui, mais personne ne met en question la compétence professionnelle. Nous laissons la nouvelle Banque de Maurice prendre les décisions qu'il faut en ce qui concerne les taux d'intérêts.

Nous allons nous concentrer sur deux choses surtout, comme je le répète, diminuer la dette publique - une pression terrible - et redresser le budget de l'État. Ils ont tout ruiné ! Ces décisions-là, nous allons les prendre, mais tout en continuant à faire le maximum. C'est pourquoi, en ce qui concerne les pensionnés, les handicapés, les *allowances* – il y a des *carer's allowances* tout cela – ils auront tout ce qu'on a promis parce qu'on peut tenir cette promesse-là. Mais on ne va pas tenir une promesse au prix de l'avenir de ce pays.

Heureusement, je le dis franc, qu'on a le Premier ministre que nous avons et qu'on est en parfait accord sur ce qu'on peut faire et sur ce qu'on ne peut pas faire. Et il faut regarder l'horizon, non pas seulement notre poche, mais regarder l'horizon. Nous allons le faire et nous allons réussir. Ce ne sera pas facile, mais nous allons réussir.

J'allais oublier de le dire : nous avons pris la décision de donner l'exemple. *We had decided before the law came* de donner l'exemple : les députés, les ministres qui étaient dans ce Parlement l'année dernière ne prendraient pas le quatorzième mois. Maintenant, la loi a limité à R 50 000. Mais avant cela, nous avons pris la décision de donner l'exemple qu'un député et un ministre ne prendraient pas le quatorzième mois si le quatorzième mois était à leur portée, à leur disposition. Parce que nous avons la ferme intention de donner l'exemple aussi, partout où nous pourrions donner l'exemple.

La situation est tellement grave que j'ai dit, nous aurons à compter sur nos alliés, nos amis, les pays alliés, les pays amis, les pays étrangers. Nous aurons à compter sur eux. À commencer par l'Inde, la Grande-Bretagne et les États Unies et la Chine, n'en déplaise à certains, tous les pays amis. Nous comptons sur eux, mais seulement *we must earn what we will get from them. They look at the horizon their way, but they look at the horizon also*. Et nous allons voir que faire vis-à-vis la de Banque mondiale et du FMI. Je dis toujours à mes amis ces derniers temps, prenez le temps d'étudier ce qui s'est passé et ce qui se passe au Sri Lanka et aux îles Maldives. *A lot of lessons to be learned by them, Madam Speaker*. Et que le gouvernement d'avant ne vienne pas dire, 'ah, ils se tournent vers la Banque...' Je vous rappelle que le gouvernement précédent avait conclu ou plutôt chercher un accord avec la Banque mondiale.

Dans le budget 2023-2024, était prévu 250 millions de la Banque mondiale. Mais ça aussi, ils n'ont pas été foutus de faire ! Ils n'ont même pas réussi à négocier ce qu'ils avaient annoncé dans le budget. 250 millions disparus ! Nous aurons à faire des efforts et nous comptons sur la Banque mondiale, le FMI. Pas à n'importe quelle condition.

C'est un peu la même chose que dans le cas de Diego Garcia et des Chagos. La Grande-Bretagne a finalement été obligée de reconnaître notre souveraineté. Une souveraineté que nous avons depuis 1965/1968 et ils ont offert un *enn ti kas*, Enfin, *impe enn 'gro ti kas' ! Enn ti kas !* Quoi ? Parce qu'on est en difficulté, on va sauter dessus ! Maintenant qu'ils ont reconnu notre souveraineté, nous trouverons d'autres moyens si les négociations n'aboutissent pas parce que les négociations sont toujours en cours. Et nous avons besoin de cet argent pour sortir de l'*economic mess* dans lequel le gouvernement précédent nous a mis, mais pas à n'importe quel prix, pas à n'importe quelle condition.

Nous sommes lucides, Madame la présidente. Nous sommes parfaitement lucides et nous ferons notre devoir *ariv ki ariv*. Je terminerai en revenant sur quelque chose que nous avons à adopter, que nous avons mis dans notre programme, un *Fiscal Responsibility Act*. Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un *Fiscal Responsibility Act* ? C'est une loi qui fixe les taux d'endettements du pays, le déficit budgétaire, etc., qui exige une responsabilité du gouvernement.

Des *Fiscal Responsibility Acts* existent de par le monde. Seulement, le plus souvent, les pays où existe un *Fiscal Responsibility Act* ne respectent même pas leur propre loi. Pas tous

les pays, mais beaucoup de pays. C'est pourquoi certains pays comme la Jamaïque – mes collègues ont étudié ce qui se passe en Jamaïque – pas seulement aujourd'hui, depuis quatre ans, *it is cooking* en Jamaïque. Et la Jamaïque est parmi les premiers pays qui a un *Fiscal Responsibility Act*, mais qui veut aussi un mécanisme pour faire respecter ce *Fiscal Responsibility Act*. C'est pourquoi ils ont voté et ils sont en train de mettre debout un *Independent* – et vraiment indépendant, pas comme l'ancienne l'ICAC d'ici, heureusement – *Fiscal Commission*, des gens indépendants, qualifiés, avec un *board*, avec un directeur général, avec un *Advisory Board* pour faire respecter le *Fiscal Responsibility Act* que notre pays a adopté.

Nous sommes sérieux, nous regardons loin, nous regardons l'horizon. Le Premier ministre et moi, et les autres, nous ne voulons pas que ce crime économique qui a été commis ces dernières cinq années se répète. Il faut à tout prix éviter cela et le prix, c'est un bon *Fiscal Responsibility Act* et un bon mécanisme pour le faire respecter, un *Independent Fiscal Commission*. Un mois dans l'histoire d'un pays, c'est peu mais nous sommes fiers de ce que nous sommes en train de faire depuis un mois et je demande aux travailleurs, je demande aux syndicats, je demande aux cadres professionnels de bien comprendre de quelle situation de faillite nous avons hérité que nous ne pouvons pas faire plus que ce que nous avons fait avec ce package. Non, franchement, j'ai été syndicaliste, je suis politicien depuis 40 ans. Alors, si on pouvait et tout le monde sait que je suis quelqu'un de responsable avant tout, quand je donne une parole, je tiens ma parole à moins que ce soit impossible de tenir la parole.

C'est le cas-là, nous avons dit que nous allions donner un 14^{ème} mois, nous avons donné mais pas le *full* 14^{ème} mois que nous aurions aimé donner mais je demande à la population, aux cadres, aux salariés de bien comprendre, nous avons fait et nous continuerons à faire le maximum pour les plus vulnérables, pour les pensionnés, les vieux, pour les salariés au bas de l'échelle, pour les victimes de la misère en général et pour les autres aussi dans toute la mesure du possible, les professionnels, les cadres. Mais notre phare à nous, et je terminerai là-dessus, notre phare à nous, c'est l'avenir de notre pays. Ni le Premier ministre ni moi, nous ne ferons rien qui comme eux ils ont fait, tuera l'avenir de ce pays. Depuis un mois nous travaillons nuit et jour à cela. Peut-être que la population ne se rende pas compte, ce mois qui vient de passer, la pression qu'il y a eue sur le Premier ministre, sur moi-même, la pression du travail quand on a d'autres dossiers comme ce dossier-ci et le dossier Chagos-Diego, ben, cela ne nous a pas empêché de nous occuper des autres problèmes. Je prends un exemple ;

j'ai passé je ne sais pas combien d'heures à discuter avec les gens concernés, à commencer par Sam Lauthan, la drogue, les ravages qu'il fait, il faut travailler là-dessus aussi.

