



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 20 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 Ramtohul	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Lutchmanah Pentiah	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Ranjiv Wochit, OSK	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Mahendra Gondeea, OSK	Minister of Arts and Culture

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 05 of 2024

Sitting of Friday 20 December 2024

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 3.00 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Wastewater Management Authority for the year ended 30 June 2023.

B. Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Research

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Open University of Mauritius for the year ended 30 June 2023.

C. Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

The Annual Report 2023 of the Data Protection Office.

D. Ministry of Local Government

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Pamplemousses for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin–Rose Hill for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)
- (c) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Rivière de Rempart for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)

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.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

(3.03 p.m.)

**COVID-19 – DIALYSIS PATIENTS' DEATHS – FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE
REPORT**

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Mr A. K. Bachoo): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement pertaining to rendering public the Fact-Finding Committee Report in regard to the deaths of dialysis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madam Speaker, as I informed the House and replied to PQ I B/18 and I B/24 during the Sitting of the National Assembly held on Tuesday 10 December 2024, the Fact-Finding Committee Report contains sensitive, personal, and medical information; thus prior consent from the family of the deceased is mandatory for the document to be released in the public domain. My Ministry has now secured their consent, accordingly.

Madam Speaker, with your kind permission, I am thus tabling a copy of the Fact-Finding Committee Report. At the same time, in a spirit of transparency, I am also tabling a copy of the report of enquiries carried out by the Medical Negligence Standing Committee.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister!

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE SPECIAL ALLOWANCE BILL

(NO. XX OF 2024)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Special Allowance Bill (No. XX of 2024).

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister, you have the floor.

(3.04 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, congratulations are in order. First to the MPs who have delivered their maiden speech, and then to the Minister of Labour who has moved two very important bills; bills of great significance. The Special Allowance, and amendment brought to the Employment Relations Act are legislations of common bondage. But, of course, as expected, we could have done more but the circumstances certainly are not conducive. The nation is paying the price of serious mismanagement of the economy. The real macro-economic figures are shocking.

Today, we are honouring an electoral commitment with an act of faith and responsibility. It is good to remind ourselves what these commitments were. A one-off allowance and a salary adjustment wrapped in a package with a reduction of Rs5 on a litre of Mogas and Gasoil.

Secondly, a monthly basic salary of up to Rs50,000 to be paid in two instalments unless, as stated by the Minister of Labour, there is an agreement or compromise between employees and employers to be paid in four instalments. Pensioners have been paid and are being paid. As of now, payment of 14th month bonus to beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pensions; the payment bonus to beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pensions, Basic Widow's Pension, Basic Invalid's Pension, Basic Orphan's Pension, Carer's Allowance, Child's Allowance and other benefits have been effected by banks on 17 December 2024 to as many as 275 beneficiaries for an amount of more than Rs4.2 billion. Payments at the Post Office have been effected to more than 17,000 for an amount of more than Rs270 m., and against this backdrop, no employee earning up to Rs50,000 will be left behind. The amendment to the Employment Relations Act has corrected an anomaly with respect to wage adjustment of employees in any industry or sector of activity not covered by the remuneration regulations.

Madam Speaker, we are conveying right signals to another party, that is, the employers. Those who have the capacity to pay should pay. The distressed micro, small and medium enterprises with a turnover of Rs100 m. will be given financial support. But it is true also to say that big companies are overwhelmingly privileged from giveaway of the Mauritius Investment Corporation to massive exemption on land conversion tax, it's a jingle bell all the way. But I have to say many big companies have honoured and are honouring their obligations towards all employees.

But today, employees they are paying for the largesse and fraudulent practices of the decadent regime and I will refer to the case of the brother-in-law, winner of a trifecta loan from SBM and MIC, Rs1.1 billion, money which most likely has been washed, rinsed, spin-dried in many accounts in Dubai. I hope he will honour his obligation towards his employees. It is too easy to talk of debt or inability to find a buyer of his properties; I have in mind his hotels. But those who committed financial crime should not get away, they should be on trial before a special tribunal, call it the FCC or Serious Fraud Office, it has to start the investigation. The Attorney General, of course, is watchful and mindful.

Madam Speaker, the political arm of the executive should not have been hold of the National Wage Consultative Council or NRB. May I remind the House that the former Minister of Finance exercised undue influence on the Chairman of the National Wage Consultative Council.

Economic consequences over the least concerned, they almost provoked a descent into social chaos, but the pen is mightier than the sword and people voted massively to give L'Alliance du Changement a clear mandate; a mandate to be bold and to take effective measures. And, I say hats off to one of the fiery brand trade unionist, Mr Tengur, then member of the National Wages Consultative Committee, who stood up to the Chairman. The latter was a stooge of the former Minister of Finance.

Former Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, and his Minister of Finance have dismally failed to understand that they were mere tenants and not owners of government or Government House. National Wages Consultative Committee must have the freedom to act independently. Wages have to be linked with productivity. Madam Speaker, no one owes us a living and we have to be competitive. Even reliable partners of the international front, of course, they put their interest first. Yet, there are times, we have to punch above our way vis-à-vis the international partners to convey the right signals.

Government, I am sure, would give due consideration to bring an amendment in the Finance Bill to give the National Wages Consultative Committee its legal entity. As a responsible government, we shall remain at arm's length from the NRB or National Wages Consultative Committee.

Madam Speaker, we do not neglect a partner; we do not neglect a reliable movement which contributes to socio-economic development. Though there was no tripartite, the Trade Union movement was privileged by the former Prime Minister to an impromptu tripartite meeting. We gave figures for wages adjustment arising from national minimum wage to all those in private sector not governed by the Remuneration Regulation.

Let me focus on specific issue relating to this Special Allowance Bill. Of course, any government, especially this government, which has a clear mandate, would have liked to go the full hog but we had to act responsibly. All measures have to be taken to redress the economy, to have a stable rupee which would give every citizen of the Republic a dignified purchasing power. If expenditure does not rain in, we will all fall of the cliff. For short-term pain, there will be long-term gain and I am confident that by the end of our mandate, we will create a fiscal space to put hard earned cash in the hands of the employees.

2024, Madam Speaker, it is game over. When the people so decide neither fake news nor manipulation of poll survey or money politics would have altered the course of history. This is history in the making. The Prime Minister is writing a new chapter on a conciliation of social and economic justice. Shortly, after the swearing-in of the Cabinet, he gave us an insight into the gravity of the economic situation.

The Moody's latest report is supportive of the new government's strong will to redress the economic situation. Fiscal consolidation is high on our agenda. Public debt will be reduced; the public sector debt programme will be implemented and it was the Prime Minister, if my memory serves me right, who reminded us that the public sector debt, as a percentage of GDP, was 59 % when the Labour Party left government in 2014. It will be done, it can be done and it will be done in all transparency and accountability.

There is the fear; I mean it's a rational fear that Moody's credit ratings agency may give us a negative output but, is there certainty that Moody's will drop junk status upon us? The uncertainty or certainty is that we do not know but as a credible government, we shall get our act right. Do you know of any country which has been spared by credit ratings agency?