Donc, depuis un mois nous travaillons non seulement à sauver et à redresser cette économie, à faire face aux Britanniques sur le dossier Chagos et Tromelin mais déjà chaque ministre à son poste et je salue les nouveaux ministres. Je salue en particulier mon camarade Ashok, la façon qu'ils ont appris ce rôle de ministre avec responsabilité et avec courage aussi, depuis un mois nous travaillons d'arrache-pied ; nous allons continuer. Je demande à la population de bien comprendre que nous ne pouvions pas, nous ne pouvons pas faire plus que ce que nous avons fait. Allons construire l'avenir ensemble.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker : Hon. Parapen !

(6.55 p.m.)

Mr K. Parapen (Third Member for Grand River North West & Port Louis West):

Madam Speaker, it is with great humility and deep sense of responsibility that I address this esteemed Assembly for the first time. Today marks my maiden speech as a Member of Parliament and I am honoured to have the privilege of representing the people of Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West in this august Assembly.

I rise today to speak on the second reading of the Special Allowance Bill. While the General Elections held on 10 November 2024 may be behind us, the commitments taken during the electoral campaign are still very much alive. It is worth remembering that the promise of the payment of a 14th month did not feature in the electoral manifesto of the *Alliance du Changement*, when it was presented to the public on Tuesday the 29 October 2024.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, the promise of a 14th month bonus did not feature in the electoral manifesto of any of the prominent political parties for alliances which took part at these elections. So, must we not ask ourselves how did this measure of the 14th month bonus make its way into Parliament? The hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his speech, alluded to the announcement of the 14th month bonus by the then *l'Alliance Lepep* as being a decision taken to address the loss of purchasing power of the population. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has either lost his memory or he is deliberately misleading the House.

Madam Speaker, desperate people do desperate things and in the face of a crushing electoral defeat, the then Prime Minister Jugnauth notoriously announced the payment of the 14th month bonus if he was re-elected during the last political rally of his party on 03 December 2024, exactly a week before the elections were due to take place. At no point in time, did he or any of the representatives from his *Alliance Lepep* explain the rationale behind the payment of the 14th month or the way such an onerous electoral promise would be financed. As we said, Madam Speaker, desperate people do desperate things.

Madam Speaker, it is well known that in order to neutralise the political opponent, one of the most effective strategies is to mirror the action of your opponent. In the United States after losing several presidential elections in a row, the Democratic Party under Bill Clinton adopted some traditionally republican positions like advocating for welfare reform and a balanced budget. This strategy turned out to be effective and helped Bill Clinton secure two consecutive terms as the President of the United States of America. Tony Blair adopted a similar approach a few years later in the United Kingdom by launching his new Labour Movement to woo Tories' voters. This helped Blair secure three consecutive electoral successes.

Madam Speaker, in our local context, unfortunately, populism is now deeply ingrained within our political tradition. The politics of *met for gagne for* has been on the ascendency for many years now and no political party has epitomised this more than the previous Government led by *Mouvement Socialiste Militant* of Pravind Jugnauth. The last ditch attempt to salvage his sinking Government by promising a 14th month salary will go down in history as the pinnacle of populism in Mauritian Politics.

Madam Speaker, the sheer structure of our society means that populist measures can have a significant impact on voting patterns and truth be told, numerous elections in the not so distant past have been won or lost on the basis of populist measures being announced or not announced.

However unfortunate, this is the reality of the situation and we cannot and should not hide away from it. Madam Speaker, neutralising a political opponent which indulges into populism in the Republic of Mauritius is no mean feat. Past experience has taught us that the only effective strategy is to mirror its policies however irresponsible they might be. Madam Speaker, one could argue that it was not necessary for the Alliance du Changement to include a 14th month bonus in its electoral manifesto, that the alliance would have won a landslide

victory, irrespective of this one off 14th month salary payment and they would probably be right, Madam Speaker but the question I would like to put to all those who share this premise is very simple – aren't we all wise after the event?

Madam Speaker, my Party – Rezistans ek Alternative agreed to join forces with the Labour party, the Mouvement Millitant Mauricien and the Nouveaux Démocrates on programmatic and pragmatic grounds because in our opinion, our beloved country was on the brink of entering a fully-fledged dictatorship. At the last general elections, we were adamant that we could not take any chances with respect to the outcome of the elections. Pravind Jugnauth and his government had to be ousted.

Madam Speaker, the decision of the Alliance du Changement to align itself with Jugnauth's trump card of a 14th month salary should also be interpreted in the same vein, that is, to do what we must do to ensure that our country is liberated from the grasp of a regime that has been responsible for so much suffering and anguish among the population. So, it is in this context that the Special Allowance Bill which is being debated in this House today must be taken. It is a profound desire of this Government to honour the commitments announced during the electoral campaign and I have no doubt that this Government would have honoured its commitment to pay a full 14th month salary bonus to all employees had the financial situation of the economy been healthy but one cannot make abstraction of a dire economic predicament the country finds itself in.

In his State of the Economy address on Tuesday 10 December 2024, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance painted a very gloomy picture of our economy. As an economist and the economic spokesperson for Rezistans ek Alternativ over the last ten years or so now, I was more than convinced that the previous government was cooking the books and hiding the real true economic situation from the population but I must confess that I was appalled by what was revealed in this very House about the state of the Mauritian economy.

The term '*politique de terre brûlée*' is very much appropriate in light of the destructive policies implemented by the former government. In light of the report on the State of the Economy, it would have been hugely inappropriate for this Government to proceed with a blanket 14th month bonus. Not only would it have severely impacted our level of public indebtedness but it would have sent the wrong signal to the outside world.

A country's sovereign rating can be likened to an individual's reputation. Once one gains a bad reputation, it can take years or even decade to make up for it. Rating agencies like

Moody's rank countries across the world and typically distinguish them between two categories; investment grade and non-investment grade. As stated by the Minister of Labour, hon. Mr Uteem, those countries with a non-investment grade status are also known as junk rated countries and they typically face harsher financing conditions.

Mauritius managed to attain an investment grade status over the years owing to its cumulative economic progress and manageable public debt levels. However, after 10 years under the stewardship of Pravind Jugnauth, the country is on the brink of losing its investment grade status and being moved into junk category. The threat is very much real. Such a downgrade would spell trouble for our economy, especially for some important segments of our financial sector.