Even countries like France and US have not been spared. On 04 August 2023, Fitch Ratings made headlines by downgrading the credit rating of U.S from AAA to AA+; a move not seen in more than a decade but above all, our credibility is important and the key word is credibility; credibility of institution and governed by example is paramount.

The two Bills are sending the right signals with compliance with what the Prime Minister said when he reported on the state of the economy. We are at war; we are at war against corruption and fraudulent practices. The drug economy is the making of the regime of Pravind Jugnauth and the nexus between the MSM of Pravind Jugnauth and the drug mafia was highlighted in the findings of the Lam Shang Leen Report.

Madam Speaker, the statement made by the Prime Minister on 14 December on the status of the economy was shocking and he was right to say and I reinforce what he said, and I say it that Pravind Jugnauth-led regime was one of spend, squander and steal with a *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* as a curse. As former Leader of Opposition, I moved a Motion of Disallowance to reject the uncalled additional tax called *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. I also condemned forcefully the concerted action of the then regime to provoke the departure of the Chairman of Central Statistics Office. Pressure was even borne upon MCB to stop the quarterly publication of its booklet which focuses on the economy.

No one was surprised, Madam Speaker. That was their habit. And I must say good governance is vital, Madam Speaker. The uncertainty and the unpredictability are looking at us. As a responsible Government, we will turn things round. The Prime Minister will act frontally to ward off threats and we say it loud and clear to all those who want to listen to us, and I know it is the country which is listening to us; we say there will be no U-turn and we will be faithful to what we have preached and delivered to the electorate and to what is clearly spelt out in our electoral manifesto. But, we have to study the shift; good stewardship or else, the cure will be worse than the disease. The two Bills help us to rise with the tide for good tidings. Since 2023, prominent economists have been drawing our attention to the fact that figures given by the regime of the MSM on Budget was misleading and false. Indeed, the findings of the State of the Economy are testimony of truth. The setting up of a Fiscal Consolidation Commission as exists in Jamaica or the Fiscal Consolidation Council as prevails in Ireland is clearly spelt out in our manifesto. The Deputy Prime Minister flagged it but there is a call; there is a call for a new mindset and the nation has to understand that benefits are only accrued through hard work, productivity and savings culture are paramount.

Let me quote feelings expressed by a responsible citizen and he will tell you the vast difference between National Savings Fund, National Pension Fund, his savings fund and *Contribution Sociale Generalisée* – a curse and uncalled tax , and I quote, I will quote from a very respected professional and he had this to say –

“I am well placed to know about National Pensions Fund and National Savings Fund as my employer was the Investment Advisor for 15 years until March 2024. You may wish to note that no Investment Advisor was appointed after the tender in March 2024 and it is unclear who has been making recommendation afterwards. There was also some pressure via invisible hands to invest in Silver Bank deposits. AON Hewitt Ltd however refused to endorse this proposal. Re-launching the National Pensions Fund will definitely be a plus point for private sector employees as employees will directly save for retirement. A higher contribution could now be considered. The local financial market will also benefit from large players like the National Pensions Fund. However, the Government will need to appoint a competent investment committee and a strong investment team. Several current investment committee members lack knowledge of investment. The Government should urgently request for the latest actuarial variation report of the NPF. RisCura was working on this as far as I know, and it has not been published yet.”

I have quoted from a much respected professional, supportive of our policy because our policy conveyed the strong signals, not that we want to return; but return with a hands up policy because this is the call of the people and of the nation, Madam Speaker.

The Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund is another great fund managed by the same investment committee. Not much information has been so far provided on the investment performance, but it will be disclosed.

In 2009, we faced undue hardship. We were the receiving of a financial crisis, but we acted responsibly. The Nobel Laureate for Economics, Mr Stiglitz, described Mauritius as a model of democracy and sound economic policies. Can we compare our Government then and now to those fiddlers and crooks, plunders and looters, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, the package of measures means the legitimacy of the population. We shall become a high income status country. The economy will grow with sound macroeconomic policies, gainful employment and sustainable development. Existing sectors will be consolidated. New sectors will emerge. Circular workforce and import labour remain

a necessity. The two Bills are eye-openers set in such a way to help us remove our country from the financial abyss it is currently in.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

(3.22 p.m.)

Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member of Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): *Thank you, Madam Speaker.* Madame la présidente, laissez-moi avant tout vous féliciter pour votre élection. Laissez-moi aussi féliciter le nouveau gouvernement, le Premier ministre, tous les membres de l'Assemblée nationale élus au gouvernement pour votre victoire éclatante des élections générales.

Une victoire que je dois, moi aussi, être d'accord avec le leader de l'opposition, qui a été grandement attribuée premièrement, bien sûr, à *Missie Moustass*, et deuxièmement, à la promesse de payer un 14^e mois aux Mauriciens, aux employés et aux pensionnaires.

Donc, Madame la présidente, comme vous le savez, le peuple a décidé dans son intelligence de voter pour un gouvernement et de donner une majorité absolue au gouvernement. Le peuple n'a pas voulu d'une opposition réelle à l'Assemblée nationale. Nous sommes malgré nous-mêmes, le leader de l'opposition et moi, les deux seuls députés de l'opposition non élus par le système du *First Past The Post*. Donc, c'est clair que notre rôle à l'Assemblée nationale sera un rôle, on va dire, limité.

Je me contenterais donc de faire des commentaires sur cette nouvelle loi et de donner mon point de vue, aujourd'hui, sur ce projet de loi qui est devant la Chambre. Madame la présidente, le 14^e mois, tout comme le 13^e mois, a toujours été d'une importance capitale pour le PMSD. Nous avons d'ailleurs toujours été ceux à proposer le 14^e mois. Nous avons, comme vous le savez, été derrière le 13^e mois et c'est important pour nous que les Mauriciens puissent bénéficier d'un 14^e mois pour une raison bien particulière.

Comme vous le savez, la compensation salariale a tendance à compenser les employés pour l'inflation, pour l'augmentation du coût de la vie pour l'année suivante, après que le coût de l'inflation ait affecté leur pouvoir d'achat. Alors, qu'au contraire, le paiement d'un 14^e mois a, pour logique, de donner une compensation aux employés pour l'année qui est passée. Voilà la différence entre le paiement d'un 14^e mois et le paiement d'une

augmentation salariale. Le principe que le coût de la vie ait augmenté, que le pouvoir d'achat des employés a diminué, c'est ce principe donc qui anime le besoin de payer un 14^e mois.

Même si le PMSD accueille favorablement le paiement d'un 14^e mois, il demeure incompréhensible, pourquoi ? À en croire les chiffres du ministre, pourquoi 55 000 employés, des milliers de familles ont été laissés complètement en dehors du paiement du 14^e mois ? Parce que si on part du principe que le pouvoir d'achat est affecté et a diminué et qu'il faut le compenser, il faut donc aller voir le pouvoir d'achat des personnes et comment ce pouvoir d'achat a été affecté, et qui est le plus affecté. Bien sûr, nous, nous y pensons et nous l'avions proposé, comme l'a si bien dit le leader de l'opposition, que tous les employés et les pensionnaires méritaient le paiement d'un 14^e mois. D'ailleurs, c'est ce que l'*Alliance Lepep* proposait aux Mauriciens.

D'ailleurs, c'est ce que l'Alliance du Changement proposait, elle aussi, sans donner bien sûr plus de détails. Donc, 55 000 employés qui restent sur la touche. 10 % du *work force* à l'île Maurice se retrouve sans paiement du 14^e mois. Quand on regarde le principe de la baisse du pouvoir d'achat, on se demande, est-ce qu'un père de famille, ayant trois dépendants à sa charge, ne mérite-t-il pas lui, même s'il touche R 55 000, de bénéficier d'un 14^e mois ?

Est-ce que si on croit *the State of the Economy Report* et qu'on voit, par exemple, que le lait en poudre pour bébé - un des items les plus sujets à l'inflation, 69,7% - donc, ce jeune père, père un jeune enfant ou de plusieurs jeunes enfants, ne mérite-t-il pas lui et sa famille de bénéficier d'un 14^e mois ? Et il est encore plus incompréhensible quand on pense à la classe moyenne, qui si par malheur ce père ayant trois dépendants emploie une nounou, une femme de ménage ou quelqu'un à la maison, il se retrouve cette fois-ci à déboursier de son propre bonus de 13^e mois pour payer le 13^e mois et le 14^e mois de ses employés ! Donc, il se retrouve dans une position pire qu'avant ce projet de loi !

Il n'est pas trop tard et je demande au gouvernement de respecter son engagement. 55 000 familles, c'est R 2,7 milliards, dont pour une bonne partie, Madame la présidente, sera payée par le secteur privé. Une bonne partie des compagnies du secteur privé qui ne bénéficiera pas forcément de remboursement sous cette loi et dont une bonne partie aussi est déjà employée par les compagnies qui comptent leur verser le 14^e mois. Donc, il faut les déduire de ces 55 000 employés.

C'est probablement beaucoup moins qu'il faudra déboursier de la poche de l'État pour les payer. Beaucoup moins que R 2.7 milliards, je présume. On ne comprend pas pourquoi nous ne pouvons pas faire un effort pour ces gens. Pour ces gens, comme je le dis, qui non seulement restent sur la touche, mais pour beaucoup d'entre eux, se retrouveront avec un pouvoir d'achat diminué, ayant besoin maintenant de déboursier de leurs poches pour leurs employés de maison.

Madame la présidente, on sait aussi que l'argent qui va être payé des caisses de l'État, une bonne partie, 40%, un peu plus retourne de la caisse de l'État. 15 % de l'*income tax*, 9 % de la CSG, 5 % des autres *levies* prélevés sur le salaire et bien sûr aussi la taxe de valeur ajoutée de 15 % sans compter après l'*Excise Duty* et autres formes de taxes qui font que l'argent retourne. Donc, ce que nous demandons nous au gouvernement, c'est de respecter son engagement et de payer au moins un maximum de R 50 000 à tous les employés de l'île Maurice et de ne pas continuer avec une politique de discriminations qui coûte moins de 10% de la somme totale qui va être allouée aujourd'hui à cette mesure.

Madame la présidente, on est conscient aussi que la dépréciation de la roupie a été le meilleur ami des compagnies étant dans l'exportation, a été aussi le meilleur ami des compagnies qui sont dans l'importation parce que leur *markup* sont calculés, bien sûr, sur le prix d'achat ; donc, un prix d'achat plus haut veut dire bien sûr que les recettes augmentent. Et c'est ce faux de dire que les grandes compagnies à Maurice aujourd'hui se retrouvent dans le rouge. C'est le contraire qui est plutôt vrai.

Donc, si cela coûte très peu à l'État et si cela coûte au secteur privé des sommes qu'ils peuvent payer alors, pourquoi, et je demande au ministre, pourquoi pas respecter son engagement et inclure ces 55 000 employés ; des milliers de familles mauriciennes, beaucoup qui comptent énormément aujourd'hui sur leur 13^e mois et qui se verront payer aujourd'hui, verser leur 13^e mois à les employés pour leurs 14^e mois. Donc, c'est une situation pour catastrophique. Madame la présidente, la justification qui nous a été donnée par le gouvernement réside sur l'état de l'économie. Je ne suis pas en mesure moi, personnellement, de vous dire quels chiffres sont vrais ou faux ; je n'en suis pas en mesure.

Tout comme le Premier ministre l'a dit si bien, étant avant dans l'opposition n'avait pas accès aux chiffres. Je ne suis pas en mesure.

(Interruptions)

Mais par compte, Madame la présidente, je trouve choquant qu'aujourd'hui que le ministre des Finances d'alors n'ait toujours pas parlé...

(Interruptions)

N'ait toujours pas commenté sur cette attaque directe son intégrité. Choquant aussi que le Directeur de l'audite, parce que n'oubliez pas, Madame la présidente, le Directeur de l'audite a audité la dette, il a audité le déficit budgétaire. Dans son dernier rapport, on le voit à la page 12 et 13, il parle de la de la dette du secteur publique. Il parle de tous ce qui est justifiable aujourd'hui, de ce qu'on se sert pour justifier aujourd'hui cette politique de discriminer sur le paiement du 14^e mois. Donc, le Directeur de l'audite a audité la dette et le Directeur de l'audite, détenteur d'un poste constitutionnel, comme vous le savez, Madame la présidente, de part de la constitution ne rend de compte à personne, n'est sous le contrôle et l'autorité de personne. Donc, ce Directeur de l'audite n'a rien à dire sur le fait que son propre rapport ait été manipulé, les chiffres étant été manipulés.

De même pour la *Statistic Mauritius*, on n'a toujours pas entendu aujourd'hui l'*Acting Director* piper un mot sur ces accusations. Et la *Statistic Mauritius* comme de Directeur de l'audite, Madame la présidente, lui aussi qu'il soit *acting* ou pas, lui aussi bénéficie d'une provision de la loi, de la *Statistics Act*, qui prévoit qu'il ne rend de compte à personne et il n'est sous le contrôle et sous l'autorité de personne. Donc, totalement indépendant.

Et pour la *Statistics Mauritius* aussi c'est une attaque sur son intégrité tout comme le Secrétaire financier, tous comme tous les innombrables officiers du ministère des Finances qui ont travaillé sur les chiffres de la dette. Nous demandons, pareil pour le *IMF Consultation* qui s'est tenue en mai 2024, qu'en est-il aujourd'hui de ce rapport, quelle crédibilité donnons-nous à ce rapport, si elle est venue, estampée, approuvée tous les chiffres qui avaient été donnés par le précédent gouvernement ? Donc, c'est une question que je pose, aujourd'hui, au Premier ministre et au gouvernement : avez-vous discuté, est-ce que le Premier ministre, est-ce que le gouvernement a discuté avec ces personnes, le Directeur de l'audite, la *Statistics Mauritius*, le Secrétaire financier et qu'ont-ils à dire sur leurs rôles, qu'ont-ils à dire sur leurs responsabilités constitutionnelles pour l'un et l'autre de par la *Statistics Act*, qu'ont-ils à dire ? Quelles actions vont être prises contre ces personnes si visiblement ils n'ont rien dit ; on n'est pas au courant en tout cas. Quelles actions vont être prises contre ces personnes qui ont une obligation de par la loi et la constitution d'agir indépendamment, de ne pas être sous le contrôle de M. Padayachy ou autre ? Nous voulons savoir, aujourd'hui, les retombées

du *State of the Economy*, qu'est-ce que ces personnes ont à dire, nous ne les avons toujours pas entendues. Et je redis, la première personne à parler aurait dû être M. Padayachy lui-même.