Madam Speaker, the decision not to award a 14th month bonus to those earning more than Rs50,000 per month has nothing to do with supposed pressures from employers as alluded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. If the previous government had not ransacked the coffers of Government, a blanket 14th month bonus would have been paid to all. As a responsible Government, we must do everything we can to convince international rating agencies that we are still worth an investment grade rating. This will not be an easy task but it starts with the Special Allowance Bill today.

With respect to devising the right criteria upon which someone would be eligible and someone would not be eligible, there can never be a perfect formula. Each formula will come with pros and cons. The eligibility criteria decided by this Government has been a means-tested one. As such, 90% of the working population earning the lowest basic salaries will be eligible to a 14th month bonus. Yes, Madam Speaker, 9 out of 10 Mauritians who are recognised as an employee under the laws of the Republic will be receiving a 14th month salary and this is a highly commendable effort by the Government, given the difficult financial condition the country finds itself in.

That said, I feel it is also important to take note that inflation has been so rampant in recent years in Mauritius that there has been a generalised impoverishment of all households across all social classes. As such, several citizens who find themselves in the bracket of salaries not eligible for the special allowance feel that they have been unjustly excluded and that they too deserve some sort of gratification. The Government should not turn a deaf ear to these individuals and should give due consideration to their grievances when crafting future economic policies.

The middle class is the backbone of any thriving economy and it is a fact that the middle class of our society has suffered the most over the last ten years compared to other social strata. Madam Speaker, it is also worth mentioning the one-off nature of this special allowance given to eligible employees. In no way should this Bill be considered as an integral part of the economic policy framework of this new Government. Its non-recurrence means that its impact on the economy and society will be short lived. All stakeholders must take good note of this including the beneficiaries themselves, the non-beneficiaries as well as the private sector.

It is also highly appreciable that the special allowance has been broken into two tranches, one payable in December 2024 and another one in January 2025. This will allow the mass of money to flow into different sectors of the economy and provide a broad-based economic impetus. The self-employed community, though not a direct beneficiary of a 14th month bonus, stands to gain indirectly from this measure as their business activities will likely flourish on account of increased consumption. As such, consumers should be encouraged to support the local economy as far as possible.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the economic and financial legacy of the previous government is well and truly catastrophic. It will take a lot of discipline and hard work to put the country back on the rails of progress and prosperity. Given the precarious situation the country finds itself in, it could have been justified to walk away from the promise of the 14th month bonus. But the Special Allowance Bill shows the commitment of this newly elected Government to make good on its electoral promises in spite of the challenging economic circumstances.

Madam Speaker, this Government has been given a clear mandate to improve the economic situation of the population. While the 14th bonus will certainly alleviate the financial constraints of households for the coming months, it would certainly not prove to be a long term solution. It is high time that we move from the illusion of progress to the reality of progress. As such, the true barometer of economic progress will be the forthcoming structural and fundamental economic reforms which will be put forward by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the next budget.

I thank you and all hon. MPs for their time and attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Etwareea!

(7.13 p.m.)

Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Madame la présidente, les résultats des récentes élections ont rendu la liberté à toute la population. On l'a vu partout dans le pays. Les mesures spéciales annoncées par le gouvernement, plus particulièrement l'annonce du 14^e mois dont on débat aujourd'hui et les autres mesures, notamment la baisse du prix de l'essence, par exemple, vont rendre le sourire au pays. Ce pays avait arrêté de sourire depuis un moment et on avait besoin de cela. Donc, avec la liberté retrouvée et des sourires revenus, on ne peut que penser du bien de ce qui entraîne du passé.

Madame la présidente, l'objectif de mon intervention, aujourd'hui, est de saluer le projet présenté par l'honorable ministre du Travail, et à travers lui, tout le gouvernement qui fait tout ce qui est possible, comme l'a dit le Premier ministre, dans les circonstances économiques données. Le déboursement du 14^e mois viendra soulager la plus grande partie des salariés ainsi que tous les bénéficiaires d'allocations sociales diverses.

Le versement renforcera leur pouvoir d'achat qui n'a cessé de dégringoler au fil des années. On connaît les raisons, c'est à cause des augmentations des prix des productions ainsi que par la dévaluation constante et voulue de notre roupie par le pouvoir sortant. On sait que la roupie a perdu 46 % de sa valeur par rapport au dollar les dix dernières années.

Le gouvernement sortant a trompé toute la population tout au long de ces 10 dernières années en créant une illusion de richesse, le tout reposant sur la manipulation du compte – on en a parlé ce matin au moment des questions. Le pillage des fonds publics, on en a aussi parlé à l'heure des questions, et un endettement vertigineux qui met l'avenir en risque et un endettement qui dépasse aujourd'hui les 80 % sur notre produit intérieur brut.

The Special Allowance Bill restaurera tant que ça peut le pouvoir d'achat et améliorera la qualité de vie de nos compatriotes, certes. Mais elle aura aussi un autre impact non-négligeable psychologique, certes. L'annonce de cette décision –c'est une promesse gouvernementale de l'Alliance du Changement – va rendre le sourire au Mauricien. Je vais vous dire et je vais faire un état des lieux de ceux qui avaient repris notre sourire.

Madame la présidente, en fait, notre pays est plongé dans le malheur ces dernières années. Selon l'édition 2024 du *Happiness Index Report* réalisé par Gallup, les Nations unies, et l'université d'Oxford et qui mesure le bien-être, un rapport dévoilé le 20 mars dernier, nous avons dégringolé de la 52^e à la 70^e place en une année. Au hit-parade de ce classement,

nous nous retrouvons pratiquement au milieu de ce classement qui répertorie le niveau de bonheur de 143 pays. Nous ne sommes pas en si bonne compagnie. Au 69^e rang, on retrouve la République dominicaine – et je n’ai aucun mépris pour ce pays – et à la 73^e place, la Moldavie, juste avant la Russie. Donc, nous sommes à la 70^e place !

En 2021, donc trois ans plus tôt, l’île Maurice occupait le 50^e rang. Donc, le recul est formidable, une façon de le dire. Le recul en termes de bien-être se constate aussi dans le rapport sur le développement humain publié chaque année par le programme des Nations unies pour les développements, le PNUD, comme nous le connaissons. L’édition 2024 classe Maurice au 72^e rang sur 193 pays. En 2018, nous occupions la 65^e place sur 189 pays. L’indice de développement humain tient compte non seulement du revenu, mais aussi des indicateurs comme l’espérance de vie, de l’accès à l’éducation, à la santé, mais aussi du respect des libertés fondamentales dans le pays.

Le respect de la liberté, parlons-en, Madame la présidente, c’est le recul en fait. Le rapport de 2024 de l’institut V-Dem lié au département des sciences politiques de l’université de Gothenburg en Suède place Maurice dans le *Top 10* des États en voie d’autocratisations. L’institut V-Dem n’invente rien. La démocratie à Maurice au niveau des administrations régionales avec les élections renvoyées à plusieurs reprises, la démocratie parlementaire – les collègues ici en savent quelque chose – la liberté d’expression par le muselage de la presse sont des tristes réalités.