Maintenant, je note toutefois, Madame la présidente, que si les chiffres avancés par le *State of the Economy Report* avancent une manipulation à outrance sur toute la ligne, je retiens tout de même que le gouvernement accepte les chiffres de l'inflation malgré la campagne qui a été faite contre les chiffres officiels de l'inflation. Pas plus tard que le 9 novembre, cela avait été répété sur Radio Plus, qu'aucun mauricien ne croyait vraiment que l'inflation était à 3.8 %, on disait.

Donc, depuis longtemps l'opposition de l'époque parlait de la manipulation des chiffres de l'inflation et pourtant ce sont les seuls chiffres qui vraisemblablement n'ont pas été manipulés. Et est-ce une coïncidence que c'est aussi sur ces chiffres qu'on base le paiement de la compensation salariale ? C'est une question.

Maintenant, Madame la présidente, voilà un peu pour l'instant les observations. Il y en a d'autres, par exemple, quand on parle du pouvoir d'achat, quand on parle de l'inflation des prix, on parle bien sûr de l'essence. N'était-ce pas une promesse de l'Alliance Lelep, de l'Alliance du Changement de baisser le prix de l'essence et qu'elle était la promesse ? L'abolition de l'*Excise Duty* et l'abolition de la *VAT* parce que comme la Chambre est au courant, l'essence est un item, un des seuls, le seul je pense, où la *VAT* est imposé après avoir calculé toutes les autres taxes. Donc, l'abolition de l'*Excise Duty*, l'abolition de la TVA, certains parlaient de 20 % de réduction de l'essence et du diesel et c'est malheureux de constater, Madame la présidente, que la baisse qui a eu lieu jusqu'à aujourd'hui est loin du compte. En fait, si on prend la peine de regarder le *price structure*, on va voir qu'en 2024, entre septembre et décembre, le prix du litre en dollars a baissé. Et le fait que l'État achète moins cher le litre d'essence par R 2, ajouté à cela une réduction de seulement R 2 sur le Mogas, l'essence, et bien sûr quand on comptabilise la *VAT*, cela réduit le montant, et cela fait que pour les R 5 de réduction sur le prix du Mogas, en vérité, le gouvernement a un manque à gagner de seulement R 2, ayant baissé l'*Excise Duty*. R 2 ...

An hon. Member: Vous n'avez pas fait mieux monsieur.

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: R 20, R 2...

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: R 2, R 20...

An hon. Member: R 748 000!

Mr A. Duval: R 2, R 20...

(Interruptions)

Si tout le monde pouvait se tenir à ce chiffre quand ils voyagent, on va voir !

(Interruptions)

Faites la division!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, let him talk please!

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: Alors, Madame la présidente, comme je disais, de R 20, on est loin du compte et j'ai expliqué qu'en fait sur le *Mogas*, le gouvernement a réduit seulement deux roupies, le reste provenant d'une réduction sur le prix du cours du litre d'essence.

Donc, voilà on est loin du compte pour l'instant. Je tiens à rappeler au gouvernement un autre engagement qui a été tenu et que je tiens sincèrement à ce qu'il le respecte. C'est bien sûr l'engagement de ne pas rétrograder, de ne pas *demote* les policiers. Un engagement avait été pris que tous les policiers ayant une promotion qui n'avaient pas encore été confirmés, allaient garder leur rang. Un engagement avait été pris en public. Malheureusement, force est de constater que quelques jours après...

Madam Speaker: I am sorry. Is this related to the Bill?

(Interruptions)

I am sorry, I am trying to be as nice as possible to you, but I think that is going a little bit outside the scope of the Bill.

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: I will bow to your ruling, Madam Speaker. I will bow to your ruling. I will only say that others have gone a long way from the Bill.

All that is to say, Madam Speaker, that promises have been made and we want to see those promises kept because we are in a Parliament today.

(Interruptions)

We are in a Parliament today where there are only two Members of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Only two Members of the Opposition...

An hon. Member: *Ena fwa tou les deux pa la !*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: And therefore, the point being, to answer my friends who are in a rush to hear it, the point being what?

The point being, Madam Speaker, that it is up to the Government itself to make sure that it respects its own pledges that it took with the population. So, that is why, Madam Speaker, in such a Parliament, it is important. Democracy cannot properly function in such a Parliament...

(Interruptions)

...with the Opposition being so outnumbered and it is up, of course, to the Government itself, having won all the seats, to ensure that it acts as the safeguard that is necessary and they have to keep their promises. Obviously only month has gone by. It is too early to say all of that; that it has not kept. I am only commenting, as I said, on certain things that it can still change so that, Madam Speaker, is for me...

An hon. Member: Stick to the Bill!

Mr A. Duval: ...very important. Of course, it is all in your hands now, Madam Speaker, as a Speaker. It is in the hands of the Government to make sure that the promises that have been made are kept and this is why I reiterate my demand to the Minister. Include those 55,000 employees, include those out of which I am sure less than half will have to be disbursed from the public purse.

Madam Speaker: You made that point.

Mr A. Duval: Yes, and I reiterate it because he seems not to be for now interested in going ahead. It has been said, I reiterate it and I hope that, Madam Speaker, it is done.

Thank you.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I would suggest...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members, I would suggest we break for tea because then we will have the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister when we come back. So, we break for tea for one hour because it is our last...

(Interruptions)

...it is our last meeting, I think. Maybe I am pre-judging.

(Interruptions)

I am pre-judging. *Il est...*

(Interruptions)

4.30 p.m., let us come back at 4.30 p.m.

At 3.45 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.33 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I think it is appropriate that when we look at this Bill, we should look at the context in which this Bill has been brought to the House.

Just to refresh minds, some MPs might have forgotten that there was a request in December 2023 to give a 14th month bonus to all. The MSM refused at that time. They probably thought that they were going to win the election anyway – you were not there at that time. The Minister of Labour went further. He said, “in any case we cannot do it, we need consultations”. Good!

However, just one week before the election, suddenly, – I suppose the former Prime Minister felt the ground shaking under his feet! He saw the tsunami coming – in desperation, he announced the 14th month bonus. One week before the election! The Minister of Labour, who had said that “we cannot do it, we need consultations”, had no choice. *L’empereur avait décidé qu’il fallait gagner les élections à tout prix!* He was given his marching orders, and

he just did it. Advice was sought from the SLO. The SLO said it was illegal. *L'empereur avait décidé !* So, the Minister of Labour knew. In that Cabinet, it is not like the Cabinet of today. We have discussions in Cabinet. *L'empereur décide, tout le monde dit 'oui'!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: *L'impératrice!*

The Prime Minister: *L'impératrice!*

(Interruptions)

That decision was immediately challenged by Business Mauritius by way of judicial review.

Just to remind Members, what did we say at the time when we were in Opposition? We were saying that the Minister has acted illegally, but we added, “They are in government; they know the figures as you pointed out; they had all the economic figures. Surely, they know that they can pay the 14th month. So if they can pay, so can us! But they will not be there; we will be there!” That is what we said, Madam Speaker. And we know the results – a crushing defeat!