Ce déclin, dont je vous parle et qui nous avait repris le sourire, a débuté en 2018, a noté l’institut V-Dem. Puis, pour notre bonheur, un changement de paradigme s’est opéré le fameux 10 novembre. Les résultats des élections ont confirmé que la population souffrait en silence et dans la peur ces dernières années. Tout le monde a parlé de liberté retrouvée et de nouvel espoir. Tout le monde l’a constaté et tout le monde a retrouvé aujourd’hui le sourire avec la perspective de toucher le 14^e mois et une augmentation du pouvoir d’achat et la possibilité d’améliorer les conditions de vie.

Madame la présidente, l’allocation du 14^e mois par le gouvernement de l’Alliance du Changement traduit une promesse en termes de pouvoir d’achat. Il y a certes une polémique autour du plafond de R 50 000. On en a parlé, nous ne voilons pas la face. Ce n’est pas le gouvernement actuel qui l’impose, mais c’est bien l’état des finances publiques qui n’accorde pas de marge de manœuvre et qui dicte ce plafond.

Monsieur le leader de l'opposition, qui a tant parlé tout à l'heure, est parti et j'ai remarqué qu'il fait cela souvent, le moment où il doit écouter ses pairs, très souvent, il n'est pas là. Tout à l'heure, on a vu aussi que le *Chief Whip*, l'autre député, n'est pas là depuis le début. Donc, ce sont des gens qui ne veulent pas voir la vérité.

Nous héritons d'une économie saccagée sauvagement par un gouvernement sortant, irresponsable et pas du tout soucieux de l'avenir de nos enfants. Comme cadeau de départ, l'ancien régime nous laisse, aux jeunes, une dette de R500 000 dès leur naissance. Il est évident que chaque pas de ce nouveau gouvernement est surveillé de près par les agences de notation. Moody's nous a à l'œil. Et les risques d'un *downgrade* sont réels.

Madame la présidente, nous connaissons tous les conséquences d'une baisse de notation sont très fâcheuses. Le taux de rendement sur les obligations à 10 ans, qui sont de référence, va grimper s'il y a un *downgrade* et ça veut dire que le pays devra payer un taux d'intérêt encore plus élevé pour emprunter sur le marché. Ce taux d'intérêt, sur les obligations de 10 ans ont déjà atteint les 4,9% en décembre 2018. Alors, je vous laisse imaginer si en cas de *downgrade* ce taux va augmenter jusqu'à 6% ou 7%. Nous nous souvenons tous de ce qui s'est produit avec la Grèce quand la Grèce n'avait pas réussi à rembourser sa dette, c'était en 2013-14 et qui avait plongé toute l'Union européenne dans une récession.

Cela dit, Madame la présidente, il est clair que Moody's nous a à l'œil et nous sommes suspendus à ce que Moody's va nous dire mais un jour il faudra aussi se poser la question : qui est Moody's ? Nous sommes malheureusement pris dans une logique où ces organisations à but lucratif ont un si grand pouvoir sur la marche de notre économie et d'autres économies des pays en voie de développement. Un jour effectivement il faudra poser la question de savoir qui va noter les agences de notation. Il faudra la poser en alliance avec d'autres pays et mettre en question leur puissance mais, ce n'est pas ici la plateforme aujourd'hui de le faire.

Madame la présidente, il est évident que l'ancien régime a pratiqué la politique, je vais reprendre cette phrase parce que mon collègue tout à l'heure a parlé de la politique de terre brûlée, merci. Il y a une autre expression qui a été utilisée à maintes reprises 'après moi, le déluge'. Cette fameuse expression est prêtée à Louis XV qui voulait faire savoir à ces partisans qu'il se moquait complètement de ce que pourrait faire son dauphin Louis XVI et a été repris par la suite, le plus récemment dans l'histoire contemporaine, par le triste maréchal Mobutu Sese Seko qui à l'époque était le président de la république de Zaïre, à présent la

république de Congo. Fervent admirateur de Machiavel, après 32 ans de règne brutal et une fuite honteuse de son pays en 1997, il avait effectivement laissé un pays en ruine comme vient de le faire le gouvernement sortant. Sans faire de comparaison avec le Zaïre de l'époque et Mobutu Sese Seko, le Premier ministre sortant et sa bande organisée de pilliers ont laissé nos finances publiques en lambeaux et cela nous mènera peut-être aux Fonds monétaire international. Je n'aime pas cette perspective. Je sais que la discipline fiscale et budgétaire s'impose et c'est cela qui va plaire à nos bailleurs de fonds y compris nos pays amis.

Madame la présidente, le gouvernement a fait le choix difficile de demander aux hauts salaires de faire un sacrifice. C'est le prix à payer pour sortir de l'ornière, pour éviter un *downgrade* de la fameuse note de Moody's et pour accéder auprès du FMI. Espérons que si nous allons au FMI les conditions des emprunts seront les plus avantageuses pour nous mais nous savons qu'une fois qu'on entre au FMI ça devient très difficile d'en sortir. Pour la suite, Madame la présidente, nous attendons la publication du programme gouvernemental qui donnera les orientations de la politique économique et financière pour ces prochaines années et là nous y verrons, nous y commenterons en place et lieu. Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. I should have said to hon. Mr Parapen as well; I think they were both doing maiden speeches which I think is a very sexist term.

(Interruptions)

I am joking. I am joking. But you will surely get other possibilities as you just mentioned *l'indice de bonheur et tout ça ; même ça il faut se poser une question. Alors, on va peut-être, sur ces indices-là, se lever et peut être aller se détendre un peu. Une heure et demie ? One and a half hour for dinner? I would have said one hour, but maybe un petit peu plus d'une heure, on va dire. On coupe la poire en deux : one hour and 15 minutes.*

At 7.27 p.m. the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.46 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated. We reached the quorum so we can start. Hon. Dr. Aumeer !

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Merci, Madame la présidente, de me donner l'occasion de participer à ce débat sur un projet de loi qui est la toute première pour cette session parlementaire.

Je dois tout d'abord féliciter le gouvernement pour sa très grande victoire indiscutable aux dernières élections législatives, elle-même synonyme du sentiment et de la volonté de la population, et je me rappelle bien d'un mot qui s'était servi souvent pendant la session parlementaire de ces cinq dernières années, le mot « claque ». Il se disait souvent par l'ancien Premier ministre, et cette victoire, le résultat et l'ampleur de cette victoire est une claque magistrale au style d'autocrate qu'avaient pratiqué l'ancien Premier ministre et son gouvernement. Donc, un mandat clair et sans équivoque à l'alliance du changement pour redéfinir le destin de ce pays.

Je voudrais aussi vous féliciter pour votre élection à la présidence de cette chambre et pour cette bouffée d'air frais que vous apportez après cinq longues années très chaotiques et tumultueuses que personnellement moi-même et plusieurs ont vécues dans cette chambre. J'en suis sûr, que sous votre présidence, cette auguste assemblée retrouvera ses lettres de noblesse tant attendues, qu'on appelle le temps de la démocratie.

Madame la présidente, ce projet de loi qui nous est présenté se revient dans un contexte extrêmement difficile, voire même très compliqué et difficile, surtout que le gouvernement est confronté à des réalités économiques implacables. Personne dans cette chambre n'aurait imaginé l'état précaire de notre économie, à quel point elle a été mal gérée, avec d'énormes dettes dans plusieurs secteurs clés de notre économie, et réduit à presque nul la marge de manœuvre pour honorer les promesses électorales que nous avons promises à la population. Mais ce gouvernement va honorer ses promesses, quitte à faire des ajustements difficiles et douloureux pour certains. Il va falloir que nous contribuions tous ensemble à relever ces pays dans un élan patriotique, et je peux vous assurer à tous qui nous écoutent ici et ailleurs que le meilleur est arrivé.

Madame la présidente, les chiffres ne mentent pas, les caisses sont vides, les engagements électoraux se heurtent aux limites budgétaires, comme l'a si bien dit un éditorialiste récemment. Récemment, tout à l'heure, le leader de l'opposition avait fait référence au fait que c'était le Premier ministre d'avant qui avait proposé le 14^e mois et le Premier ministre actuel, j'avais bien dit pendant la campagne électorale, c'est nous qui allons la payer. Mais autant, comme dirait le lambda mauricien, le Premier ministre d'alors et son gouvernement auraient promis tout ce qu'ils pouvaient.

Et avec un certain sens de l'humour, certains disaient même 'les contraventions de rue seront gratuites' parce qu'ils allaient nous proposer et allaient dire pour appâter et gagner les élections, il fallait tout donner, voir même sinon aller vers une faillite économique.

L'état de l'économie comme l'a présenté le Premier ministre mardi dernier, est une indication à quel point les chiffres ont été manipulés par l'ex ministre des Finances pour créer un mirage de boom économique. A un certain temps, ils parlaient d'un budget de trillion. Bien sûr, ils rêvaient, mais en réalité un fiasco total qui nous aurait emmené tout droit à la faillite tel que le Sri Lanka ou d'autres pays comme la Grèce.

Madame la présidente, des chiffres qui font peur, une dette publique de R 238 milliards en 2014 pour arriver à R 559 milliards en 2024. Donc, il n'y a aucun doute que l'affaire économique a été très mal géré, mais en sus de cela, il y a une partie de cette dette qui a été dû au paiement aux clients de l'ex BAI, le Betamax, le Neotown. Et la philosophie de l'ancien gouvernement été basée sur la vendetta politique. Une vengeance à la sueur du peuple, et en juin de cette année, 83% de notre PIB, nos produits bruts et en décembre 2014, n'étaient qu'à 59%. 83% cette année, 59% en 2014, et vous dites la comparaison est claire. Il n'y a pas de photo.

Une croissance économique à seulement 5.1% qui a été gonflée à 7%, une dévaluation persistante et fulgurante de notre monnaie mauricienne vis-à-vis du dollar, dépréciation vertigineuse de 5% annuellement de 2020 à 2024, et quand on regarde les chiffres de décembre 2014 à novembre 2024, 46% de notre roupie a été dévaluée en comparaison au dollar. Le faible taux d'investissement de l'étranger, un déficit budgétaire de 5.7% qui nous a été annoncé, qu'on a pu revoir maintenant, mais qui au lieu de 3.9%, un chiffre imaginaire et qui a été dit dans les budgets *ad nauseam* pendant les trois dernières années. Un déficit de R 38 milliards, c'est ce que ce nouveau gouvernement va devoir trouver pour combler le fossé pour faire des paiements et honorer les ajustements salariaux.

La faillite du CSG, un déficit de R 9 milliards à prévoir cette année. Ceux qui ont été dans cette Chambre pour la dernière session vont se rappeler d'une question parlementaire, quand le ministre des Finances, implacablement, sans aucune gêne, nous disait que le coffre de la CSG était vide. Les dettes des entreprises publiques –

- Le *Metro Express* se taille la part du lion, R 15 milliards ;
- Le *National Property Fund*, R 9 milliards ;

- Le *New Social Living Development*, R 1 milliard ;
- La CEB, R 6.8 milliards ;
- Le *State Trading Corporation*, R 970 millions, et
- l'avance qu'on a fait à *Air Mauritius* est encore plus grandissante.

Les deals de la MIC qui sont mal structurés, Menlo park qu'on vient de découvrir qui bénéficie de R 50 millions décaissés en 24 heures et clairement avec la bénédiction de l'ex-gouverneur centrale de la Banque de Maurice, qui rappelons-nous, va retourner sur un différent tapis rouge à son arrivée à l'aéroport dans les jours qui viennent. R 250 millions étaient en attente pour être décaissés. Heureusement, nous avons un nouveau gouverneur à la Banque de Maurice et des gens responsables tel que le Premier ministre et le *Deputy Prime Minister* pour empêcher ce genre de folies.

Augmentation des prix des commodités de 10, et je dis de 10%, à 110% depuis 2014. Cela ne vous fait pas peur ? Moi j'en ai les frissons. Heureusement, comme le disait beaucoup, il y a un Dieu pour ce pays, et aujourd'hui ce gouvernement, avec le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam à la tête et ministre de Finances, largement félicité par le peuple, va redresser la barre dans le temps qu'il faut et en tant que gouvernement responsable, ne va nullement mener ce pays à la dérive.

Madame la présidente, ce que je viens d'expliquer et ce que je viens d'énumérer explique pourquoi l'octroi du 14^{ème} mois a été réservé aux revenus plafonnés à R 50 000. Une décision – j'en suis sûr – très difficile, mais il y a quand même une considération spéciale aux plus vulnérables de notre société dans n'importe quel fragment qu'il soit loti.

Madame la présidente, aujourd'hui mon intervention portera sur le projet de loi '*The Special Allowance Bill, No. XX* de 2024 dont l'essentiel concerne le paiement du 14^{ème} mois, et qui a été qualifié d'un paiement unique d'une allocation spéciale pour l'année 2024 aux employés percevant un salaire de base mensuel ne dépassant pas R 50 000. Il ne faut pas oublier que ce paiement forme parti d'un *package*, d'un ensemble qui comprenne non seulement le 14^{ème} mois, mais aussi la compensation salariale, les salariés, la baisse du prix de l'essence et du diesel.

Madame la présidente, je vais couper court aux principaux points de discorde, si tant est que je puisse m'y référer en tant que tel, car il y a eu plusieurs débats, beaucoup de débats, des conférences de presse, dans la presse et dans le public en général au cours de la semaine

écoulée. Qui sont ceux qui bénéficieront du paiement unique d'une allocation spéciale susmentionnée ?