Hon. Adrien Duval and also the Leader of the Opposition said we won because of that promise of 14th month. They do not seem to realise their illogical reasoning behind this. Because you were in government, you had promised the 14th month, why didn't you win the elections then? You should have won! Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, who is not here today, unfortunately he is abroad, gave you some of the reasons why people decided to boot you out. They were fed up. They wanted liberty. They wanted unity, not division. That is why! The corruption, the nepotism, all these are the reasons where you are today in the dustbin of history. This is the reason!

We suspected during the campaign, myself and the Deputy Prime Minister also; we kept saying that we do not believe the macroeconomic indicators that they are giving us. Surely, they are being manipulated. But no one, neither me nor the Deputy Prime Minister nor anybody else, I think, had an idea of the extent of how much they massaged the figures. I heard hon. Adrien Duval say; I think he said, Dr. Padayachy's reputation should be given a chance or whatever.

Mr A. Duval: ... as a full question.

The Prime Minister: And he has not answered the question, right.

You spoke about the Director of Audit. I remind you: your father, when he was in the Opposition, criticised the government for having failed to give the Director of Audit whatever he was asking for, and it is in the Report of the Director of Audit. He complained that for the first time in Mauritius, a Director of Audit, having a constitutional post as you said, was not given access to papers which he wanted to have access to. You can ask him. This is how they managed the economy.

Also, the Head of Statistics for Mauritius at that time – he is here today – did not agree with the figures. He said the figures are being manipulated. You know what he was told? “You give the figures we are telling you. Otherwise, we will boot you out”. Being a professional, being a man of courage, integrity, he said, “I prefer to lose my job, but I will not manipulate economic figures”. And he resigned. This is what happened.

We have evidence of the IMF writing to the Minister and saying, “please, stop bullying our staff”. All this is there. This is what happened. Unfortunately, they falsified the macroeconomic figures, not by one billion, two billions; by a lot. Unbelievable, the percentage! They dilapidated the finances of this country. As the Deputy Prime Minister said, they acted criminally. They should be held to account for this. We should not just pass over it as if nothing has happened; everything is going to go on forever. *La rupture veut dire aussi cela!*

Not only they destroyed the economy, Madam Speaker, they destroyed our reputation. You know what happens when institutions are forced to act illegally? You destroy the reputation of the institutions. You do not have credible institutions. You become what we call a rogue State, *un État voyou*. This is what happened under the previous government.

Let me remind you of the economic situation as I produced this State of the Economy Report on 10 December. I must say, the Deputy Prime Minister and I, we worked very closely. He said this last time: ‘the more we dig, the more we are finding’, and it is worse. Just look at some of the economic figures; I will not go through the whole list, Madam Speaker, it would be too long a speech. But nominal GDP reduced by Rs36 billion, the forecast I mean, Rs36 billion. The growth rate declining, it was 21.9% when I left government; it is 18.5% now. Investment rate declining: it was 21.9%, this has also gone down. And we know when there is no investment, there is low growth, increased

unemployment, increased pressure on the economy. The rupee has depreciated by 46% over 10 years. 46%! Inflation has surged and you know what they were doing? They just printed money. What do you want Rs10 million? Okay, I will print and I will give you Rs10 million. This is how they managed the economy!

Cumulative inflation from 2022 to 2024 was 23%. Now, do not tell me about COVID-19, this and that. Seychelles, our neighbour, smaller than us, next to us, cumulative inflation while ours was 23%, theirs was 2.4%. How do you explain this big difference? And we know, Madam Speaker, that the poor spend more of their money on food. Why? Because they have to eat. There is no choice. You have to eat, and you have to drink water. The cumulative food price inflation for that same period, while inflation was 23%, was 33%. That is why during their campaign, people were complaining about the price of basic food items. It was impossible for them to buy what they wanted to buy; even middle-class people were complaining. I know people who told me they were embarrassed. They go to the supermarket, push their caddies, and when payment time came, they realise they do not have enough money; they have to return some of the items back on the shelves.

Same for the budget deficit. They said it was going to be 3.4%, but, in fact, it is 6.7%, nearly doubled. Revenue, again, was overestimated by Rs13.8 billion. And public debt, Madam Speaker, in June 2024, probably worse after that, 83.4%. The result being, I heard the former Prime Minister say, 'I am looking after babies even before they are born in their mother's tummy'. He was because he put a debt of Rs500,000 on every baby as soon as they are born in this country.

And then adding to this *politique de vengeance*: Betamax, BAI, Neotown cases, it cost the taxpayers, so far, I believe there is more to come, Rs26.9 billion and there are still some legal costs to pay. We will have to find the money. The special funds, all of them depleted. The Metro Express, the Deputy Prime Minister explained very well the other day, that it has a debt of Rs17 billion which has lost Rs3 billion on Foreign Exchange, Rs17 billion!

The same with the STC. You spoke about how we have reduced the price of petrol, *l'essence, et diesel*, but the deficit at the STC is Rs5.6 billion. And they destroyed a contract that I negotiated with the Prime Minister of India at that time, Dr. Manmohan Singh, so that we could get our petrol from Mangalore at a lower price, and I had cut out all the middlemen. They broke that contract. They claimed to be great friends of India, but they broke the

contract with India. Why? They wanted to buy again from the Middle East so that they could have middlemen so that they could take bribes.

An hon. Member: Courtier.

The Prime Minister: Courtier.

(Interruptions)

That is what they did and that is why we are paying the price we are paying for this.

An hon. Member: *Sun Trust ranpli!*

An hon. Member: *Courtier!*

The Prime Minister: Wastewater Management Authority, same thing Rs2.2 billion in arrears, and they have an outstanding loan of Rs3.5 billion. I don't want to go to the list: CEB, CWA, *Casino de Maurice*, Mauritius Post Limited; all of these, SBM, MIC – you have seen what is happening to the MIC –, CSG wiped out, and pension for workers wiped out. We need to find Rs9 billion to pay the pension of the workers. Air Mauritius, same thing: destroyed! Now, Government will have to step in if you want to save Air Mauritius, and it is with this background that you must understand that we have had no other choices.

In fact, institutions like Moody's were saying even at that time that even if you don't do anything, you are likely to be downgraded. It looks like you are in that veer, the countries together with you; we are rated now BAA3 at the moment, but we were likely to be degraded, even before we did anything, with no policy change. In this context, we had to make choices; we had to decide what we wanted to do. I chose transparency, put the cards on the table, let the people know how these people have destroyed the economy, have mismanaged everything, and we are going to pay the consequences now, the whole nation.

The degrading by Moody's, Madam Speaker, I suppose some people do not realise what it means. It means the country gets junk bond status. That means it is classified as a country that would probably default on its debt, probably. And if our country is degraded by Moody's, it damages our reputation, it damages our credibility, and it becomes more expensive to borrow from abroad if you get the loan. Many countries do not want to loan to a country that is probably going to default. Rates will go up, and investors never invest in a country with junk bond status. Therefore, what is going to happen? Every year it is already on

a decreasing time; it will keep going down, and again I say, no investment, no growth, and the economic cake shrinks even further.