Madame la présidente, je prends la parole aujourd'hui en tant que député d'arrière banc, ce qu'on appelle *backbencher*, mais qui est assis à l'avant-garde. Mon travail consiste à remettre en question et à pousser le gouvernement sur des questions qui touchent l'ensemble de la population. Bon nombre des électeurs et de la population générale, en particulier ceux qui sont des travailleurs autonomes, m'ont demandé pourquoi ce paiement unique ne leur avait pas été accordé. Je crois qu'il est sensé de ma part d'aborder le sujet. Nous nous sommes engagés tout au long de la dernière campagne électorale à ce qu'une fois élu, nous payons la dite indemnité spéciale à tous les travailleurs du pays. Et je dois souligner ici que par les travailleurs, j'entends l'ensemble de la classe ouvrière, c'est-à-dire un travailleur tel que défini dans le *Workers Rights Act 2019*. Il est toutefois regrettable que tous les travailleurs d'aujourd'hui à Maurice ne pourront pas et nous ne sommes pas en mesure de bénéficier d'une telle allocation spéciale, d'autant plus que cela leur aurait certainement aidé à leurs dépenses de fin d'année et peut-être offert un moment spécial une fois dans l'année. Mais, la réalité des caisses de l'Etat est très différente pour ne pas dire alarmante, ce qu'on appelle comme l'a dit le *Deputy Prime Minister* – '*economic mess*'.

Notre proposition à l'époque était une proposition faite en tout bon sens et était basée dans une large mesure sur ce que le gouvernement sortant avait proposée. Oui, nous avons dit que nous allons faire la même. Nous pensions sérieusement à cette époque que les caisses de l'Etat auraient été en mesure de 14 mois à tous les mauriciens. Mais, un mois plus tard, tout ce que je peux dire c'est que les comptes du gouvernement n'étaient pas – il est parti – entre les mains des personnes responsables et honnêtes envers la population et en qui, on ne peut jamais et jamais leur faire confiance encore. Comme l'a bien dit une fois le Premier ministre, il faut les mettre dans la poubelle de l'histoire.

Je me demande comment en écoutant toutes les discussions qui se sont écoulées pendant ces derniers jours, comment l'ancien gouvernement sortant de l'époque aurait financé ce 14^{ème} mois. C'était une réflexion que je me suis faite et j'ai conclu que l'astuce de l'ex-argentier était d'imprimer la roupie, augmenter son offre d'un système qui a détruit sa valeur et la dépréciation de la roupie.

C'est pourquoi que je dirais que c'était un gouvernement non seulement irresponsable, mais qui n'avait pas à cœur l'intérêt de ce pays, plus les enfants et les petits enfants qui vont venir.

Madame la présidente, pourtant, nous ne sommes pas revenus sur notre promesse. Nous avons fait ce que nous avons pu. Nous n'avons pas trompé la population qui, non seulement, nous a donné un mandat clair pour gérer, mais aussi pour le remettre sur les rails. Et pour cela, Madame la présidente, nous devons être responsables. Ce que nous faisons, nous demandons la solidarité de tous les Mauriciens, car cette solidarité est requise. L'avenir de nos enfants et de la future génération qui doivent être sécurisés, et non pas hypothéqués par des actions que nous regretterons à long terme. Heureusement, ils ne sont plus au pouvoir.

Madame la présidente, donc, après avoir examiné le projet de loi, je dois dire qu'il est louable qu'une très grande partie de la population bénéficie de cette allocation spéciale, quatorzième mois. Mais je voudrais quand même faire une petite proposition qui concerne principalement ceux qui sont indépendants, ce qu'on appelle les *self-employed*. Le gouvernement pourrait peut-être un jour, dans les mois à venir, on ne sait pas quand, considérer à examiner la possibilité d'un paiement unique d'un montant fixe aux travailleurs indépendants qui ont un revenu de pas plus de R 50 000 et qui ne ferait qu'à combler le fossé entre ceux qui ont bénéficié de l'allocation et ceux qui en sont indépendants. Mais ce n'est qu'une proposition. L'état de la caisse mauricienne, l'état de nos affaires ne sont pas à leur mieux, et peut-être, cette proposition, telle que je la fais, démontre que nous avons à cœur et que nous considérons les appels de tout un chacun qui se dit travailleur dans ce pays.

Madame la présidente, je dis cela parce que je note d'après l'alinéa, section 3, sous-section (5) (b) du projet de loi sur les allocations spéciales qu'il existe une autre possibilité pour un employeur et son employé de convenir que l'allocation spéciale sera payée et versée en quatre versements jusqu'à mars 2025. Il y a peut-être suffisamment de réconfort, à mon humble avis, pour qu'une telle proposition soit explorée et considérée en temps et lieu. Ce que nous ne voulons pas, c'est que cette population, qui nous a voté et nous a donné une si grande victoire, ait l'impression d'avoir été lésée, mais plutôt, qu'elle voie et ressente l'effort de ce gouvernement. Malgré la très mauvaise gestion des fonds publics par le MSM sortant, on a fait ce qu'on pouvait faire. Pour dire, on a fait le minimum, pour ne pas dire le maximum.

Madame la présidente, je félicite donc l'auteur de ce projet de loi, mais je souhaite sincèrement que ceux qui ont malheureusement été laissés sur la touche, ou peut-être un peu coincés par l'état de notre économie, en particulier les travailleurs autonomes, à sentir que le gouvernement est toujours et sera toujours à leurs côtés, et a leurs intérêts à cœur, d'où ma proposition précédente.

Madame la présidente, il y a aussi un autre facteur qui aurait peut-être échappé à l'attention de beaucoup. Qu'en est-il des travailleurs indépendants qui ont des employés à temps plein sous leur responsabilité ? Ils ne bénéficient certainement pas de cette allocation spéciale, mais ils doivent s'occuper des employés qui reçoivent R 50 000 du moins. Un budget additionnel qu'ils n'attendaient pas. Mais dans un élan de solidarité, dans un élan de mettre ce pays sur les rails économiques - ce dont on a besoin - avec des chiffres catastrophiques que le Premier ministre nous avait présentés, *the state of the economy*, peut-être qu'il y a certainement lieu pour ces deux catégories de personnes d'aider, à leur propre façon, ce pays à sortir de ce marasme économique.

Madame la présidente, j'ai fait part de mes points de vue et de mes suggestions à la Chambre et j'espère sincèrement qu'ils seront pris en considération ou au moins qu'ils feront l'objet d'une réflexion. Il aurait été évidemment préférable et idéal que l'allocation spéciale soit versée à tous les travailleurs de ce pays sans distinction, mais en tant que gouvernement responsable, le maximum des maximums a été fait.

Madame la présidente, des agences internationales telles que le FMI, la Banque mondiale et surtout l'évaluation de notre performance économique par Moody's sont des observateurs très importants. Comment l'exécutif va gérer l'économie dont la marge de manœuvre est presque nulle ou très limitée, et c'est pourquoi nous devons être responsables et avoir l'intérêt à long terme de ce pays dans notre prise de décision à court terme.

Pour conclure, je reprends cette phrase de François Mitterrand à l'annonce de sa victoire présidentielle en 1981 : « Enfin, les ennuis commencent. » Mais à la tête avec quelqu'un comme Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, le Premier ministre, je suis sûr qu'il mènera le bateau à bon port.

Merci.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Ameer Meea!

(9.07 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry, SME and Cooperatives (Mr A. Ameer Meea): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It feels good to stand up and to make my speech because we have been sitting down for almost three years.

Madam Speaker, it is with great sense of honour that I rise, today, in this august Assembly in support of the Special Allowance Bill which has a commendable objective to provide a one-off payment for a special allowance for the year 2024 to eligible employees in the Republic of Mauritius drawing a basic wage or salary not exceeding Rs50,000.

At the outset, allow me to mention that the Special Allowance Bill stands as a powerful testament to the commitment of the newly elected Government to uplift the working class who is a driving force behind the economic progress of the country. Indeed, it is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to providing a lifeline to all those who have been confronted to significant hikes in their cost of living over the last years, which have impacted on their quality of life.

It is a promise made and a promise kept. Even though some may argue, not completely, but partially. However, one has to keep in mind that Government is navigating through extremely challenging economic conditions as a ticking time bomb, if I may say, left by the former political regime.

In reply to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition stated during his intervention, that we won the general elections because of our promise of the 14th month salary bonus, *Madame la présidente, laissez-moi l'administrer une petite dose de rappel. Donc, l'honorable leader de l'opposition disait que les chiffres préparés dans le state of the economy ne sont pas bons. Les statistiques et les analyses faites par le leader de l'opposition, savez-vous par qui s'étaient préparées à l'époque ? C'était préparé par Pulse Analytics. Ce même Pulse Analytics qui leur donnait gagnant pour les élections générales. Ils ont été balayés 60-0, Madame la présidente ! Balayé !*

Ce même Pulse Analytics nous a coûté - notre argent, l'argent du public -plus d'un million de dollars, c'est-à-dire, R 47 millions of public funds. Ils auront des comptes à rendre. Ils auront bientôt des comptes à rendre ! Plus de R 250 millions qui ont été committed to them. Une firme soi-disant professionnelle, une firme soi-disant indépendante !

On est en 2024 ; avoir à faire avec des voyous qui essayaient d'influencer le vote des élections, et leur donner gagnant, et voilà le résultat !

Il nous a dit qu'on a gagné les élections par rapport au quatorzième mois. Je vais lui dire pourquoi ils ont perdu les élections, Madame la présidente. Pour commencer, il y a eu un *mismanagement of public funds*. Il y a eu un crime économique, comme l'a si bien dit le *Deputy Prime Minister*. Par rapport à la corruption, par rapport au népotisme, qu'est-ce qu'on n'a pas vu à la *State Bank* ? Qu'est-ce qu'on n'a pas vu à la *Silver Bank* ? On a pris des milliards à la municipalité de Port Louis et à toutes les municipalités.

On a pris des milliards dans les District Council. Aujourd'hui, le gouverneur de la banque nous dit il y a R 8.4 milliards qu'on ne va peut-être pas recouvrir. *Bad debt and doubtful debts* – R 8.4 milliards et par rapport à la *State Bank*, trois ans de cela, je faisais ce discours ici même, R 12 milliards ont été *write-off*, R 12 milliards.

Vous savez autrefois la *State Bank*, c'était un joyau de la couronne pour le gouvernement, une banque qui faisait par milliards de profits, une banque cotée en bourse, qui gagnait des prêts sur l'Afrique par rapport à la performance. Aujourd'hui, la *State Bank* avec des nominations politiques, des gens incompetents, j'ai dit ça plusieurs fois et il faut le répéter. On a prêté de l'argent avec quelqu'un, le lendemain il a fait faillite. Un Indien basé à Dubaï, il emprunte de l'argent, où aurait-il dû emprunter ? Soit Dubaï ou bien en Inde. Il vient d'emprunter de l'argent à l'île Maurice, avec la *State Bank* et le lendemain, il fait faillite. R 12 milliards qui auraient dû être versées en termes de dividendes dans la caisse de l'État et indirectement, des fonds publics.

Ils ont perdu les élections par rapport au coût de la vie, *rising cost of living*. Ils ont perdu les élections parce qu'ils ont fait du business durant le Covid. Comment un ministre qui avait fait des *unsolicited bid* pour acheter des respirateurs, des médicaments passés de R 9 à R 99 ? Ils ont perdu les élections parce qu'ils ont violé la démocratie ! Ici même, qu'est-ce que nous n'avons pas fait ici dans ce temple de la démocratie ? Un voyou assis où vous vous êtes installée maintenant, Madame la présidente. Un *bouncer* qui nous empêchait nuit et jour de faire notre travail, humiliant les députés de l'opposition. C'est pour cela qu'ils ont été bottés hors du pouvoir. Ils ont aussi perdu le pouvoir par rapport à l'environnement quand on se rappelle ce qui s'est passé par rapport à Wakashio.

Madame la présidente, les pouvoirs, les rênes du pouvoir étaient *hijacked*. *Hijacked* ! Les rênes de pouvoirs n'étaient pas dans la main du Premier ministre, les rênes du pouvoir se trouvaient dans la cuisine et c'est la cuisinière elle-même qui donnait des ordres. C'est la cuisinière qui donnait des ordres – *right, left and centre* – qui il fallait recruter, qui il fallait mettre dehors baser par leur religion, leur caste, leur communauté. C'est une honte pour l'île Maurice. Ils disent que nous avons gagné les élections par rapport aux promesses de 14^{ème} mois, ils ont perdu les élections par rapport à tout ce que je suis en train de dire.

Tous les institutions, Madame la présidente, tous les institutions, à commencer par la police, l'ICTA, l'IBA, FIU, MRA, je peux nommer toute une liste des institutions qui ont été pourries. L'indépendance des institutions ont été tous contrôlés, pas par le gouvernement, même pas par le gouvernement, même pas par le conseil des ministres mais par la cuisine. C'est la cuisine qui contrôlait tous les institutions qui auraient dû être des institutions publiques. La banque de Maurice, une institution prestigieuse, qui aurait dû faire la fierté de notre pays. La banque de Maurice était contrôlée par la cuisine et ses complices, Madame la présidente et par rapport à la MIC, donc je disais précédemment tout l'argent qui a été déboursé par la MIC et ils osent dire que nous sommes contrôlés par le secteur privé. Allez voir la liste des bénéficiaires de la MIC. La liste des bénéficiaires de la MIC, qui a bénéficié de ça ? C'est le secteur privé. Il fallait donner de l'argent pour sortir du Covid mais ne nous accusons pas que nous sommes à la solde du secteur privé quand c'est ce que vous avez fait avec la MIC.

Et en dernier lieu, par rapport à pourquoi ils ont perdu les élections, quand ils ont coupé les réseaux sociaux. Quand ils ont coupé les réseaux sociaux dans un pays comme l'île Maurice, les jeunes se sont manifestés et ils se sont sortis pour aller voter massivement notre alliance, c'est une des raisons encore pourquoi ils ont perdu les élections. Donc, c'est un peu dommage mais quand même que le leader de l'opposition n'est pas là mais je vois que son ex partenaire est là. Donc, ils prennent le relais parce que je crois qu'ils se sont fâchés après les élections. Donc quand un est là, l'autre n'est pas là, donc...

Mr Assirvaden : *Ex-partner !*

Mr Ameer Meea: Ex-partner. Donc, Madame la présidente, *let me now comeback to the Bill*, mais il fallait répondre à tout ce que le leader de l'opposition avait dit, j'aurais mis mes lunettes.