It is in this context, Madam Speaker, that this Bill was brought because we had to make a policy choice, and it is a package as the Deputy Prime Minister and also the Minister of Labour explained. It is a package; we did the maximum that we thought we could to prevent a downgrade as far as possible. *On ne peut pas donner de l'agent qu'on n'a pas. C'est aussi simple que ça.* It is essential that we act responsibly, that we are credible. We have to bring down debt, we have to bring down the deficit, and we have to show that we will bring structural reform; we have to show, otherwise, the consequences will be terrible for us. It is obvious, so obvious then that in those circumstances, there is no way we could pay the whole 14th month to everybody, there is no way. Either we are responsible or we are not responsible.

And remember, Moody's is an international agency. They do their work as professionals. Look at what happened with France. President Macron just named a new Prime Minister, François Bayrou. As soon as he was named, I think the next day, Moody's degraded France with all the consequences that it is going to have.

Therefore, there is a harsh reality to economies, whether we like it or not. We can say 'give this or give that'. But there is a reality that we have to face and we had to minimise that risk. This is why there was a cutoff point, members of the Opposition. This is why we had to have, and we chose Rs50,000. There was demand for Rs30,000. There was also demand for not giving anything, but we decided to give Rs50,000 because 420,000 employees, both in the public and private sectors, that is 90% of the total employees in this country, are going to get it. 9 out of 10! We had to have this cutoff point otherwise it would have been terrible.

I spoke to one trade unionist. He was misled; he thought that public officers in government service are not going to get it. It is not true. We did not put it neither for the municipal workers nor for parastatal; we did not put it in the Bill because, I think, the hon. Minister of Labour explained it very well. There is no need for an amendment in the law because it is governed by PRB. There is no need. It is done by circular, and it is already being done by the way.

As I said, it was a package, not just the 14th month bonus. We also gave the one-month allowance to every pensioner, widow, orphan, and disabled person plus a salary compensation based on the figures of inflation that we have officially at that time because it

is for the year, Rs610. That is the inflation rate, you multiply it by the minimum wage. And as I said, for the price of petrol we had to do this.

Again, if you look at the context, who is the responsible person, who is not a demagogue, who can say that we could have done more? If you say so, it must be bad faith.

I want to thank the Junior Minister, hon. Kugan Parapen, for suggesting that we pay it into two tranches – *deux tranches*. It is helpful in three ways –

- First of all, you know humans are humans. When they get a lot of money, they will spend it during the festive season; this is the temptation. And then what happens is, more money in circulation, inflation goes up and there is more pressure of the rupee.
- Secondly, after January, many families after having spent their money, have no money to buy books or whatever they need in January, and
- Also, making payment in installments produces a relief for employers on their cash flows. That also helps, especially for the small and medium enterprises.

Madam Speaker, as the Deputy Prime Minister rightly said, we must look at the horizon, not at the tip of our nose. It is the horizon that we have to look at. We have three essential objectives –

1. *Réduire la dette;*
2. *Réduire le déficit budgétaire, et*
3. *Redémarrer l'économie.*

We have no choice and it is not going to be easy. I never said it is going to be easy; nobody is saying it's going to be easy. We do not have a magic wand so that we can create a new society out of this mess. There are no easy fixes but fortunately, we have a team which is competent and determined to put this country back on the rails. We have been working, myself and the Deputy Prime Minister, especially; we have been working round the clock. We had a few issues that we had to settle – the 14th month, petrol prices, *les salariés*, *compensation* plus negotiation for Chagos at the same time. And, in the U.K., especially, they want to do it before President Trump swears in as President on 20 January. But we work as a team and I must tell you something. You know, we said this during the campaign: you need a

team that has experience. At this juncture in the country, you need that experience that I have, that the Deputy Prime Minister has, and that all these Ministers have. We need experience to be able to tackle this problem otherwise we will never be able to lift this country out of the precipice it has fallen into.

I would also like to thank hon. Minister, Ashok Subron. His contribution has been very significant in all the discussions we had. He has pointed out things that maybe could have escaped our attention. This is why I need to thank him for his contribution, for what he has done here.

As I said, Madam Speaker, we are lucky that the people have booted them out, this bunch of *voyous*. And we have the team that we need to be able to *redresser l'économie*, as I said. We are determined to turn this economy around. We are going to be transparent in our policies. We are working with a commitment, not for us, but for the future generations, for the youth of this country. We need to put this country back on its rails for the next generation because they are the future of this country.

And, more importantly, I can guarantee to the House that we will act responsibly. We must rehabilitate our institutions; we have started doing this. We must get rid of those people. I hesitate to use the word '*chatwas*', but they have placed '*chatwas*' in all the institutions. This is where the problem is. When you weaken an institution in a country, you are weakening the whole country and this is what has been happening. We must regain our credibility and we must regain our reputation, which is not easy after the destruction that Dr. Padayachy and Mr Pravind Jugnauth have inflicted upon our country, but I am confident that we have the zeal to succeed. It will be difficult, but we will succeed.

Let me end, Madam Speaker, by congratulating the hon. Minister of Labour, Mr Reza Uteem. He took a difficult task in a short time, very short time, and he had to deal with all the problems that he had to deal with. It is a complex issue, but he acted in a determined manner, and I must say in a very loyally manner.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Labour, your winding up speech, please.

(4.57 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Madame la présidente, permettez-moi avant tout de remercier tous les honorables membres des deux côtés de la Chambre qui ont participé dans le débat de ce projet de loi.

Je m'associe à mes collègues pour féliciter les nouveaux parlementaires pour leur baptême de feu, je n'utiliserai pas '*maiden speech*'. Je ne vais certainement pas répéter tout ce que l'honorable Premier ministre vient de dire brillamment en résumant la position du gouvernement sur ce projet de loi.

Je vais me contenter d'essayer de répondre plutôt aux attaques et critiques formulées par les membres de l'opposition avant d'apporter une ou deux éclaircissements suite à des réactions, des remarques et des commentaires que j'ai reçus après la présentation de ce projet de loi.

Je crois comprendre que les deux honorables membres de l'opposition ne sont pas contre ce projet de loi, mais leur seul argument c'est qu'on aurait dû payer à tout le monde et pas qu'aux personnes qui ont moins de R 50,000 hors, quand on parle de pérennité. Là, il y a divergence. D'un côté, on a l'honorable leader de l'opposition qui vient d'essayer de donner la pérennité de ce projet de loi à son leader, le leader de *l'Alliance Lepep* et de parler d'une promesse électorale. Et, on a son collègue qui formait parti de cette alliance électorale *Lepep* qui lui tire tous les draps sur lui et vient dire que non que c'était le PMSD.

En vérité, Madame la présidente, comme l'a souligné l'honorable Premier ministre, effectivement, quand le PMSD était en alliance avec le Parti travailliste et le MMM l'année dernière, le leader de l'opposition d'alors était venu avec une *PNQ*. C'est bien pour les membres de la Chambre qui n'étaient pas là de les rappeler ce qui était le libellé de cette *PNQ*. Donc, il s'adresse au ministre du Travail –

“whether, in regard to the rise in the cost of living over calendar years 2022 and 2023, he will state if Government proposes to legislate 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 (...).”

An hon. Member: *Repet sa!*

Mr Uteem: C'est ça!

“ (...) all employees of the private and public sectors, earning less than Rs50,000, whilst providing for a mechanism to assist those employers facing financial difficulties?”

That was the position of the Opposition, acting always responsibly.

On n'avait pas la connaissance des chiffres, mais au moins, on avait dit que pour ceux qui ont déjà été affectés par la cherté de la vie, pour ceux qui se trouvent au bas de l'échelle, pour les retraités, pour les travailleurs qui ont moins de R 50 000, au moins à ces gens-là, donnez-leur ce 14^e mois. Et c'était quoi la réaction du gouvernement Jugnauth, du gouvernement MSM?

Je vous dis la réponse de l'honorable Callichurn –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to consider the payment of a 14th month bonus, we will have to hold wide consultations with different stakeholders to ensure its sustainability, as we have always been doing for salary compensation and minimum wage.”

Le leader de l'opposition d'alors persiste et il continue parce que les entreprises ont les moyens de payer. Les manquements qu'on vient d'entendre de la part du fils, excusez-moi, de l'honorable Adrien Duval, mais l'honorable leader de l'opposition disait le contraire ! Il disait 'mais vous avez tous les moyens.' Et là, le gouvernement dont faisait partie l'honorable leader de l'opposition, qu'est-ce qu'il répond –

“We just cannot decide without holding consultations on whether we will introduce a 14th month bonus for the workers or not. We have given enough consideration by giving additional income support for the working class of this country to support them and counter the loss in purchasing power.”

Ils n'avaient pas l'intention de donner ce 14^e mois. Donc, aujourd'hui, l'honorable leader de l'opposition, ne venez pas dire que c'est grâce à vous, à votre gouvernement que les gens de ce pays vont avoir un 14^e mois !

(Interruptions)

Madame la présidente, les deux membres de l'opposition ont parlé de promesses électorales gagnantes. Vous, quand vous étiez au gouvernement, dans votre budget, vous n'avez pas prévu de payer 14^e mois l'année dernière. Quand vous avez fait votre programme électoral après l'annonce des élections – je me souviens très bien de la date. C'était le 23

octobre 2024 – où vous annonciez en fanfare les 17 mesures phare de *l'Alliance Lepep*, vous n'aviez pas parlé de 14^e mois !

Comme l'a bien souligné l'honorable Premier ministre, *when you found that the soil was shaking under your feet*, comme l'honorable Parapen l'a dit, mesures désespérées d'un Premier ministre désespéré sachant qu'il allait perdre les élections, c'est là que vous êtes venus avec cette idée de payer le 14^e mois. Mais le peuple ne vous a pas voté. Vous êtes venus avec la proposition du 14^e mois, mais le peuple n'a pas voté pour vous. Pourquoi ? Le peuple a voté pour le changement. Et cela veut dire quoi, changement ? Changement veut dire d'être transparent, de dire la vérité aux gens, de ne pas mentir, de leur expliquer l'état de l'économie parce qu'il ne faut pas insulter l'intelligence des Mauriciens.

Les Mauriciens et les Mauriciennes sont responsables. Ils/elles savent que si le pays doit choisir entre un dividende politique de court terme où d'hypothéquer l'avenir de leurs enfants, ils vont toujours choisir le bien-être de leurs enfants et le bien-être du pays.

Madame la présidente, maintenant, je vais parler de pourquoi on a limité à R 50 000. Le chiffre R 50 000 n'est pas tombé des nues. Ce n'est pas un chiffre qu'on a décidé un jour qu'on va donner. C'est par rapport à la définition d'un *worker*. On a dans le *Workers' Rights Act* une définition de travailleur, de *worker* qui définit le travailleur mauricien comme celui qui touche un salaire n'excédant pas R 600 000 par an. R 600 000, quand vous le divisez par douze, cela vous fait R 50 000 par mois. C'est la raison pour laquelle on a utilisé ce chiffre de R 50 000. Ce n'était pas arbitraire. C'est pour être en ligne avec les dispositions de la loi.

Mais je suis d'accord, j'ai entendu ce que les syndicalistes m'ont dit, j'ai entendu les réactions, il est temps de probablement rectifier et d'amender cela, parce qu'avec l'augmentation de la vie, avec toutes les compensations salariales, aujourd'hui, ce montant de R 50 000 doit être augmenté pour couvrir d'autres travailleurs. Mais on le fera en cours d'année quand on va avoir une réforme complète du droit du travail. Pour l'instant, on s'est contenté de nous aligner sur la définition de *worker* sous le *Workers' Rights Act*.

Autre chose soulevée par l'honorable leader de l'opposition concerne la punition de R 5000 pour une infraction à ce projet de loi. Effectivement, quand on voit en isolation R 5000, on peut trouver cela pas assez sévère. Mais à Maurice, il y a une théorie, il y a un principe de droit de la relativité/ proportionnalité. On ne peut pas aujourd'hui prévoir dans une loi, une sanction pour une effraction qui est plus lourde que la même sanction pour la même effraction dans une autre loi.

Malheureusement, on a déjà une autre loi qui prévoit le paiement du 13^e mois, l'*End of Year Gratuity Act*. Sous la disposition d'*End of Year Gratuity Act*, la punition maximum pour une effraction, c'est R 5000. Donc, c'est à cause de cela que dans ce projet de loi, on s'est aligné à ce qui est prévu dans l'*End of Year Gratuity Act* et on a limité l'amende à R 5000. Mais, c'est R 5000 par effraction et par employé. Donc, cela peut être beaucoup plus que R 5000 dans la pratique.

Et finalement, il y a une section de la loi qui a fait sujet de beaucoup de questions. C'est la clause 8 du projet de loi qui concerne les entreprises qui bénéficieraient d'une aide du gouvernement. Ces entreprises qui ne peuvent pas payer les 14^e mois ou après le paiement du 14^e mois, cela aura une incidence importante sur leurs bilans financiers. Dans la loi, on prévoit des entreprises en difficulté, on prévoit les SME. Donc, on a eu des questions pour dire, mais quid des institutions charitables, des *religious bodies*, des *sports clubs*. Ils m'ont dit que ce n'est pas couvert par la loi.

En fait, non. On a eu des sessions de travail avec les responsables du ministère des Finances et de la MRA. Ce sont eux qui m'ont dit qu'au lieu d'essayer de mettre toutes les personnes, toutes les entreprises, toutes les associations, toutes les *NGOs* qui puissent bénéficier de cette aide, de le faire par voie de réglementation, *regulation*. C'est pourquoi vous allez voir dans la clause 8, il y a une disposition qui prévoit que le ministre des Finances, en collaboration avec le MRA, va venir avec des règlements, des *regulations* pour dire quelles sont les institutions, quels sont les O.N.G., les *charitable institutions* qui pourront aussi bénéficier de cette aide financière.