Donc, as I said, it was a promise and we kept that promise. Madam Speaker, the daunting trials confronting our economy today are manifold and intimidating. Real GDP growth has been revised down by 25.1% for 2024, reflecting a slower than expected recovery. Inflation while on downward trajectory remains a lingering burden on households with prices of essential goods still elevated. Public Sector Debt has surged to 83.4 % of GDP as at June of 2024, pushing our fiscal space to its limit.

Sadly, I can only echo the words of our hon. Prime Minister who described such a shocking state of affairs as a voodoo economic situation hardly seen anywhere else in the world. Behind these figures, lie stories of businesses grappling with rising cost and households struggling to make ends meet. Our labour market faces acute skills mismatches and unemployment while declining and leaves too many youth and women without meaningful opportunities. The ripple effects of these economic conditions are felt mostly and acutely by our small and medium enterprises and the manufacturing sector, the backbone of our economy since it relates to my Ministry, please allow me to dwell a few minutes on this.

Madam Speaker, faced with this devastating situation, we had no alternative other than to implement the payment of the 14 month bonus in a targeted manner. Such a course of action has been a difficult decision but was essential to ensure the long term sustainability of our public finances and mitigates the looming risk of an economic downturn.

Madam Speaker, this Government had a choice to make and we opted for fiscal responsibility along with macro-economic stability and as such, we choose to safeguard the economic well-being of our nation and lay the foundation for future growth and prosperity in the years to come. I have obviously a special thought for all those hardworking employees who, in one way or the other, do not qualify for the 14th month bonus at this point in time For them, my message is that Government is fervidly aware that this situation could resonate as being unpalatable, one to some extent but rest assured we remain committed to finding ways to support all workers so that in the end, everyone can emerge as winners.

Madame la présidente, à ce moment précis, il est convenant de dire que Rome ne s'est pas construite en un jour. The sacrifices made today will be remembered and they will definitely yield dividends in the future as we move along the process of strengthening our economic architecture.

Madam Speaker, the provision of this Bill designed to introduce a one-off special allowance commonly referred as 14 month allowance to employees earning a basic salary wage or not exceeding Rs50,000 stands as a testament of this Government's unwavering dedication to safeguarding the welfare of our workers. This endeavor is particularly poignant as we contend with an economy left in a precarious and fragile state by the previous administration.

Madam Speaker, Clause 8 of the Bill which amends the Income Tax Act to facilitate financial assistant for employers in specific category is a masterstroke in balancing the dual objective of workforce welfare and enterprise sustainability. Under this provision, SMEs and Export Enterprises as well as other prescribed categories of businesses can claim financial assistance equivalent to the special allowance paid to the employees if they meet certain conditions. These include businesses operating at a loss or substantial profit reduction.

Employers who incurred accounting losses for the year of assessment 2023-24 or whose profit will be reduced by 50% due to the combined effect of additional remuneration, minimum wage increases and special allowance are eligible for full reimbursement of the allowance. Also, in terms of moderate profit reduction for enterprises bad experience a profit reduction of over 10%, the Bill allows for partial reimbursement equivalent to 50% of the special allowance paid to eligible employees and to streamline the application process, the mechanism for applying these reimbursements through an electronic system managed by the Director General of the MRA reflects a pragmatic and efficient approach ensuring businesses can access this support without undue administrative burdens.

Madam Speaker, these provisions are vital life lines for SMEs which are often more vulnerable to cash flow constraints and economic fluctuations. The Bill thus ensures that the commendable goal of providing financial relief to employees does not come at the cost of the survival of businesses. Madam Speaker, SMEs are not merely contributors to our GDP, they are the cornerstone of employment generation, innovation and regional economic stability. The Bill recognises the pivotal role by enabling them to sustain operations even while fulfilling their obligation under the Special Allowance provisions. The inclusion of SMEs in the eligibility criteria for financial assistance is especially significant.

By doing so, the Bill not only supports individual enterprises but also strengthens a broader ecosystem of entrepreneurship and corporative development which is essential for fostering exclusive growth. Madam Speaker, let me quickly say a few words on the

manufacturing industry and particularly the export-oriented segment which are having to manoeuvre in a complex and difficult trading landscape and if I may add, compounded with a discerning future outlook.

Without bold and decisive actions, this strenuous situation threatens to worsen. However, I can assure the House that at the level of my Ministry, my officers are already working on finding tangible solutions to bring about a major transformation in the overall industrial development process.

At this point in time, I have to acknowledge that the Bill's requirement for a one-time payment of 14th month allowance could create an unexpected strain on the financial resources especially for enterprises with a large workforce. Nonetheless, I note with satisfaction that the Special Allowance Bill at Clause 8 as I said earlier has provisioned for the payment of special allowance to assist eligible export oriented enterprises with the payment of 14th month bonus. Indeed, this assistance will provide the much needed lifeline to our export operators who are in financial distress to meet the cost associated with this exceptional social measure.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, I wish to convey a message to our industry operators that this Government will stand by their side to support them in these difficult moments to ensure their long term viability. Madam Speaker, now I will conclude because time is really running off. As I conclude my intervention, let me reiterate that this Special Allowance Bill being introduced in Parliament today is more than just a simple policy measure. It is a promise kept to the nation and a clear signal that this new Government means business as we walk the talk. The payment of the 14th month bonus is a first in the history of Mauritius and this Government will always be remembered for this bold initiative.

Madam Speaker, the destiny of our country is being rewritten. A new chapter of economic prosperity awaits us. As a true patriot, it is with immense pride that I rise today in full support of this landmark Bill. I am done. Thank you.

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

Dr. Boolell: Madam Speaker, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 20 December 2024 at 3.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 9.27 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 20 December 2024 at 3.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MYSTIK FESTIVAL CONCERT – CANCELLATION REASONS

(No. 1 B/53) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the cancellation of the Mystik Festival Musical Concert which was scheduled for Saturday 07 December 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the reasons for overturning the prior approval granted for the holding of the concert.

(Withdrawn)

**ALLEGED TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS – COMMISSION OF
INQUIRY – UPDATE**

(No. 1 B/54) Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Cabinet decision dated 25 October 2024 for arrangements to be made for the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry to inquire into and report on the alleged misuse of telecommunications infrastructure and the publications and/or broadcast of alleged telephone conversations on social media and other platforms, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

DRIVING INSTRUCTOR'S LICENCE – APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

(No. 1 B/91) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to Driving Instructor's Licence granted in June 2024, he will state the number of applications received therefor, indicating the number of –

- (a) successful candidates thereof, and
- (b) licences not yet granted as at date, indicating the reasons therefor, if any.

(Withdrawn)

**TAMARIN, LA PRENEUSE & BLACK RIVER – BYPASS PROJECT –
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

(No. I B/92) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the villages of Tamarin, La Preneuse and Black River, he will state if his Ministry is in presence of any project for the construction of a bypass in the region of Yemen to alleviate the heavy traffic thereat, indicating if a feasibility study has already been carried out in that regard.

(Withdrawn)