Avant de m'asseoir, laissez-moi aussi, Madame la présidente, remercier tout le personnel de mon ministère qui ont vraiment travaillé d'arrache-pied pour ce projet de loi, je sais que c'est de même au niveau du ministère des Finances et du bureau de l'*Attorney General* parce que je dois vous dire que même le jour qu'on présentait ce projet de loi, on était encore en train de faire des ajustements pour venir avec une loi parce qu'on a travaillé sous pression et je remercie tout le monde parce que je pense qu'on a fait un bon travail dans le temps imparti à nous et finalement je conclurai en vous souhaitant à vous, Madame la présidente, à tous les membres du personnel, à mes collègues, membres du Parlement et à la population, un joyeux fête de fin d'année, joyeux Noël et bonne année. Merci.

Madame Speaker: Do not forget you have to commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Uteem: Yes, with these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

THE SPECIAL ALLOWANCE BILL

(No. XX of 2024)

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Interpretation).

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stands part of the Bill.”

Mr Uteem: Madam Chairperson, I move for an amendment to Clause 2 as per amendments circulated –

“in clause 2, by deleting the definition of “special allowance 2024” and replacing it by the following definition –

“special allowance” means the special allowance payable under section 3;”

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Consequential amendments).

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stands part of the Bill.”

Mr Uteem: Madam Chairperson, I move for an amendment to Clause 8 as per amendments circulated –

“in clause 8, by deleting subclause (1) and replacing it by the following subclause –

(1) The Income Tax Act is amended, in PART XIID –

- (a) in the heading, by deleting the words “**COMPENSATION 2021, 2022, 2023 AND 2024**” and replacing them by the words “**COMPENSATION 2021, 2022, 2023 AND 2024 AND SPECIAL ALLOWANCE**”;
- (b) by inserting, after section 150EB, the following new section –
- 150EC. Financial assistance for payment of special allowance for year 2024**
- (1) In this section –
- “accounting loss” means the loss made by an employer from all his activities and computed in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards;
- “accounting profit” means the profit derived by an employer from all his activities and computed in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards;
- “basic wage or salary” –
- (a) has the same meaning as in the Special Allowance Act 2024; and
- (b) includes any payable additional remuneration;
- “eligible employee” –
- (a) means an employee employed on a full-time basis –
- (i) from an export enterprise;
- (ii) from an SME deriving gross income from business;
- (iii) from such other category of employer or employee as may be prescribed;
- (iv) who has been paid the special allowance under the Special Allowance Act 2024; and
- (v) whose basic wage or salary for the month of December 2024 or where

he is not in employment in December 2024, his last month of employment, does not exceed 50,000 rupees; but

- (b) does not include –
- (i) an employee employed by a Ministry, a Government department, a local authority, a statutory body or the Rodrigues Regional Assembly; and
 - (ii) such category of employees as may be prescribed;

“export enterprise” has the same meaning as in the Export Enterprises (Remuneration) Regulations 2019;

“SME” means a small or medium enterprise, whose turnover for the year of assessment 2023-2024 did not exceed 100 million rupees;

“national minimum wage” means the national minimum wage determined in accordance with the National Minimum Wage Regulations 2017;

“special allowance” means the special allowance payable under the Special Allowance Act 2024.

(2) Subject to this Part, the Director-General shall pay to an employer, in respect of each of its eligible employee, an allowance equivalent to the special allowance paid to that employee, where the employer is –

- (a) an export enterprise;
- (b) an SME; or
- (c) an employer falling within such other category as may be prescribed,

and which had for the year of assessment 2023-2024 –

- (i) an accounting loss; or

- (ii) an accounting profit that would be reduced by more than 50 per cent if –
 - (A) the additional remuneration 2024, the increase in national minimum wage payable as from January 2024 and the special allowance payable for the year 2024 to its employees, were deducted from that accounting profit; and
 - (B) the financial assistance payable to the employer under section 150EB, were added to that accounting profit.

(3) Subject to this Part, the Director-General shall pay to an employer, in respect of each of its eligible employee, an allowance equivalent to 50 per cent of the special allowance paid to that employee, where the employer is –

- (a) an export enterprise;
- (b) an SME; or
- (c) an employer falling within such other category as may be prescribed,

and which had for the year of assessment 2023-2024 an accounting profit that would be reduced by more than 10 per cent if –

- (i) the additional remuneration 2024, the increase in national minimum wage payable as from January 2024 and the special allowance

payable to its employees were deducted from that accounting profit; and

- (ii) the financial assistance payable to the employer under section 150EB, were added to that accounting profit.

(4) Subject to this Part, the Director-General shall pay to an employer, in respect of each of his eligible employees, an allowance as specified in subsection (2) or (3), with such modifications and adaptations as may be necessary, on the basis of information made available to him, where the employer is –

- (a) an export enterprise;
- (b) an enterprise with an annual turnover which is not likely to exceed 100 million rupees; or
- (c) an employer falling within such other category as may be prescribed,

having started operations on or after 1 July 2023.

(5) The allowance payable under subsections (2) (3) or (4) shall not exceed 50,000 rupees in respect of each eligible employee.

(6) Subject to the other provisions of this section, an application for the allowance payable under subsection (2), (3) or (4) shall be made electronically by the employer of an eligible employee to the Director-General in such form and manner as the Director-General may determine, giving the bank details of the bank account in which the allowance will be credited.

(7) The employer shall, on or before the end of the month following that in which the allowance is paid, electronically submit to the Director-General a “Special Allowance 2024” return claiming the allowance payable under subsection (2), (3) or (4) and giving details of the employee and such other particulars as the Director-General may require.

(8) No allowance under subsection (2), (3) or (4) shall be paid by the Director-General unless the application under subsection (6) and the “Special Allowance 2024” return specified in subsection (7) are

submitted to the Director-General on or before 30 April 2025.

(9) Section 150D(4)(b) and (c) and (5), (6) and (7) shall apply to this section with such adaptations and modifications as may be necessary to enable the Director-General to pay the allowance.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and the enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Special Allowance Bill (No. XX of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with your permission, before I move for the adjournment of the House, I would like to present to you, to your family, to the hon. Members of the House, the staffs of the National Assembly, and the Police Officers who work here, the season's greetings. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker, may I kindly request on behalf of the Opposition and in my personal name to present season's greeting first to His Excellency, the newly elected President of the Republic and Mrs Gokhool and their family, to the newly elected Vice-President, Mrs Hungley and their family, to the hon. Prime Minister and Mrs Ramgoolam, to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, to all Ministers and to all Members of Parliament.

I am also pleased to extend my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the Acting Clerk, the two Clerk Assistants, the attendants who are always attending upon us, to the Sergeant-at-Arms and his officers, to all civil servants, Madam Speaker, who are involved and works in the precincts of the National Assembly. To end, Madam Speaker,

may I wish everyone, the country at large a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madame Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to associate myself to the season's greetings extended by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition to his Excellency, the President of the Republic of Mauritius and Mrs Gokhool, to his Excellency the Vice-President of the Republic of Mauritius and Mrs Hungley, I am pleased to convey the season's greetings to them.

In my own name and on behalf of the officers of the National Assembly, I thank Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and hon. Leader of the Opposition for their kind words and warm wishes and extend my best wishes for Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2025 to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and Mrs Ramgoolam, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and his family, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and his family as well as to all hon. Members and their families. This is the time for rejoicing and I wish each Mauritian the very, very best for the coming year.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 24 January 2025 at 3.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madame Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 5.18 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 24 January 2025 at 3.00 p.m.